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Making Black Queer Worlds: Black LGBTQ+ Parties in Brazil and the United States

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ABSTRACT

What does it look like in practice to center Black LGBTQ+ people in a party space, and how does this goal become complicated as these parties grow to attract larger fan bases? This paper delves into this question by highlighting two different parties, *Batekoo*, a Black queer and feminist-focused party that travels to cities throughout Brazil, and *Ascendance*, a Black and Brown queer-focused party in New Orleans, Louisiana in the USA. The paper is based on ethnographic data from interviews with founders, organizers, and attendees of both spaces, as well as participant observation at both party spaces. I argue that the organizers of these two parties see them as more than simply social spaces; they are attempts at creating alternative worlds where Black queer people can experience corporeal freedom and experiment with different forms of being, temporarily freed from the capture and control of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. While the growing popularity of these parties amongst white LGBTQ+ people threaten to destabilize the facilitation of these alternative worlds, I argue that organizers continually adapt, finding ways to attempt to maintain the Black queer worlds they created even as the demographics of the parties shift.

KEYWORDS

Nightlife; identity politics; Brazil; New Orleans; black queer placemaking

Introduction

In the opening of the 2018 short documentary “Inspire the Night” (pictured in [Figure 1](#)), bold scenes of Black LGBTQ+ bodies on the dancefloor introduce the audience to the Brazilian party *Batekoo*. As people chant “*Batekoo*” excitedly in the background, one of the interviewees in the documentary explains, “There’s a superficial idea of talking about nightlife as something shallow, so, just the fact that there are gays, fat people and trans people in the same place, having fun, the subversion is already happening” (Red Bull TV 2023). Directly following this statement praising the power of *Batekoo* in Black LGBTQ+ attendees’ lives, the music cuts to silence and a title card provides a sobering reminder: “Every 19 hours a member of Brazil’s LGBT community is murdered” (Red Bull TV 2023). The juxtaposition of this fact directly following the scenes from *Batekoo* and the prior quotation helps to show exactly what this party is working to subvert: violence that seeks to make life unlivable for Black LGBTQ+ people. *Batekoo* is a party that provides space for Black LGBTQ+ people to socialize with one another, to dance and move their bodies how they desire, with whom they desire. They can let loose and feel a freedom that allows them



Figure 1. Screenshot from “Inspire the Night” documentary. Source: Red Bull Music. 2018. Inspire the Night. YouTube video, 4:24. Posted May 24, 2022. Retrieved October 13, 2024, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLbcNuelXCs>). Screenshot from 1:28.

to forget, if only momentarily, the violence outside the doors of the party. Because of this freedom, Batekoo exists not just as a party but also as a life-sustaining refuge for its Black LGBTQ+ attendees.

By providing a space for the collective pleasure of a Black LGBTQ+ public, parties like Batekoo bring into existence worlds that are not yet tangible. The violence that Black LGBTQ+ people face outside of the doors of the party does not instantly disappear once entering the party. Instead, those who inhabit the event, both organizers and party-goers alike, work to manifest another plane of existence through the act of collective enjoyment. Black queer people are not afforded the opportunity to simply forget the restraints and barriers that the violences of the now impose upon their community. Despite this, parties like Batekoo create a place that “straddle[s] the now and the ether” (Allen 2022:7), a place where people both acknowledge the realities of the present and dance toward the future. As party organizers create an event that attempts to eke out a corporeal and epistemic freedom within its walls for Black LGBTQ+ attendees, the party organizers and attendees become, in the tradition of Muñoz (2009), time travelers seeking an era beyond the present where Black queer¹ freedom can thrive.

Traveling beyond the boundaries of the present that entraps Black LGBTQ+ people becomes most possible through the collective imagination of those within the party’s boundaries. Black Brazilian author Conceição Evaristo (2017; 2020) insists that Black women’s acts of writing their collective experience in the context of literature not only documents their existence but also allows them to dream of alternative worlds. As a concept, *escrevivências*, or “written lived experience” (Falu 2023:2) [joining *escrever* (write) and *viver* (live)], emerges from Evaristo’s realization that any imagined world through her writing would be continually structured through her standpoint as a Black woman in Brazil. As they write fictions and imagine new worlds, Black women’s ancestral knowledge and collective

social position make it so that any written utopia is intertwined with and responds to the social conditions that create their lived experience.

I argue that, similar to how *escrevivências* allow Black women to write into existence their present realities and their dreams of alternative worlds, cultivating Black queer nightlife becomes an act of *festevivência* where partying (*festear*) serves as a vehicle through which the creators of Black queer spaces can invoke their community's lived experiences (*vivências*), inviting them to self-fashion as they choose while manifesting alternative worlds through collective action and imagination in the party space. The creators of these nightlife events invite Black LGBTQ+ attendees to engage in a process of continual self-making, to understand their lived experience not solely through the lens of the violence that structures their social position but also through the process of experimenting with their own body and consciousness to discover who they are and who they can be. Rules and strict-but-democratic governing of the party space allow the creators to protect this process of collaborative experimentation with self-making in the party space. This paper takes up the theme of *festevivências* for Black LGBTQ+ communities by analyzing two different parties in Brazil and the United States. In Brazil, I focus on the party mentioned in my opening paragraph, Batekoo, a party that happens in various cities throughout Brazil, with most of their parties located in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador. In the United States of America, I draw attention to Ascendance, a New Orleans-based party. Both parties chart their beginnings in the decade of 2010 and speak to a contemporary generation of Black LGBTQ+ *festevivências*.

Queer Nightlife Studies

The study of queer nightlife has long shown its paradoxical nature—simultaneously a site of liberating possibilities and hierarchical exclusions. While sociologists have showcased these contradictions within urban, predominantly white gay neighborhoods and nightclubs (Armstrong 2002; Brekhus 2003; Brown-Saracino 2018; Collins 2004; Collins and Drinkwater 2015; Ghaziani 2014; Greene 2014; Han 2015; Ruting 2008), recent writings have sought to understand the dynamics of more ephemeral, event-based queer nightlife and the different possibilities these parties open up, particularly for queers of color (Adeyemi 2022; Ghaziani 2024; Ghaziani and Stillwagon 2019; Hunter et al. 2016). Many of these alternative spaces reject the racist and homonormative structures that appear in fixed gay bars and neighborhoods, seeking to free themselves in the context of ephemeral events, even as other hierarchies are simultaneously (and sometimes unconsciously) constructed (Allen 2022; Bailey 2013; McBride 2005; Muñoz 2009; Reason 2018). Black queer people, through the creation of new transient queer nightlife spaces which refuse white supremacy, engage in a speculative process of Black queer placemaking and worldmaking.

This article blends sociological understandings of placemaking (Hunter 2013; Hunter et al. 2016; Murphy 2022; Reason 2018), nightlife ethnography (Benedicto 2014; Buckland 2002; Ghaziani 2024; Manalansan 2003; Thornton 1996), and Black Queer Diaspora Studies (Agard-Jones 2013; Allen 2012; Saunders 2015) to examine how Black queer nightlife functions as a space for both resistance and cultural production. While sociological narratives have been increasingly concerned with the “closure epidemic” (Douek 2016; Mattson 2019) amongst gay bars, framing it as an increase in disappearing

queer spaces, this paper turns instead to the adaptive and mobile acts of placemaking (Ghaziani 2024; Greene 2022; Murphy 2022) that shape these Black queer nightlife spaces that have grown amid the decline of the gay bar. By employing in-depth interviews with space-makers, sensory ethnographic (Tutenges 2019) readings of Black queer nightlife spaces, and Black feminist lenses of intersectionality (Collins 2000; Combahee River Collective 1977; Crenshaw 1989; Evaristo 2020; Gomes de Oliveira 2017; Ribeiro 2017), this study examines how Black queer event creators in Brazil and the United States produce belonging, joy, and safety through nightlife in the face of systemic exclusions.

The Sociology of Placemaking at Night

Sociologists often organize analyses of placemaking amongst LGBTQ+ communities around predominantly gay, middle to upper-class environments. Responding to Epstein's (1994) claim that contemporary queer theory would be impossible without sociology's foundational studies on gay and lesbian identities, Roderick Ferguson (2005) argues that these canonical investigations into sexuality have been invested in upholding societal norms related to race and class. Therefore, while succeeding in framing the white gay middle-class subject, canonical sociology has inadequately addressed the Black queer subject (Ferguson 2004). This normative lens has bled over into the study of placemaking for LGBTQ+ people, which often sought to focus on the semi-permanent real estate of gay-owned bars or gayborhoods (Beemyn 1997; Brekhus 2003; Brown-Saracino 2018; Collins 2004; Collins and Drinkwater 2015; Ghaziani 2010, 2014; Ruting 2008). Some sociologists have demonstrated how Black queers and queers of color attempt to navigate these normative and fixed gay spaces while simultaneously showcasing the white power structures that control these gay bars and neighborhoods (Greene 2014, 2022; Han 2015). Through my careful analysis of Batekoo and Ascendance organizers' own experience of exclusion from these normative gay spaces, I build upon these studies of the exclusion of queers of color within homonormative spaces. Simultaneously—and importantly—this paper shifts the central focus away from the site of exclusion, white-owned and white-dominated gay bars, toward the site of inclusion, Black-organized ephemeral queer spaces, to show the distinct possibilities of spatial belonging that these parties seek to offer Black queer attendees.

Recent work has pushed the sociology of placemaking at night to think beyond gay bars to focus instead on the process of producing ephemeral nightlife forms (Abrutyn and Ghaziani 2014). Using close-detailed analyses through ethnographic study in tandem with theories from queer of color critique, sociologists have begun to show the distinct value of transient and impermanent spaces, particularly for multiply marginalized communities like Black queers and queers of color that are isolated from normative gay spaces (Ghaziani and Stillwagon 2019; Muñoz 2009). Sociologists have also shown how the possibilities of the ephemeral have stretched beyond queer communities. Black populations in the United States, often shut out of property ownership through redlining and housing segregation, have found ways to play with space, finding community and belonging for one another within fleeting spaces in the face of exclusion from permanent real estate (Du Bois 1899; Hunter 2013; Hunter and Robinson 2018; Hunter et al. 2016). And while these spaces of community building often are ephemeral for Black and/or queer communities, as Amin Ghaziani argues, "Even if something is impermanent, it can still leave a residue" (Ghaziani 2024:71).

Therefore, drawing from this recent sociological literature documenting the potentiality of the fleeting, my analysis of two Black queer ephemeral nightlife events (Ascendance and Batekoo) seeks to understand in detail the experimental and utopic atmospheres that are constructed within these events, especially how the organizers seek to leave a permanent imprint from an impermanent space upon the psyches of their Black queer attendees.

Black Queer Placemaking and Worldmaking in Nightlife

José Esteban Muñoz argues that “queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling of the present” (Muñoz 2009:1). Muñoz insists that queerness’s function, beyond an identity marker outside of the bounds of heterosexuality, is to provide a lens to see the constricting limits of the norms of the present and help queers imagine a world beyond the repression in the here and now. While Muñoz focuses on the speculative nature of queerness in the context of art and performance, I argue that this futuristic and utopic rendering of queerness has a constant presence in the Black queer parties analyzed in this paper. Collective sensorial experiments within queer nightlife are crucial to this utopic “feel” within queer nightlife spaces. Victoria Buckland (2002) highlights how improvisational dance within queer nightlife is a central element of queer utopic imagination. Curated by the party’s sonic and sensorial experiences through music and lights, improvisational movement, for Buckland, becomes a way of collectively manifesting imagined utopias within queer nightlife. Adeyemi (2022) reminds us that the feeling of utopia and belonging for queers does not simply appear out of thin air within these nightlife spaces but is constructed through painstaking affective labor. To understand the delicate balance between the affective curation of the space and the possibilities for queer utopic spontaneity, this paper analyzes the intentionality the organizers of these two parties bring to the creation of their events as places for Black queer dreaming and self-making, and the protective borders the organizers construct to protect this intentionality as their parties grow.

Resignifying the definition of Black placemaking, Marcus Hunter, Mary Patillo, Zandria Robinson, and Keeanga Yahmatta-Taylor (2016) push scholars, from both within and beyond sociology, to pay close attention to the “celebration, play, and poetry” that are central to Black placemaking. They argue that the playful nature of Black placemaking happens due to its occurrence amid violent racist repression and urban segregation, which necessitates creative experimentation with space (Hunter et al. 2016). Whether ephemeral or semi-permanent, these Black placemaking processes seek to transform the space into a place of Black belonging as long as it exists (Hunter et al. 2016). Theo Greene (2022) shows how even in predominantly white gay spaces, which operate on a logic of racial exclusion, subcultures can arise that challenge the dominant racial logic of the space. Outlining Black gay men’s episodic takeover of Washington DC gay club Halo on Friday nights, Greene shows how Black gay men restructure the racial dynamics of belonging within the club and collectively engage in a process of ephemeral Black (queer) placemaking.

Transforming places to create new geographies of Black belonging through placemaking is simultaneously a process of manifesting new worlds. As Marlon Bailey (2013) shows, while ballroom cultures work toward Black queer placemaking through the organizing of balls in the physical space, the cultures of Black queer belonging built up within the ballroom community and maintained even outside of the walls of the ball enacts a process of worldmaking as well.

While the event of the ball might be the centerpiece of ballroom culture, the alternative kinship structures, economies of recognition, and gender performances are all ontologies that the ballroom community brings to life and maintains, manifesting those new worlds wherever the community goes. While placemaking for Black queer communities is about wrangling back spatial control to design spaces that invoke Black queer life and joy, Black queer worldmaking is about building up cultures that sustain that life and joy even when the space dissipates, bringing a queer futurity into the here and now (Muñoz 2009). Black queer nightlife is thus not merely about creating places for socialization, but also a mode of worldmaking, I argue, producing new modes of living, relating, and imagining the future.

Black Queer Placemaking and Worldmaking in Local Contexts

While this paper aims to present a transnational understanding of nightlife creation in the Black queer diaspora (Allen 2012, 2022), I am equally invested in understanding each of these parties as intricately rooted in the specific geographies they inhabit. To do this, I draw from scholarship that has outlined a rich history of queer placemaking in New Orleans, built mainly through gay bars, gayborhoods like the Marigny, and gay Carnival traditions (Smith 2017; Stone 2022). As this placemaking throughout the 20th century worked to construct a safe space for certain queers from violence and homophobic oppression in the US South, these places operated along the same logic of racial and spatial segregation that the rest of the city operated (Nero 2005). Often then, Black queer placemaking in New Orleans happened together with and besides placemaking practices of the larger Black community in this predominantly Black city (Chapman 2014; Johnson 2008).

While co-existence between queer and non-queer Black people in their placemaking processes was not necessarily free of homophobic discrimination or violence, this spatial segregation, as Chapman (2014) argues, cultivated a dialogic relationship between Black people. This resulted in Black queer New Orleans-based cultures rooted and directly in conversation with larger Black cultural production. One such example is New Orleans Bounce music, a Black queer tradition birthed through nightlife that built upon New Orleans-based hip-hop rhythms (Chapman 2014, 2023). In analyzing the contemporary moment of Black queer placemaking and worldmaking in New Orleans, Alix Chapman also contends that Black queers who artistically create space and ways of being amid the context of violent repression in this US southern city adopt what he calls a “limbologics” (2023:64), a flexible and malleable ontology that is “defined by flexibility and originality under circumstances of encroachment” (Chapman 2023:64). I argue that this Black queer New Orleans-based theory is crucial in understanding the nimble and flexible ways that the Ascendance organizers have responded and adapted to maintain the essence of this Black queer space as it grows, shifts, and responds to changing political and demographic circumstances.

São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Salvador, the three main locational hubs of Batekoo, all have vibrant queer nightlife histories. However, like New Orleans, these Brazilian queer, or *cuír* (Nascimento 2018), nightlife spaces have dealt with similar problems of exclusion and racial hierarchy. James Green (1999) shows how Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have historically served as complicated places of refuge for gay men, or *entendidos*, from across Brazil. Throughout the mid to late twentieth century, gay men practiced placemaking through the creation of “counter-*casas*” (Green 1999:10) that sprouted up within public places such as the Vale do Anhangabau in São Paulo and Copacabana

Beach in Rio de Janeiro. Being that homosexuality was stigmatized as deviant and therefore mapped outside of the imaginary of the home or *casa*, these “counter-*casas*” served as alternative public and semi-private spaces where gay men could find community and intimacy with one another (Green 1999; Trevisan 1986). In the Salvador context throughout the twentieth century, as Vinicius Zacarias (2024) argues, placemaking amongst gay men and, even more so, lesbians has been much more transient. Gay and lesbian bars in Salvador have struggled to stay open as owners deal with morality complaints from neighbors and economic struggles. However, despite the transient nature of the nightlife of *entendidos* in Salvador, Zacarias (2023, 2024) shows a steady stream of *cuír* nightlife cultures throughout the latter half of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century. While scholarship has shown that across all three cities Black performers, drag queens, and *transformistas* played a large role in building up and maintaining these queer nightlife spaces in Brazil (Green 1999; Parker 1999), testimonies from these performers reveal the high levels of racism and discrimination Black performers and attendees of these spaces have dealt with to take part in Brazilian LGBTQ+ nightlife (Caetano and Rodrigues 2018; MacRae 2018; Zacarias 2024).

Contemporary Black LGBTQ+ creators from what has been called the *geração tombamento* have sought to break with his history of exclusion and racial hierarchy by creating Black places of refuge that put forth a queer and feminist politic to ensure that those who are most vulnerable in other spaces are centered within this new nightlife scene (Barros 2022; Lino e Silva 2022; Reason 2018; Ribeiro 2020). Through creating these new nightlife spaces, Black creators work to queer, or *cuír*, the historic Black Brazilian worldmaking processes of the *quilombo*, maroon societies where enslaved Africans in Brazil formed societies out the reach of slave catchers (Henson 2024; Nascimento 1980; Nascimento 2018). Building upon the theme of modern-day *quilombos*, Murphy (2022) shows how Black entrepreneurs in São Paulo work to restructure the anti-Black geographies of the city (Alves 2018) through the designing of their businesses as urban *quilombos*. Therefore, the businesses that Murphy highlights are not simply economic enterprises but tools to sustain Black life and build up alternative ontologies. Merging Murphy’s analysis of these urban *quilombos* with Tatiana Nascimento’s call to *cuír* these spaces helps us understand the *quilombo*-like worldmaking possibilities within these economic ventures of nightlife production, such as Batekoo, amongst Black Brazilian LGBTQ+ communities.

Methods

The research from this paper is drawn from a larger project on Black queer worldmaking in Brazil and the United States for which I have conducted in-depth ethnographic research across urban sites in both countries within social spaces, community organizations, and nonprofits, all of which serve Black LGBTQ+ populations. The specific portion of the ethnographic research relevant to this article was conducted through 56 hours of participant observation split across two parties. At Batekoo, between June 2016 and January 2025, I attended four editions of the party in São Paulo, two in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, and one in Belo Horizonte. At Ascendance in New Orleans, between December of 2023 and February of 2025, I attended four party editions, and one edition was produced in collaboration with another local party, Set de Flo. At each party I attended, I closely observed the

organization of the space, the dynamics and aesthetics of the attendees, the musical curation by the DJs, and the speeches by the organizers that helped to structure the feeling of the space. I often took notes on my phone as I observed during the party and revisited these notes to flesh them out more the following day, as the party was still fresh in my mind. Drawing from Fiona Buckland's (2002) methodological approach to the study of dance's facilitation of queer worldmaking, beyond simply observing, I also took part in the improvisational dance and communal interactions within at the party and reflected on my own autoethnographic and sensorial experiences of the space. Interacting with others I met, including friends that I saw at the parties, I presented myself as both a researcher producing a study of these spaces, as well as a Black queer participant and fan of the events. These informal interactions with other attendees helped to shape my understanding of the effectiveness of the organizers' arrangements of these Black queer place-worlds.

In addition to participant observation, I also draw from analyses of in-depth interviews with Black LGBTQ+ interlocutors split across Brazil and the United States. This data includes interviews with five organizers and/or DJs of either party and seven interviews with regular attendees of the parties. All twelve interviewees identify as Black (in Portuguese as either *preto/a* or *negro/a*) and also identify as an identity that falls into the categories of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender (examples: lesbian, gay, bisexual, *travesti*, and/or queer). My twelve interlocutors ranged from 20 to 42 years of age at the time of our interview. Interview lengths ranged from 30 minutes to three hours. Eleven interviews were conducted in person, and one was conducted through Zoom. In-person interviews were conducted in a location decided on by the interviewee, where the interviewee might feel comfortable talking about themselves. All interviewees were provided informed consent forms and given the option of anonymity or using their personal or professional names. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed shortly after the completion of the interview. Interview questions were prepared beforehand and were structured around themes of experiences with gender/race/class/sexuality discrimination, their involvement in space creation for Black LGBTQ+ people, and imagining better/other possible worlds for Black LGBTQ+ communities. Despite the prepared questions, I often remained flexible with the questions I asked, guiding the interview along points of interest from my interlocutors' responses.

I coded my interviews and field notes for the following themes: specific references to Batekoo or Ascendance, Black LGBTQ+ community, exclusion and inclusion, democratic engagement, growing popularity, feeling of belonging, and safe space. My analytic approach seeks to understand Black queer placemaking and worldmaking through these two specific instances of nightlife. Rather than expand my sample size by interviewing multitudes of Black LGBTQ+ organizers of different urban nightlife spaces to give a wide-ranging understanding of how the concept of Black queer placemaking and worldmaking is taken up across nightlife spaces, this paper seeks to zoom in to understand the specificity of these placemaking and worldmaking practices within these two nightlife spaces. Just as the authors of Black placemaking (Hunter et al. 2016) offer four specific vignettes of Black placemaking, rooted in the specific geographies of Chicago, to show how these processes offer larger lessons for all types of placemaking for marginalized people, I similarly provide descriptive analysis of placemaking practices at Ascendance and Batekoo to show the larger worldmaking possibilities that exist within ephemeral queer nightlife.

Findings

Batekoo: An Introduction

Batekoo began as a one-off party in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil in 2014 organized by two Black gay Bahian DJs. The Black attendees' reaction to the launch of Batekoo was so positive that the founders decided to form a recurring party in Salvador and in São Paulo. Batekoo's recurring party sought to make space for Black people, specifically catering to Black LGBTQ+ people and Black women as both producers and attendees. After São Paulo and Salvador, the Batekoo collective expanded to cities throughout Brazil, like Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte, nationalizing the scope of Batekoo. The party gained financial sponsors such as Budweiser and Red Bull which helped to enlarge the scope of the events Batekoo actualized and soon after the party spread to almost every major city across Brazil. By 2018, when Red Bull sponsored a documentary about the Batekoo collective (Red Bull TV 2023), the Batekoo party-world became notorious throughout the country. Batekoo became a central example of what Black queer placemaking looked like amongst the young generation of the Black movement in the 2010s, referred to by many as the *geração tombamento* (Reason 2018).

During a summer research trip to São Paulo in 2016, I learned about the first Batekoo I attended through some Black friends at the University of São Paulo (USP) who were taking part in protests on campus to push the university to institute affirmative action racial quotas to guarantee spots for Black and Indigenous students. Batekoo organized their party *Ocupação Preta* (Black Occupation) in solidarity with this movement for racial quotas at USP. The party took place in the outdoor area of the Funarte Cultural Complex in the center of the city, walking distance to two metro stations and in front of a bus stop—easily accessible to people coming from various parts of the city.

Batekoo in Brazilian Portuguese is slang that means clap or shake (*bater*) ass (*cu/koo*) and the name accurately describes the dancing one will see and take part in during a Batekoo, as I distinctly remember from that first Batekoo. When I arrived, loud Brazilian funk music blared throughout the space, and a sea of mostly Black people were dancing, twerking, laughing, and sharing deep conversation. People of various ages were there, while most attendees were between eighteen and thirty years of age. Inside the cultural complex, protest art produced throughout the day-long takeover hung (pictured in Figures 2, 3, and 4), which had statements such as, “Fora Temer” (Get Out Temer) in reference to Michel Temer, Brazil's vice-president and acting president after the coup d'état of president Dilma Rousseff from the leftist Workers Party in 2016 and “Contra o Genocídio da População Negra” (Against the Genocide of the Black Population) (pictured in Figure 2). The space also exhibited art critiquing Rede Globo, the news and media company that many argued supported the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the installment of Michel Temer.

The juxtaposition of this political art with the crowds of people dancing showed how Batekoo curated nightlife as fundamentally intertwined with politics. There were groups of Black people with their hair in afros, twists, dreadlocks, and dyed purple, red, blue, or whatever color they pleased. People sported various styles of gender expression within the space, seemingly refusing to be controlled by the norms of the society outside of the Batekoo environment. My first impression was that this space radiated a sense of freedom for Black LGBTQ+ people to be who they wanted to be in the moment. My eyes gleamed as I witnessed and danced in awe of the feeling this space invoked.



Figure 2. Batekoo Ocupação Preta. Photograph by Author.

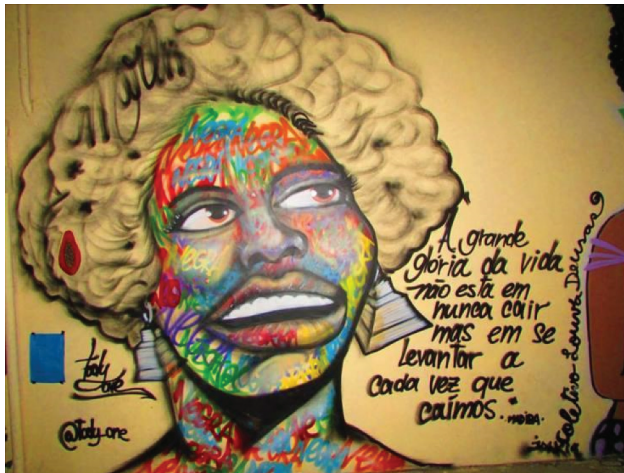


Figure 3. Batekoo Ocupação Preta. Photograph by Author.

Ascendance: An Introduction

Ascendance is a New Orleans, Louisiana based party that was conceptualized in 2017. Convened by a team of Black creatives, the party was organized around the theme of the zodiac, with a different party planned to celebrate each zodiac sign of the calendar year. The organizing team ensured that there was an astrologer at every edition of the party to provide chart readings for attendees, so as to fully embrace the party's zodiac theme. Inspired by the fervent rise of Black movements protesting against anti-Black police and state sanctioned violence in the mid-2010s (Carruthers 2018; Cohen 2010; Taylor 2016), the party's organizing team was clear in their advertising and promotion of the party that Ascendance was



Figure 4. Batekoo Ocupação Preta. Photograph by Author.

intended to facilitate a safe space for Black and Brown (i.e., nonwhite) queer people, trans people, and women across the city to dance and have fun. A small bar and music space at the edge of the Marigny neighborhood, Sidney's Saloon, was the first home of the regular Ascendance editions. As more attendees sought out the zodiac-themed party, the organizing team closed a deal with the Black-owned performance-arts venue Café Istanbul, also in the Marigny, to carry on with a larger version of the Ascendance zodiac parties. Ascendance grew from a party that brought in 10–50 people in its early editions to bringing in hundreds of attendees at its regular Café Istanbul editions.

I first heard about Ascendance on a job visit, interviewing for a position at Tulane University. My future colleagues, after hearing my job talk earlier in the day about Black queer art and media in Brazil and the United States, offered that New Orleans would be an exciting place to continue my research and brought up a local party that centered Black and Brown queer and trans people: Ascendance. Their explanation of the space immediately reminded me of my experiences at Batekoo, and I knew that I had to check the party out. Months later, after making the move down south, I finally had the chance to attend my first edition of Ascendance at their December Sagittarius-themed party in 2023 (advertised in [Figure 5](#)).

I arrived with my partner near the party start time of 10 PM. After paying the \$15 entrance fee, we made our way from the lit hallway toward the dark main dancehall. The hallway leading to the dancehall was decorated with zodiac ornaments and a Sagittarius dedication table. The dancehall vibrated rhythms from the DJ booth that began to move my body from the moment I stepped in. The DJ gracing the space with hip-hop dance mixes appeared to be a light-skinned Black man. Our early arrival time meant that we were two of around 10–15 party attendees that had already arrived. Taking advantage of the emptier space at the dancehall bar, we went to get drinks as we vibed to the rhythms. As more people started making their way in, I saw a crowd with a slight Black majority, with lots of non-Black and white faces mixed in. After about an hour within the space, the number of attendees quickly rose to around 80–100 people, and at the party's peak around midnight there were hundreds of people crowding the space all dancing in sync with the music. The gender make-up of the space, based on my own imperfect

ASCENDANCE *Sagittarius Season* STAR PPL



SATURDAY
DJ FTK
\$15

16 DECEMBER
CAFE ISTANBUL

COLOR: ORANGE
BELOVED SUN
11P-3A



Figure 5. Ascendance sagittarius party Advertisement. Notes: Ascen.dance. 2023. Quick but Goodie over at" *Instagram*. Retrieved October 13, 2024, (https://www.instagram.com/p/C0kOHE1u0lk/?hl=en&img_index=7).

perception of those in attendance, was about 60–70% women, with the rest of the population split between men and those whose gender presentation suggested non-binary or genderqueer. Fashion choices for looks within the space embraced all types of bodies, showing as much skin as the person desired. The short-shorts, tight dresses and skirts, leather cutoff shirts, and much more sported in the space all embraced the tropical heat that reigns for much of the year in New Orleans, even momentarily during December's winter season. I interpreted these fashion choices as a rejection of the insistence that only certain bodies are allowed to show off their bodies. All sizes were welcome at Ascendance. The DJs switched every hour-and-a-half, and the other two DJs were Black women. Each DJ had their own vibe, and the DJ who played at the height of the night around midnight brought an incredible mix of local New Orleans bounce music. My partner and I danced blissfully as we found ourselves immersed into a uniquely Black queer New Orleans nightlife space.

Constructing the Intentions of the Space

When explaining the serendipitous nature of the Batekoo's beginnings and subsequent growth into a national nightlife movement, Mirands, one of the party's founders, told me in an interview that Batekoo originally began as a fun birthday party between friends and extended community.

The first party was my birthday party and my Salvador going away party. I was not thinking of activism in the way the party is today, right? In how Batekoo is seen today in the movement. But, for example, I only hired Black DJs, the production team was all Black, there was only music by Black people . . . because I noticed that there were lots of Black parties where everybody was white . . . the promoters were white, the majority of the attendees were white, and I thought that was strange because they had everything, except Black people! . . . So I paid attention to this [in Batekoo]. (Mirands, interview with author, July 12, 2016)

What is fascinating about Mirands's reflection about the lack of "activism" in his original construction of the Batekoo space is that the primary concern for Mirands was making a space that was fun for himself and his Black LGBTQ+ friends and community in Salvador. While initially understanding this as a simple exercise in event planning, Mirands's subsequent reflections about his experiences of exclusion and marginalization within the nightlife scene help him to understand that even his birthday party can and should push against these exclusions that he experienced. Through planning this initial party, Mirands realizes that creating a space for his Black LGBTQ+ community would involve "activist" considerations about how identity impacts inclusion, who is often shut out of the economics of nightlife creation, and why. His insistence upon this party being a nightlife space where Black DJs, Black music, and Black people are exalted serves to address the past trauma Mirands experienced at the hands of a white supremacist nightlife industry while also charting a new and different path forward. Mirands's insistence on drawing upon his own experience of isolation within the nightlife world ensures that any space he creates, even his own birthday party, will refuse the pain of isolation that he had experienced as a Black gay DJ. This act of refusal ensures that the space he creates will inevitably be a party that provides inclusion and reverence for Black people. This incorporation of a Black queer placemaking intentionality as Mirands plans his party sparks a community-wide desire to replicate and expand Batekoo beyond Mirands's singular birthday edition.

Just as Mirands drew from his negative experience of dominant nightlife spaces in São Paulo and Salvador to create a space that operated by new rules, Ascendance similarly sought to draw from the founders' harmful nightlife experiences in New Orleans to create something different. DJ Chinua, one of the co-founders of Ascendance, shared with me in an interview that as he and his fellow co-founders worked to structure Ascendance as a recurring party, they aimed to cater to those who valued Ascendance as a safe space from harm and exclusion.

I think I think you know all of us have had enough experience, you know? Gypsi [Ascendance astrologist and founding team member] and [P, another co-founder,] and I have had enough experience in nightlife spaces that we know who are the people harmed most in them . . . When we think about that, we think about obviously, women in particular. We think about queer folks, in both different and similar ways. And we think about black people, melanated people. Particularly in New Orleans . . . We wanted to very much focus on, you know, the people who we know . . . sometimes feel like they don't have space. (DJ Chinua, interview with author, July 18, 2024)

As Ascendance grows and transforms in its early genesis, DJ Chinua and his co-organizers reflected deeply upon the question of who suffers violence in nightlife and why. Co-founders DJ Chinua and P, two Black bisexual cis-men, process and productively use their own experience with that harm in nightlife spaces but also seek to gain an understanding of how other Black queer people who attend Ascendance have suffered harm in nightlife spaces. DJ Chinua's acknowledgment of the "different and similar ways" that Black women and queer people within the space have experienced trauma in the New Orleans nightlife scene communicates that the Black queer umbrella encompasses varied social positions related to gender, class, ability, immigration status, among other categories, that all structure the level of safety these Black queer attendees have felt in other queer nightlife spaces. Therefore, this insistence upon focusing on those who "don't have a space" goes beyond just the organizers' experiences with exclusion to think about all types of exclusion and create a Black queer nightlife space that works to counteract all kinds of harm across various axes of power.

As Ascendance organizers defined the kind of nightlife they sought to counteract, they also began to outline the kind of space they sought to create. In my interview with Ascendance co-founder P, he insisted that, along with the theme of the zodiac, consent should also be a guiding ideology of the party space. Recounting his conversation with DJ Chinua, he said, "I was like, 'Why don't we have something where people have to ask people to dance.' [DJ Chinua] was like 'like consent?' I was like, yeah, how bout we do that" (P, interview with author, April 19, 2024). Refining the incorporation of consent into the fabric of the party, P, DJ Chinua, and their collaborators decided to make the party invite-only, sending out e-mail invites to community members to then pass around to their trusted invitees. Everyone who was invited and forwarded an invite would be cognizant of the space's zodiac theme and the emphasis on consent within the space. For the organizing team, this invitation style helped to ensure that everyone in attendance would abide by the rules of the space, maintaining an atmosphere of safety for people to enjoy themselves. P elaborated,

We were the only party that was doing invite-only and we would make our own invite-only e-mail ... you were not allowed in unless you had that ... So we had to do all that work going through all those emails and sending all those emails out. (P, interview with author, April 19, 2024)

P's quotation acknowledges the large amount of work that goes into creating something innovative. While the invite-only style of the party required unexpected labor, this allowed the organizers to live up to their goals to ensure a safe and consensual party for Black queer attendees. The organizers' enticement of the attendees, through the aesthetics and music of the party, to agree to the rules of consent works to reframe attendees' ideas about the ontological possibilities of nightlife. This ideology of consent seeks to shift the demeanor of those within the space to facilitate safety within the party zone while simultaneously planting the seeds of consent culture in the psyches of their attendees, even after the party ends. The extra work of an invite-only structure to uphold the consensual nature of the space, while tedious for the organizers, was essential to the creation of a new kind of Black queer nightlife that the organizers felt New Orleans needed. As Kemi Adeyemi insists, the work that goes into creating Black queer nightlife "is indeed the work of community building" (Adeyemi 2022:122). Yet, through the careful facilitation of new cultures within the party space, cultures that tempt the attendees through consensual enjoyment of the party to permanently shift the way they interact and adopt consent as a life practice, this work also falls in the category of worldmaking.

Festevivências: Living and Feeling at Ascendance and Batekoo

The moment Bahian DJ Tia Carol stepped into her first Batekoo party, she felt a sense of revelation. She had been DJing for several years at various gay parties throughout Salvador. She insisted that originally, these spaces had provided her a sense of freedom as a Black woman who was part of the LGBTQ+ community. However, as time went on, she started to see how she often felt like she was on display as the only Black woman DJ at these gay parties. Growing tired of the racial exclusion she saw in gay nightlife spaces in Salvador, her friends Mirands and Mauricio told her about their party Batekoo, and invited her to check it out to think about DJing for them. She described her entrance to her first Batekoo, saying,

I was extremely welcomed . . . It was like here the clothes I wear aren't going to be ridiculed. My hair isn't going to be seen as something different or a costume. The way I dance won't be interpreted just as something sexual, like I'm dancing because I'm having fun. You get it? It was an epiphany. (DJ Tia Carol, interview with author, July 25, 2016)

Entering the Batekoo space, Carol was finally able to see the things that felt wrong and restrictive during her time DJing in predominantly white gay nightlife spaces. While she had initially felt a sense of freedom in her early days DJing at gay nightclubs, the longer she spent within these white, racially segregated spaces, the more she felt a sense of racial othering within the space. No longer feeling that sense of being on display in the Batekoo space, Carol found an opening for a different type of freedom for herself as a Black woman. Without the dominance of the white gaze that sought to spectacularize her body, instead her body became an entity that she could embrace, dress up as she chooses, and have fun with as she danced to the rhythms within the space.

After the invitation from Mirands and Mauricio, Carol launched into the DJing and organizing team for Batekoo in Salvador, bringing forth that same freedom to self-fashion without white supremacist judgment that she felt at her first Batekoo to her facilitation of the space.

[At Batekoo] we see more Black women, Black bisexual and lesbian women, inserted into this space that before didn't exist. . . . We [Batekoo] began to bring the favela to the space, the *bicha* (sissy) that lives in the favela that doesn't have any space to feel free. So that was my objective, us inserting everyone in this space in a democratic way and have fun. Because I think fun is the foundation for everything. If you don't have fun, you don't have any foundation, like why? The fight is already very heavy for you to stay worried the whole time. (DJ Tia Carol, interview with author, July 25, 2016)

For Carol, the nightlife space that she co-created with the other Batekoo organizers was distinctly different from other gay nightlife spaces, not simply because of the increase in Black people, but because Black enjoyment was a central intention of the party. Carol echoes the sentiments of Mirands about how Black LGBTQ+ people from favela communities are excluded from white gay nightlife by socioeconomic barriers that keep them from affording these nightclubs and violent geographies of the city that make accessing the neighborhoods of these nightclubs at night (often without any public transportation lines home) impossible (Henson 2024). Charting a different path than these gay nightclubs, in the early iteration of Batekoo, accessibility for Black people was central to planning where and when each party took place and how much it cost. Carol explains how the deep care about making the party accessible to Black people ensures that Black attendees know they are included in the space

and can, therefore, fully occupy their minds with their enjoyment of the party. Just as Carol was freed from the feeling of being on display in white gay nightlife spaces after entering Batekoo, she and the organizing team seek to recreate that feeling for their Black attendees to experience nightlife joy without the threat of cis-heteropatriarchal and white supremacist judgment or exclusion.

Mirands offered that this feeling of nightlife joy and freedom at Batekoo provided an atmosphere for their Black attendees to experiment with their own self-fashioning through different aesthetic choices.

The girls can be without much clothes or with a bra or with their breasts out and nobody did anything; so they felt this freedom, to have a space to be with one another that, I think at another party, a white party for example, they wouldn't feel [that freedom]. Just having dyed hair, you are already judged or seen as "exotic" and such when you're Black, because when you have dyed straight hair it's super normal, everyone has it. So, I think that this space of community was when people began to see so many things in common [with others in the space] that they had. (Mirands, interview with author, July 12, 2016)

In Mirands's eyes, the purposeful removal of these white judgments and high instances of violence that are prevalent in other kinds of nightlife spaces makes Batekoo a space where all Black LGBTQ+ people feel that they can focus on living without bounds instead of worrying about protecting themselves from violent gazes. Shifting their attention from the preoccupation with covering up their bodies so as not to suffer unwanted advances from patriarchs, Black LGBTQ+ women at Batekoo can experiment with the fashions that they choose without worrying about how much skin is showing. Rather than ensuring one's hair is not offensive to anti-Black gazes, Black people at the party can embrace their hair as it is and try new dye colors, textures, hairstyles, and wigs as they please. This catering to Black LGBTQ+ people, ensuring the space does not inflict the same kinds of violences that are prevalent throughout other nightlife spaces in Brazil, provides room for these Black LGBTQ+ attendees to experiment with new ontological experiences at Batekoo. Therefore, Batekoo organizers slightly lifting the weight of the constant presence of white supremacy and cis-heteropatriarchy off their attendees allow innovative forms of self-fashioning to arise through these *festivivências* experienced in these Black *cuír* party-worlds.

That same feeling of a slight freedom from the constant pressures of the systems of domination was a central intention of the organizing team of Ascendance as the party grew and evolved. P shared with me that, most of all, the organizing team wanted to bring forth a feeling of self-acceptance and empathy for their communities.

We wanted it to be more than you just going out drinking and party. . . we all initially feel like we are doing activist work . . . And I feel like me personally, what I know is music. And the activist work that I can do is through music. Through what you hear. . . the vocals that you hear over a loud speaker. I'm not trying to brainwash you, but I'm just trying to make you understand that you need to be thinking about these things, whether it is safe sex, whether it is consent, whether it is feeling sexy, feeling love . . . I want you to feel sexy. I want you to feel empowered. I want you to feel important. I want you to embrace your color. Embrace your flag. Embrace your language. Embrace your heritage. Embrace your sexual orientation. Embrace anything that is you. (P, interview with author, April 19, 2024)

As P explains, constructing the feeling of the space is the paramount work of the Ascendance organizers. The feeling that the Ascendance organizers aim to invoke on those who attend is not simply bliss or happiness, but whatever feeling that is real to

themselves and their relation to other people in the space. This embrace of feeling connects directly to DJ Chinua's stated primary goal of having Ascendance be "authentic" above all. P and DJ Chinua both want their attendees, particularly their Black queer attendees, to feel like they can experience a deep sense of authenticity that allows them to embrace things that are attacked outside of Ascendance: non-normative genders and sexualities, nonwhite racial identities, pain from the experience of oppression, and pleasure through consent. In this, the Ascendance founders don't necessarily aim to eliminate the realities of oppression beyond the party space but rather to allow their attendees to understand the all-encompassing weight of that oppression and experiment with feeling what might exist beyond it.

Ascendance organizers understand that "the queer dance floor is not an apolitical site" (Adeyemi 2022:11). Therefore, organizing a space where Black queer people feel safe enough to experience the full range of emotions that is not always available to them in other party spaces involves an ever-present connection between politics and affect within the space. The continual stating of Black queer politics within the space, through the rotating of different Black queer and trans DJs, the constant signposting and insistence upon consensual interactions, and the clear advertisement of the party as a Black queer space allows the range of feeling for Black queer attendees to move beyond the realm of questioning whether they are accepted and included. This constant rooting of the feeling of the space in subaltern politics and a Black queer social position ensures that, in addition to a full range of emotional experiences within the space, Black queer partygoers have "the right to feel good" (Adeyemi 2022:18) at Ascendance.

Maintaining Protective Borders Around the Festevivências

In 2019, during São Paulo's LGBTQ+ Pride Week, I attended a Batekoo. Budweiser sponsored the party as part of the brand's Bud Basement series that provided funding for various parties in the city. This was Batekoo's third edition of the Bud Basement party, and it took place in a large warehouse space in an upper-middle-class neighborhood of Morumbi. Entering the space, I saw a fancier-than-normal warehouse-style structure filled with Budweiser advertisements. I also noticed that the entrance fee to the party and the drink prices were higher than usual, most likely due to the edition's location and the sponsorship by Budweiser. Despite these Batekoo novelties, the party had that familiar Batekoo feel and was full of attendees dancing gleefully to the Brazilian Funk rhythms blasting from the center stage. The stage was filled with Black DJs and Black people dancing with one another, showing off their moves and letting the music flow through their bodies.

While the crowd of attendees was still filled with a majority of many familiar Black LGBTQ+ faces that I had seen at other Batekoos throughout Brazil, the higher-than-usual number of white attendees at the event reflected the growing mainstream popularity of Batekoo. At one point, a visibly drunk group of white people attempted to get on stage to participate in a dance-off competition between the Black people on stage. Almost immediately, a full-figured Black woman with beautiful purple-colored two-strand twist extensions down her back took the microphone, ordered the group to be escorted off the stage, and stopped the music. She affirmed to the crowd that Batekoo is a party that celebrates Black LGBTQ+ joy, bodies, and community. She insisted that all are invited to celebrate and participate in this joy but must understand that this joy centers on Black women and Black

LGBTQ+ people. She clarified, saying white people are welcome in this space as long as they know that, different from almost every other space in Brazil, Batekoo does not center them and their joy. Therefore, the stage is not for white people to mount. I had witnessed these kinds of powerful affirmations by emcees at almost every Batekoo I had attended up until that point. However, this instance seemed distinct because it demonstrated Batekoo organizers' insistence on maintaining the party as an unapologetically Black *cuír* space, despite mainstream success and popularity amongst white people. These declarations by the emcees at prior Batekooos were a blissful moment of community celebration among a crowd of largely Black people. Now, this announcement becomes a firm way to maintain protective borders around the party's intended audience as others make their way in.

In July 2024, I attended an edition of Ascendance in New Orleans that similarly reflected the party's growing popularity and how organizers attempt to maintain the original focus of the party as it grows. This edition of Ascendance was sponsored by Essence Fest, which took place in the city that weekend. The Essence Festival is a celebration of Black culture, life, and business organized by Essence Magazine since 1995 (Stewart 2023). The yearly festival brings in Black tourists from around the United States and is a bright spot for the New Orleans tourism industry during a summer season that is generally slow due to the intense heat in the city. My partner and I arrived at the party at Ascendance's usual location, Café Istanbul, shortly after the start time. When we got to the party's entrance, we saw a different setup than usual: two entrance lines, six fancy ticket verification computer stations, and a big group of Essence Fest workers checking tickets and giving people pink Essence Fest event wristbands. We were initially confused about what line we were supposed to get into, as there were not generally two different lines set up for entrance into Ascendance. After some (what appeared to be) women entered the right-side line to be patted down before entering, the security guards who saw my partner and I gestured for us to enter the left-side line for a security pat down, making it clear that these were gendered lines. I was somewhat shocked, considering that this kind of binary gendered splitting certainly did not align with the queer gender politics and experimentation with gender presentation that I had witnessed at prior Ascendances. As I made my way through the "men's" line, I saw DJ Chinua heading toward the security guards. Inside, I overheard DJ Chinua tell the security guards that they don't have to separate people into gendered lines and that they should check everyone the same way.

Talking with DJ Chinua later, he told me that his correction of the security guards was prompted by a long-time Black queer Ascendance attendee who told him that the security protocol did not uphold the gender-inclusive feeling of Ascendance. DJ Chinua's quick response to the attendee's experience and movement to resolve the issue shows the democratic nature of maintaining Ascendance as a protected space for Black queer attendees. Even in this larger Essence-sponsored event setting, Black queer attendees still help to decide how to structure the space. While DJ Chinua was not there to see the incident of the gendered lines, as an Ascendance organizer, he positioned himself as an easily approachable person to air complaints to, and he was willing to trust in this regular attendee's experience enough to believe that there was a problem to fix. With this action of quickly believing in the experiences of an attendee who saw something that DJ Chinua could not see, DJ Chinua attempted to hold Ascendance accountable to its original intention of creating a space that cultivates fuller and safer ontological experience for *all* Black queer people, especially those most vulnerable to harm. DJ Chinua explained to me in our interview that he clearly understood how, as a cis man, he does not experience the world in the same way that many of the Black genderqueer,

non-binary, and trans attendees at Ascendance do. However, at this moment, he understood that what was important was not his own experience but rather the cultivation of a space that is safe for all those who experience all kinds of cis-heteropatriarchal violence. This then necessitated DJ Chinua's willingness to believe when he heard experiences of harm different than his own at Ascendance and to resolve those issues when they arise.

Both P and DJ Chinua insisted that this kind of troubleshooting of Ascendance was common. This troubleshooting often included creating new rules and boundaries for the space to keep out racist and cis-heteropatriarchal violence. P explained that after removing the invite-only structure at Ascendance's two-year mark, they found themselves needing to implement more rules and reminders to keep the space's vibe as it grew.

[Ascendance] started getting this influx of college kids. Like bros and hood ass homies you know? So our consent rule was really going out the window because of this. And me and [DJ Chinua] had to start making speeches . . . "White people, we thank you that you're here, but this is not your space and you need to exit your way to the back of your space if you want to stay." You know. So we started making those speeches. We started making the consent only speeches and we just think people weren't really hearing them. So then we started incorporating feedback. We built the website . . . we started asking people to just give us feedback on how we can fix some of these issues, like. . . what do you suggest is the best course of action of maybe getting less white folks involved and stuff like that? And we then we went back to the invite, and it was like, exclusive. (P, interview with author, April 19, 2024)

P's account shows the constant flexibility and "limbologics" (Chapman 2023) that the Ascendance team engaged in to remain agile and continually ensure that the party was providing a safe space for Black queer attendees. This flexibility meant that, while the party space was changing due to exponential growth, the organizing team tried out a variety of things to attempt to maintain the party's Black queer politics and intentionality. Just as Batekoo implemented, Ascendance DJs and organizers made announcements reminding those in attendance who the space was created for and how everyone should engage with one another to maintain the sacred nature of the party. At first, rather than reject this new crowd of men and white attendees, the announcements that the organizing team made during the parties and on advertisements beforehand meant to serve as an invitation for these newcomers to take part in these *festevivências*, even if the space was not created for them specifically. However, this participation was only welcome upon the terms of engagement that maintained Ascendance's Black queer placemaking and worldmaking logic.

When the organizers were unsure of how to manage the party's growth adequately, they sought democratic engagement to figure out the best route of action. Using digital methods through their website and social media pages, they solicited ideas for ways to return this growing Ascendance to its Black queer intentionality. These suggestions finally led the organizers to return to an invite-only format to help reestablish the original party atmosphere. This drastic decision showed that the Black queer intentionality of the Ascendance space was more important to the organizing team than the monetary success that growth brought. The organizing team of Ascendance consists of artists and creatives who depend on the financial success of the party for their livelihoods. However, their willingness to return to an invite-only space, which would inevitably be a smaller, more intimate crowd, shows the sacrifice the Ascendance team was willing to make to maintain the Black queer *festevivências* of their party.

Conclusion: Worlds within Walls

Batekoo and Ascendance, at their core, are parties. They are nightlife spaces where the organizing teams and DJs convene to bring forth pumping music for people to dance to the rhythms, sell drinks that lower inhibitions and loosen people's bodies within the space, and facilitate the platonic and intimate connection between partygoers in the dark of the dancehall. However, behind the surface-level observation of these parties as social spaces, Ascendance and Batekoo open up the possibility for other worlds within their walls. The conceptual power and intention within these two parties show the potential political dimensions of ephemeral Black queer nightlife, as similarly documented by sociologists (e.g., Ghaziani 2024; Greene 2022) and other researchers (e.g., Adeyemi 2022; Bailey 2013) in a growing, interdisciplinary body of work. The stated desire by the organizers of both spaces to create a space where Black queer people can lose their inhibitions without having to worry about the anti-Black and cis-heteropatriarchal violences they are subjected to in other nightlife spaces and in the world at large means that these spaces work to create the kind of futuristic queer utopias of Muñoz's (2009) theorizations. These party spaces do not ignore the violence of the here and now outside of the party space, but rather, they democratically and repeatedly work to defend the space from those violences that always are at risk of finding their way in. This collective defense of the boundaries of the space is to allow for those Black queer people within the space to focus less on the violence they may face and give themselves over to what exists beyond that world of violence and domination. This Black queer party bliss opens space for new forms of self-fashioning in the space where the attendees can create new forms of *festeivêcias* through the reimagining of their lived experience through nightlife.

The lessons from Ascendance and Batekoo's Black queer placemaking and worldmaking processes open up exciting new research questions related to the study of queer nightlife and Black worldmaking. As queer creators continue to shift away from the gay bar and toward these more ephemeral styles of nightlife events (e.g., Ghaziani and Stillwagon 2019), how does the queer nightlife public respond and democratically engage with the structuring of these spaces beyond the visions of the space creators? How does the creative use of the digital world allow queer publics to engage democratically in nightlife placemaking and worldmaking beyond simply providing feedback? Some long-time attendees to Ascendance or Batekoo shared in interviews that they had varying opinions about the kind of world that was created within the party space despite the liberatory vision of the creators. This sparks the question of how a nightlife space deals with moments of conflicting visions between the organizers and the intended public. What happens when the public rejects the vision the organizers bring forth? How does the queer public manifest their democratic power over the space? Beyond this, how do queer creators maintain (or not) control over space to continue to build up their nightlife visions if they are not owners of the physical real estate, like in gay and lesbian bars of yesteryear? How do financial sponsors, like Budweiser and Red Bull in the case of Batekoo and Essence in the case of Ascendance, help party creators gain a kind of financial "control" but also present new problems for ownership? Finally, as Ascendance, in line with a large movement of QTPOC (Queer and Trans People of Color) nightlife spaces across the United States, understands itself as not just a Black queer space but as a Black *and* Brown queer space, what complicated tensions arrive out of these aspirational liberatory nightlife worlds that are intended for nonwhite queer and

trans people? How does anti-Blackness appear in QTPOC nightlife spaces, and how do the organizers and publics address it to attempt to ensure these parties do not become “progressive dystopia[s]” (Shange 2019)?

While this paper primarily seeks to understand in detail the Black queer nightlife creation practices of these two specific parties, “small facts speak to large issues” (Geertz 1973:23), and thus, my focus on Black queer placemaking has implications beyond it. As other scholars have noted (e.g., Hunter et al. 2016), understanding the specific placemaking practices of Black communities helps us understand how all communities who must navigate violence and oppression find ways to build space. Therefore, Batekoo and Ascendances’ creators’ nimble boundary construction against the forms of exclusion and violence that exist outside the space reflects the numerous ways that other ephemeral queer nightlife events and community spaces for marginalized people must quickly adapt to the oppressions they face. Batekoo and Ascendances’s creators’ assembly of a sensorial experience for their attendees that entices them to live in a consensual, safe, and blissful world where Black queerness is exalted similarly helps us to understand how nightlife and other social spaces have a unique political world-making potential for oppressed people. The Black queer creators’ willingness to listen to and counteract experiences of harm that are different than the ones they experience also goes to understanding what solidarity looks like in practice across nightlife and social spaces.

Finally, this paper opens up the possibility to continue to read different locations across the Black queer diaspora (Allen 2012) alongside one another. Ascendance and Batekoo, while existing in disparate national realities, both respond to interconnected global systems of white supremacy and cis-heteropatriarchy and mobilize similar strategies in their placemaking and worldmaking endeavors. If these Black queer parties, through their genre-defying nightlife creation, are working to reject the systems of domination and the spatial encasement that makes enshrines that domination, then their worldmaking project is also about a Black queer geographic expansion beyond encasement. Therefore, just as these parties’ placemaking works to expand Black queer geographies, this paper similarly seeks to analyze beyond geographies of Black (queer) encasement. Putting Ascendance and Batekoo in conversation with one another acknowledges that enclosing Black space is only possible through knowledge production’s upholding (or implementing) those restrictive geographic boundaries. I argue that sociologists, through a detailed and juxtaposed read of different Black spaces, can help to destabilize the rigid constructions of regional and national boundaries and expand Black geographies. This paper serves as a continued invitation for sociologists, specifically, as well as ethnographers of Black queer worlds, more generally, to continue to analyze the similar and different tactics that Black queer creators mobilize as they work to manifest freer spaces and worlds for one another.

Note

1. My use of queer in this paper falls into two categories: 1) as interchangeable with the umbrella category of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) and 2) as a “radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality and the family” (Smyth 1996:280). However, often in this paper I do not use queer as an identity category when I refer to only Batekoo or Brazilian contexts. This is to preserve the Brazilian identities that were shared with me in ethnographic interviews, as well as the active resistance from my interlocutors against an imposition of North American queer identities upon Brazilian realities. LGBTQ+ in this context serves as a more apt translation for the identity categories my interlocutors often identified with. When speaking to the “radical questioning”

portion of queerness in a Brazilian context only, I use *cuír* instead in this paper, drawing from Nascimento (2018) and her reframing of the concept through Black Brazilian frameworks.

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