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Walking through Rio de Janeiro's 'Little Africa': places and contested borders

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Abstract

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the urban renewal project in Rio de Janeiro's port region emphasized the macroscopic scale of road building and projects designed for the future. In parallel, the production of localities and cultural heritage have often sought to adapt to the impacts of urban transformation. Guided tours fostering the idea of 'African heritage' construct places of historical and contemporary significance, reinterpreting their wider connections with people and places and their disputed borders. In this context, 'Little Africa' involves the production of a 'place' designed locally by cultural associations that promote walking tours in an attempt to fix routes that either adapt to or subvert times and spaces.
Keywords: Rio de Janeiro, port area, walking tours, Little Africa.

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Caminhando pela ‘Pequena África’ no Rio de Janeiro: lugares e fronteiras em disputa

Resumo

Nesta virada do século XXI, o projeto de renovação urbana da região portuária do Rio de Janeiro enfatizou a escala macroscópica da abertura de vias e implementação para o futuro. Em paralelo, a produção de lugares e do patrimônio cultural procuraram algumas vezes acomodar os impactos da transformação urbana. As visitas guiadas voltadas para uma ideia de “herança africana” produzem lugares de significado histórico e contemporâneo, reinterpretando suas conexões mais amplas com as pessoas e com o local e suas fronteiras em disputa. Neste contexto, a “Pequena África” como a produção de um “lugar” se desenha localmente por associações culturais que promovem seus roteiros guiados na tentativa de fixação de caminhos que ora acomodam, ora subvertem tempos e espaços.

Palavras-chave: Rio de Janeiro, porto, visitas guiadas, Pequena África

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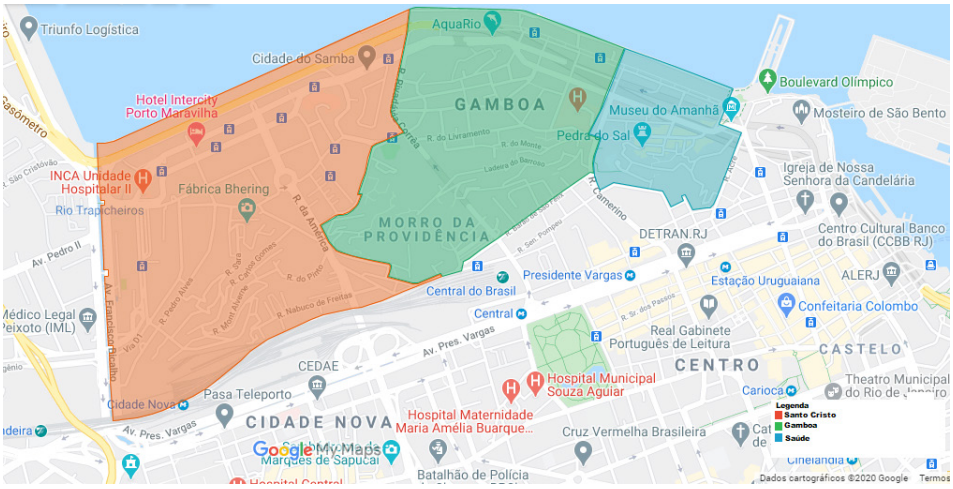
Ports enable flows in and out. In various cities of the world, ambitious urban renewal projects in dockland areas have become the focus of economic interests and substantial investments in land development projects. Attracting interest due to their tourist potential, they are also affected by the consequences of contemporary urban management policies as a whole, including the regeneration of urban areas and buildings, gentrification,[1] and the relocation or even removal of residents. Rio de Janeiro's port region is an exemplary case that has been the site of voluntary and involuntary mobilities in ambivalent form over centuries. Studies show that around two million Africans, brought to the Americas as slaves, disembarked in Rio de Janeiro. More than 500,000 arrived at Valongo Wharf alone, recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2017 (Vassallo & Cicalo 2015).

From the viewpoint of urban planning, the current architectonic layout of the Port of Rio de Janeiro, the focus of 'urban renewal' in the 2000s, is the result of the superimposed layers of almost four centuries of urban history that configure the three port districts – Saúde, Gamboa and Santo Cristo – each of which reveals architectural features of the colonial, imperial and industrial phases of the city (Mesentier & Moreira 2014: 42).[2]

Figure 1: Administrative boundaries of the districts comprising Rio de Janeiro's port region



1 A bibliographic survey by Guimarães (2014) cites the sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) as the author responsible for formulating the concept of gentrification as a process of investment in, restoration and use of depreciated residences in the working class or popular districts of Central London by the "wealthy middle class." Numerous studies have since used the idea of gentrification to analyse the transformations of old central and port areas by urban projects both for implanting new uses and for restoring existing buildings. In Rio de Janeiro, the pioneering work of Moreira (2004) makes use of the concept of gentrification in the analysis of the Rio Port plan in order to criticize the economic role of what the author classifies as 'global cities.'

2 Over the four centuries of urban history, in morphological terms, Mesentier and Moreira (2014) indicate two large groups of configurations of the port districts of Rio de Janeiro. One morphology with urban characteristics in Saúde and Gamboa, close to the centre of Rio de Janeiro; and another, in Santo Cristo, closer to the Novo Rio Coach Station and the Leopoldina Railway Station. In the districts of Saúde and Gamboa, it is possible to find "the older townhouse, low-storeyed with a deep plot of land, an urban implantation of houses at the front of the lot, on the boundary with the road, with an irregular street layout deriving from the architecture of the colonial and imperial period." This morphology predominates in Morro da Conceição, in large sections of Morro da Saúde and in the area between the Rua Livramento and Rua Conselheiro Zacarias. Large warehouses on extensive plots of land, following a layout dating back to the dockland structure of the industrial city of the beginning of the twentieth century, link the entire area along Avenida Rodrigues Alves. The configuration of the landscape extends as far as the Santo Cristo region, "which has as a backdrop the oldest Rio favela, Morro da Providência, with its streets, alleys and steps between the houses, some of them as old as the townhouses still existing today" (Mesentier and Moreira 2014: 42-3).

The idea of 'Little Africa,' today widely mentioned in the media and in diverse representations of Rio de Janeiro's port zone in Brazil and internationally, does not correspond to the exact dimensions of the districts, but merges into fluid borders in which literary and even 'utopian' narratives (Guimarães 2014) are juxtaposed with the recent narratives on cultural heritage (Vassallo & Cicalo 2015), the political and moral recognition of differences and affirmation of rights (Guimarães 2014), the clashes between diverse agents involving religious dynamics (Carneiro & Pinheiro 2015), demands for political and cultural preservation (Vassallo & Cáceres 2019), and the initiatives of local residents and groups living in these districts (Fernandes 2014).

Responding to the diverse anthropological approaches cited above that explore important aspects of this port zone of Rio de Janeiro, sometimes in totalizing fashions, sometimes highlighting differences and diverse demands for social rights, this article focuses on a new aspect: guided tours as organizers of the physical contours of Little Africa and as producers of a 'place' that gives visibility to present-day local association initiatives.[3] It is important to point out from the outset that these guided tours and tourist routes associated with the idea of an 'African heritage' have grown exponentially especially over the last decade since 2010, alongside urban reforms of the area and the growth in official heritage policies designed to recognize and valorise ethnic-racial expressions[4] and their 'circuits'.

By problematizing the notion of Little Africa in Rio de Janeiro, I refute the idea of the 'place' as somewhere ready-made, recognizing that its various layers of meaning, as well as its ambivalent dimension, produce a spectrum of continuities and changes. Margaret Rodman (2003) encourages us to comprehend 'places' anthropologically as social spaces of multiple experiences, peopled by voices and viewpoints – a multivocality and multifocality – that express the more or less hegemonic social relations evinced in their diverse meanings. Keith Basso (1996) argues that the relationship between persons and things is necessarily interdependent and mutually constituted. Since places animate or interanimate ideas, feelings, and persons, on being sensed, they are simultaneously produced and delimited: they physically demarcate themselves and also envelop people's experiences with and about a particular place.

In this way, we can ask how the process of producing Little Africa as a 'place' (Rodman, 2003) has unfolded through multiple focal points and voices since the end of the twentieth century. More especially, I wish to examine how this social production has acquired its own configuration in the current context when we focus on the voices produced by the circuits of guided tours aimed at Brazilian tourists and foreign visitors, and also at the public of Rio de Janeiro, schools, and cultural and social interests seeking "to make the African heritage visible."

As we shall see, these visits delimit a specific physical continuity between points – monuments, cultural spaces, centres, museums, and open-air visitor spaces – like the Valongo Wharf, previously dispersed in oral narratives or historical accounts. The diverse circuits of these guided tours create their own boundaries and connections, highlighting common reference points and making them visible.

3 The research intended to accompany guided tours by some regular cultural groups in Rio de Janeiro's port region from 2018 to 2019. The research was supported by FAPERJ (Research Foundation of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), CNPq (Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) and counted on Fillipe Alves (Alves 2018) (Scientific Initiation Award – UFF, CNPq). As well as the material accessible in digital sites and the printed material handed out on guided tours, direct observation was undertaken, including accompanying some of these visits during the two years in question, which enabled a number of maps to be created. The route maps presented here are based on visits accompanied by the researchers, elaborated using Google Maps. I would like to thank the research team "Discomforting territories: images, narratives and objects of the Global South" based at ICGSS- Interdisciplinary Centre for Global South Studies - University of Tübingen.

4 On August 4, 2000, consequent to Decree 3551, which instituted the List of Intangible Cultural Goods and created the National Program for Intangible Heritage (*Programa Nacional de Patrimônio Imaterial*: PNPI), IPHAN began its activities of listing and conserving intangible heritage following its own guidelines and implementing public policies for the recognition, valorisation and sustainable support of 'intangible cultural goods.' Legal instruments were also created to structure the field of cultural rights, highlighting heritage policies focused on the recognition of 'differences' that foregrounded new roles for the State and potential new relations between the latter and 'ethnic-racial' issues.

In concluding this text, I also show the formalization that these delimitations can acquire with the more recent initiative of 2019, when the notion of a 'black territory,'[5] already mobilized in other contexts (Guimarães 2012, 2014), was legally recognized as a reparative measure (Arruti 2006) through a municipal law setting precise limits to the streets and buildings defining 'Little Africa,' placing the area within clear physical boundaries.

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We need to turn our gaze to the first years of the twenty-first century, when financial investments in urban development projects in the docklands region accompanied the Rio Port Plan in 2001. These investments increased further after approval of Rio de Janeiro, in 2009, as one of the Brazilian cities on the 2014 World Cup circuit and as the host city for the 2016 Olympic Games. Urban infrastructural and traffic works were implemented in this context, financed through a public-private partnership that involved the construction of water, sewage and drainage networks, selective waste collection, mains power supply and street lightning, a project named Porto Maravilha (Marvellous Port).

An image of the future was projected by the large expressways and railway lines, the boulevard for pedestrians with the inauguration of major cultural facilities installed in the revitalized Mauá Square like the Rio Art Museum (2013) and a museum focused on the future – the Museum of Tomorrow (2015) – designed by the renowned architect Santiago Calatrava.[6] The management of spaces and the diversity of social groups established there flourished in a complex interplay of disputes and adaptations to territorial boundaries and temporalities.

In 2014, the Perimetral overpass was demolished. The Via Binário (Binary Expressway) was inaugurated, relocating vehicle traffic to the smaller roads within the port districts. In 2016, after three years and eight months of construction work, the Mayor Marcello Alencar Tunnel was opened, the country's largest tunnel, more than three kilometres in length, passing under the port area. Creation of the Olympic Boulevard stimulated visitors to enjoy the shoreline of Guanabara Bay, previously deteriorated and avoided by tourists. The plots and warehouses located nearby were turned into spaces used by open air markets, large music shows and gastronomic events.

The large-scale functional aspects and open spaces designed to favour movement contrasted with the creation of urban spaces demanded by the local population. The scale of the Olympic installations, very different to everyday needs, raised questions about their maintenance. While the local population watched the changes and the increase in rent costs, those spaces identified as dangerous were targeted by suppression and control policies, like the Pacification Police Unit (UPP) installed in Morro da Providência (2010).

In this last decade of the 2010s especially, the dilemmas of mobilities at their various levels have emerged in singular form in Rio de Janeiro's port region, since they combine on a monumental scale infrastructural projects with the remodelling of roads, highways, and tunnels, as well as the inauguration of integrated transport routes like the Light Rail Vehicle (LRV). Promising a rapid, sustainable and modern transport system, the LRV,

5 Arruti (2006) systemizes the elaboration and application of Article 68 of the Transitory Constitutional Provisions Act of the Federal Constitution, whose applicability was defined in 2003 with Decree 4887. Ethnic-racial groups identifying themselves as quilombola communities were recognized as such, possessing their own historical trajectory, specific territorial relations and a black ancestrality related to resistance to historical oppression. Guimarães (2014) analyses the case of two families linked to the Unified Black Movement, who in 2005 were involved in evictions in the context of conflicts with a Catholic institution, the Venerable Third Order of Saint Francis of the Penitence, which possessed diverse houses with tenants or informal occupants. These families asked the Palmares Cultural Foundation for recognition as an 'ethnic territory' of buildings belonging to what they called the Community of Survivors of the Quilombo of Pedra do Sal. Guimarães (2012) analyses how the presentification of narratives of the past and ritualized public actions, the idea of 'black heritage,' is governed by the paradigm of 'cultural diversity' and mobilized through the transformation of spaces into 'black territories' (2012: 300).

6 A Spanish architect and engineer who participated in important urban renewal projects and large projects like the Athens Olympic Complex, the Gare do Oriente in Lisbon, and the City of Arts and Sciences. His most recent projects are the New York skyscraper composed of 12 large houses in the form of cubes, a cable-stayed bridge on Line 4 of the Rio subway in Barra da Tijuca and the Museum of Tomorrow (*Museu do Amanhã*).

whose first phase was inaugurated in 2016, was designed to integrate all the transport systems in the central and port region of the city – ferries, subways, trains, buses, coach station, airport, cable car, and the ocean cruiser terminal. It would also serve to connect[7] the financial centre to Santos Dumont airport.

The urban reforms, combined with the growing volume of investments of international financial capital, intensified the region's commercial and touristic exploration, especially Mauá Square and Mauá Pier, located between the Saúde district and Rio Branco Avenue, the central area of the city. In parallel to the urban equipment created with a tourist potential, innumerable practices and experiences took place centred on Afro-descendent narratives, frequently linked to the idea of a 'Little Africa' (*Pequena África*) in Rio de Janeiro. New heritage and memory narratives in Rio de Janeiro began to include symbols related to the commercialization of slaves in the region and to work in the dockyards. Vassallo and Cáceres point to a recent global change in the form of representing slavery, which came to be publicly exhibited, denounced, and morally condemned (Vassallo & Cáceres 2019: 53).

This tendency is also shown in relation to touristic practices formulated in diverse ways around the world. In countries like England, the Bristol city council created the Slave Trade Trail, which associates important historical constructions, local heroes, and financial institutions with past involvement in the slave trade (Chivallon 2001). We can also mention other types of flourishing heritage constructions associated with historical walks and pilgrimages that enable an understanding of the outlines of the process of creating places and their determinant factors (Markwell et al. 2004). Araujo (2009) analyses the different representations of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade present on the Slave Route of Ajudá, a city situated on the west coast of the modern-day Republic of Benin. The author shows how "the Slave Route is a constructed place, which re-enacts the past, valorising certain aspects in detriment to others. Along the labyrinthine route suggested, two distinct images of the slave are slaved, the absolute victim and the resistant slave, without, though, overlooking the figures of the captor" (Araujo 2009: 130).

Pinho (2008) shows how this type of tourism, widespread in the United States, involves large journeys through spaces and countries by tourists, especially Afro-Americans, with the financial means to make such trips. Pinho (2015) presents the tourist routes in Brazil designed to meet the demands of US tourists in search of a "lost African heritage." It would not be possible, however, to simply frame the guided tours undertaken in this port region of Rio de Janeiro as an attempt to create an 'ethnic tourism,' or what is known more narrowly as 'dark tourism' – tourism in places marked by histories of death – or 'roots tourism' – the kind of tourism conducted by members of diasporic communities in search of ancestors.[8]

In Rio de Janeiro, the guided tours organized by social movements, cultural associations, university research projects, tourist groups or even individualized commercial proposals relating to circuits self-designated as 'Afro' are organized in their own way – not necessarily focused on an ethnic tourism for foreigners, but as demarcators that increase the visibility of local groups and associations. Monuments referring to distinct moments of the city's history organize these routes through the streets, their target public including students from state schools, teachers, tourists from Rio de Janeiro itself or from other parts of Brazil.

7 A growing literature on the 'anthropology of roads' (Dalakoglou & Harvey 2012) has revealed the practices and imaginaries beyond the various scales of the infrastructure development projects in which temporal imaginaries maintain the promise of incessant connectivity. As is observed, these frequently fail to keep their promises, but consolidate the violent exclusions of established political and physical orders, accommodating many competing interests and expectations. Beyond the moral complexity of establishing infrastructures as a 'public good,' in the majority of cases the roads are built as public works that involve financial, regulatory and technical relations between international, national and local regimes in a unique and specific localization (Dalakoglou & Harvey 2012: 460). These studies are critical in pointing out that roads can disconnect with the same efficiency as they form connections.

8 Generally speaking, 'dark tourism' is defined as tourism in places marked by histories of death, terror, and tragedy. It includes everything from visiting the place where a particular celebrity died or was buried, to organized tours of localities of collective trauma and genocide, such as the concentration camps in Germany and Poland, or the dungeons of castles along the Ghana coastline where enslaved Africans were imprisoned until being shipped to the Americas (Freire-Medeiros & Pinho 2016: 6).

Given a worldwide process of 'producing places,' which reconfigure determined types of 'tourist flows' (Urry 1995) the routes of these guided tours articulate and rework their own internal reflexivities. Urry identifies a 'tourist reflexivity' (Urry 2001), that is, framings, processes and criteria that enable each place to monitor, evaluate and develop its 'tourist potential' within the emergent patterns of global tourism. This reflexivity expresses the particular localization of a place within the geographic, historical, and cultural boundaries circling the planet, and, especially, its physical and symbolic potential to mobilize its own resources, values, and meanings.

The local organizational actions of guided tours promoted by civil bodies thus produce a place's internal particularities, reinforcing the experience of the past and strengthening the Afro-Brazilian references, especially attractive to Brazilians interested in 'recognition' of an idea of 'African heritage.' As elements of civil society, they include diverse organizational formats, including family-based, voluntary associations, ethnic groups and associations, and professional and educational groups. Continually responsible for providing arenas and contexts for defining, debating, and contesting, they produce and reproduce the conditions necessary for social life (Karp 1992).

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This reflexivity concerning Afro-Brazilian experience acquired a specific direction with the proposals for guided tours through the 'black heritage circuit' in the 2010s. However, the narrative on the broader idea of Little Africa and the 'black city' has flourished since the 1980s, the moment when many of Rio de Janeiro's public policies already made use of an association with Afro-Brazilian identity (Guimarães, 2012). These experiences are materialized in monuments, memorials, archives, and research centres, as well as the organization of Afro-Brazilian religious festivals and official rituals. In 1986, the José Bonifácio Municipal Cultural Centre was inaugurated with the aim of preserving and disseminating black memory. Two landmarks in the urban space of Rio de Janeiro were also created in Onze Square: the Sambadrome (1984) as a venue for samba school parades, and the iron bust of the anti-slavery leader Zumbi dos Palmares (1986). [9]

The more comprehensive idea of 'Little Africa,' present especially in the bibliographic production of the 1980s and 1990s, relates to an idea of fluidity and mobility similar to the notion of a 'Bahian diaspora' at the start of the twentieth century, notably associated with the sociabilities of music and carnival, and the *tias baianas*¸ the Bahian aunts (Velloso, 1990). The narrative of a Little Africa is especially based around books and actions that valorise the centrality of the African heritage. As Guimarães (2019) argues, the filmmaker Roberto Moura in his book *Tia Ciata e a Pequena* África *no Rio de Janeiro*,[10] originally published in 1983, identified Heitor dos Prazeres as the original author of the term, used by him to designate the region that "extends from the port zone to Cidade Nova [New City], its capital being Onze Square" (Moura, 1983, p. 93). As the anthropologist analyses in the book in question, Moura assembled and "dramatically organized a set of genealogies, origin myths, sacred ancestors and gods relating to the population of black Africans and Bahians who had

9 One of the repercussions of the mobilization of the celebrations of the 100 year anniversary of the abolition of slavery and the formation of the Constituent Assembly of 1988 was reflected in the processes of heritage conservation that highlighted cultural goods that perpetuate Afro-Brazilian memory. Two emblematic listings of tangible heritage in Brazil were the Casa Branca do Engenho Velho in Salvador, Bahia, which in 1984 became the first candomblé terreiro recognized as national heritage (Velho 2006), and the Serra da Barriga Historical and Landscape Complex, Alagoas, listed in 1985 as a representative of the slave resistance of the Quilombo dos Palmares.

10 This book had a large impact since it echoed the convergences and contacts between cultural references associated with Afro-Brazilian religiosity, musicalities and sociabilities. As Guimarães (2019) explains, the term Little Africa, coined by Moura, is also mentioned on the historical report for the listing of Pedra do Sal produced by the State Institute of Cultural Heritage (INEPAC) between 1984 and 1987. Pedra do Sal, the place where salt was unloaded from the ships, is described as a meeting point for *sambistas* who lived there in the nineteenth century, where Bahians and Africans arrived in Rio. As related, many of them worked as dockers in the port and resided in this area with its winding streets.

inhabited the central and port regions during the first decades of the twentieth century." Tia Ciata (Aunt Ciata)[11] was the main protagonist of the narrative: a *quituteira* (a maker of delicacies) and *mãe de santo*, her house on Onze Square in the Cidade Nova district was frequented by samba musicians successful in the emergent phonographic industry, like Donga, Pixinguinha, João da Baiana and Heitor dos Prazeres.

The paving stones of the Valongo Wharf[12] were 'rediscovered' by archaeologists in 2011, just a few metres from Morro da Conceição. A quick internet search allows anyone interested to discover routes and guided tours. 'Walking tours' are available, referred to as 'history tours,' 'memory tourism,' in which the 'paths of slavery' are revealed or the 'historical circuit of African heritage.' A vast range of names and forms of fixing and identifying historical figures and facts is created in this way. These are presented not only as atomized parts, but are linked to one another with the aim of configuring a 'circuit.'

Through the guided tours, 'Little Africa' became produced as a place allowing the present-day visitor to reflexively enter into contact with black people and leaders from the past who lived in the area or passed through it – figures like Tia Ciata, or the writer Machado de Assis, or the ballerina Mercedes Baptista[13] or one of the instigators of the Vaccine Revolt, Prata Preta.[14]

In other central and port areas of the world, classified as historical and regenerated sites, urban interventions have also valorised an enjoyment assured by leisure facilities, which have also come to be seen as tourist sites, attractive to visitors and to a ludic and festive lifestyle.[15] In Morro da Conceição, as Guimarães (2014) shows, two spaces in particular were claimed as landmarks of this black memory: Pedra do Sal and the old Valongo slave market, over which the Jardim Suspenso (Hanging Garden) had been built. As the anthropologist pointed out, a group of heirs and guardians of memories emerged for both sites: the Community of Survivors of the Pedra do Sal Quilombo and the carnival group Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi.

The institutionalized route emerged following Municipal Decree 34.803 of November 29, 2011, of the Curatorial Workgroup of the Historic and Archaeological Circuit of African Heritage[16] and gave strategic visibility to the Porto Maravilha Project, presented as something that added value to the planned urban transformation – even though it seems that its genesis was only grudgingly approved by the local authorities. The emergence of the 'African Heritage' circuit in these plans thus marked a valorisation of the black presence with an emphasis on some of its framings. As a counterpoint, the circuit did not include, the example, visits to the installations of the samba school sheds, where the carnival parade floats are constructed, known as 'Samba City,' installed in the Gamboa district in 2006 (Barbieri 2009).

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11 Hilária Batista de Almeida (1854-1924), known as Tia Ciata, was a Bahian woman settled in Rio de Janeiro, a cook and *mãe de santo* (candomblé priestess), considered by many to be one of the most influential figures in the emergence of samba in Rio.

12 Vassallo and Cicalo (2015) problematize the official process of recognizing the Valongo Wharf as a heritage site, focusing on the combined actions of three main groups – leaders of the black movement, academic researchers (especially archaeologists, historians and anthropologists), and representatives of the municipal government. Valongo Wharf re-emerges, therefore, as a landmark of the region, revealed in the excavations, ready to be 're-explored.' This fact redirected the action of the public authority, which was compelled to deal with an instance of archaeological heritage that it could no longer ignore.

13 Mercedes Baptista (1921-2014) is considered the precursor of modern dance in Brazil and of Afro-Brazilian dance. She was the first black ballerina admitted via a public entrance exam to the Ballet of the Municipal Theatre in 1948. See Silva Junior, 2007.

14 Prata Preta was a resident of Rio de Janeiro's port region where he worked as a docker. He was considered one of those responsible for mobilizing many residents of the Saúde district against the government during the Vaccine Revolt, also known as the 1904 Revolt. The Bloco Cordão do Prata Preta, a carnival association founded in 2004, emerged with the objective of revitalizing the street carnival in the Port Zone. In homage to Prata Preta, the Praça da Harmonia (harmony Square) is incorporated as its open-air headquarters with a plaque on the square's bandstand engraved with the words: "Open-Air Headquarters of the Bloco Prata Preta, Long Live Zumbi of Saúde." (Silva 2014: 54).

15 In the case of Rio de Janeiro, we can emphasize its intense cosmopolitan and intercultural life involving Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Roma, and Jewish immigrants (Vassallo & Bitter 2018: 97) brought together by musical sociabilities, carnival groups and popular music. These cultural reference points were present in the imaginary and literature on the places of samba, revived in intense fashion recently (Gonçalves 2013).

16 As explained by Vassallo and Cicalo (2015), the workgroup includes representatives of the Subdepartment of Cultural Heritage, the CDURP and the black movement, prestigious *mães de santo*, academic researchers and cultural agents from the port region. A Letter of Recommendations (2012) elaborated and signed by all members of the workgroup, revealed the consensus on "the historical and cultural importance of Rio de Janeiro's Port Region for comprehension of the process of the African Diaspora and the formation of Brazilian society" (Vassallo & Cicalo 2015: 250).

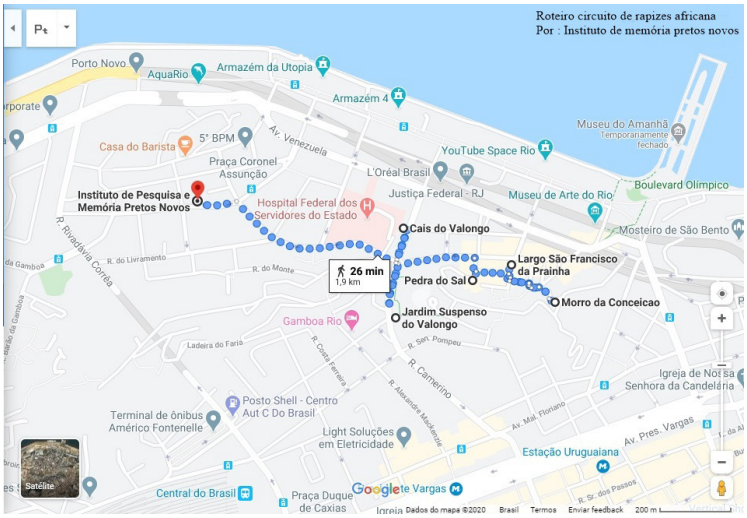
Rio de Janeiro City Hall conceived the 'Historic and Archaeological Circuit of African Heritage,' composed of visiting points that related to the region's slavery past. Included in this circuit were Pedra do Sal, the Valongo Hanging Gardens, Depot Square (today Dockers Square), the New Blacks Cemetery and the José Bonifácio Cultural Centre.

In 2017, the Valongo Wharf acquired the maximum possible level of recognition when it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, classified as a 'site of conscience.'[17] The wharf[18] became the high point of most of the tours, even though there were few signs or physical clues to what the space actually was. On the walks, the guides would fill this gap with meanings, telling the history of the place from a perspective that valorises and extols an idea of Afrodescendent culture and its religious and festive expressions.

The Institute of New Blacks (*Instituto dos Pretos Novos*: IPN), a centre for memory and research, located on Rua Pedro Ernesto in a townhouse in Gamboa district, close to Valongo Wharf, was created in 2005. During a reform of the house in 1996, the owners found bone fragments and period artifacts revealing the existence of a former cemetery of slaves buried there, thus becoming an archaeological site.[19] The cemetery had received the bodies of enslaved Africans at the turn of the nineteenth century. Given these facts, the IPN describes its institutional mission as "stimulating and promoting the construction of memories and the valorisation of African and Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage" and also "promoting reflection on slavery and racial equality in Brazil," assuming responsibility for management of the Cemetery of the New Blacks and the Memorial of the New Blacks.

The Institute of New Blacks (IPN) has been organizing regular visits, as well as offering guide training courses. A large part of the public visiting the IPN are students and teachers from the state education system, reflecting the institute's proposal for 'heritage education.' As well as visits to the IPN townhouse itself, the guides promote guided tours of the Valongo and Empress Wharfs, Pedra do Sal, Valongo Hanging Gardens, Depot Square, and the José Bonifácio Cultural Centre.

Figure 2: Routes of the guided tours conducted by the New Blacks Institute



17 Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and concentration camps in Poland were classified as sites of conscience. Placed in this category, they refer to localities that witnessed major tragedies and crimes against humanity and that should never be forgotten for the suffering that they represent.

18 Both the unearthing of the wharf and the elaboration of the circuit occurred during the two-term administration of Mayor Eduardo Paes (2009–2016 of the MDB), responsible for the Porto Maravilha project to revitalize the region. As Vassallo and Cáceres (2019) analyse, the exhibition of the Valongo Wharf and the points that make up the circuit was never a priority of the Paes administration, but coincided with his administration's desire to increase land values in a region until then considered stigmatized. His government supported the application to UNESCO, aiming to promote tourism in the district.

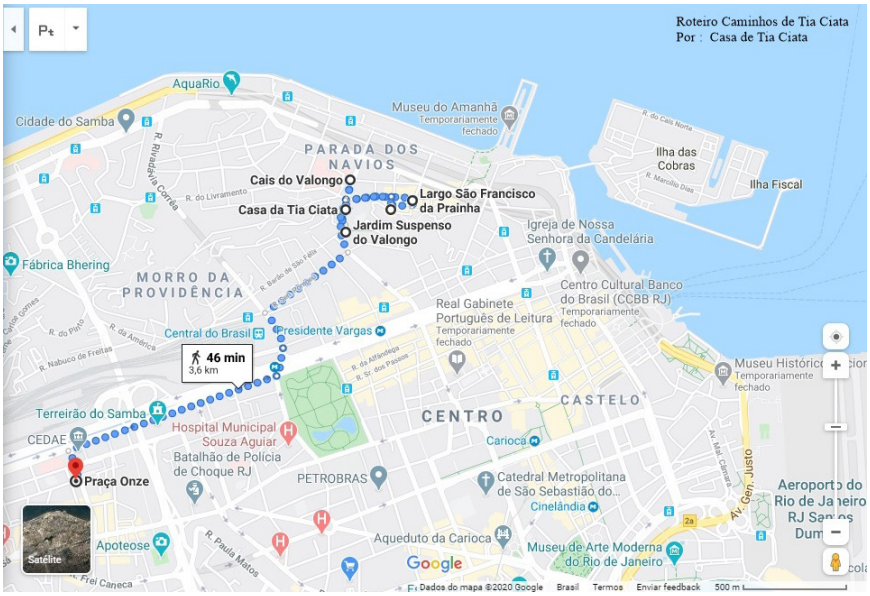
19 As Vassallo (2018: 56) narrates, in 2017 an important find contributed to the stabilization of the archaeological site as a black holocaust and to the victimization of those buried there: the discovery of a semi-intact skeleton, in an anatomical position, a little under one metre below ground. Observation of its anatomical features, made in situ by a specialist from the team, identified the skeleton as that of an African woman aged around 20. She was baptized Josefina Bakhita by the technician Andrei Santos who found her.

Within the broader official circuit are other points and figures important to the demarcation of an Afrodescendent memory. Some of the region's residents, who are also able to take a course for guides offered by the IPN, have created their own routes. As well as common points of reference, these include personal or family episodes or choose to emphasize particular points based on personal interests.

In 2016, Rio de Janeiro City Hall authorized the installation of a statue of the Black ballerina Mercedes Baptista, donated by the 'Red Beach Artistic Movement' and installed in São Francisco da Prainha Square. This also became an important visitor point.

The House of Tia Ciata, the headquarters of the Organization of the Survivors of Tia Ciata (ORTC), was founded in 2007 by Gracy Mary, Ciata's great-granddaughter. Defining itself as a cultural space that seeks to "keep alive the memory of the matriarch of samba," since 2015 the ORTC has expanded its visitor program to include percussion and dance talks and workshops, as well as the guided tour called 'Paths of Tia Ciata.' The ORTC tour extends to Onze Square, encompassing the Sambadrome and the Terreirão do Samba, spaces where samba activities now take place in the city.

Figure 3: Course of the route proposed by the ORTC – Paths of Tia Ciata



In another project called 'Present Pasts – memory of slavery in Brazil,' university professors and researchers, setting out to recognize these histories and stimulate 'memory tourism' in Rio de Janeiro, worked in partnership with these communities to develop a mobile app and construct permanent exhibitions in some spaces. According to the text of the project, the tourist signs and open-air memorials seek to "honour the victims of the tragedy of slavery and celebrate the black cultural heritage in Brazilian lands by those who survived."

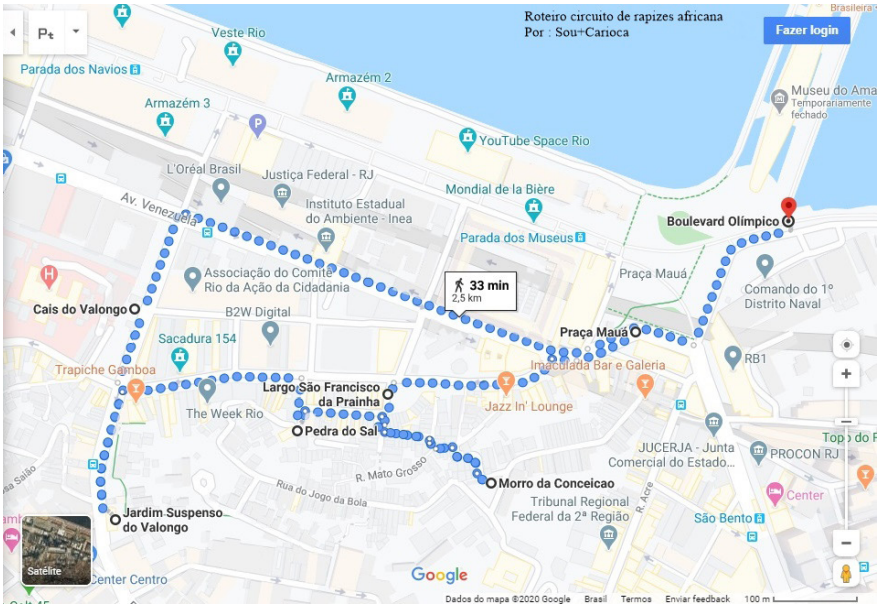
The 'Present Pasts' project was itself based on the Inventory of Places of Memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the History of Enslaved Africans in Brazil – a project coordinated by the historians Hebe Mattos, Martha Abreu and Milton Guran at the Laboratory of Oral and Visual History of Fluminense Federal University (LABHOI/UFF) with the support of UNESCO's Slave Route project in 2014. The project was presented by the South Fluminense Afro-Brazilian Studies Reference Centre and JLM Artistic Productions to the 2012 Petrobras Intangible Heritage Competition. The research also generated the mobile app with four 'Afro-oriented routes.' As well as the old 'Little Africa' in the port region of Rio de Janeiro, specifically the area around Valongo Wharf, the largest slave port of the Americas, the project's scope also included the São José do Pinheiro Park of Ruins (Pinheiral), the São José Quilombo (Valença) and the Bracuí Quilombo (Angra dos Reis), in partnership with quilombola and jongueira communities.

Another new form of guided tour, diverging from most of Rio de Janeiro's tourist companies, was Sou+Carioca, which preferred to offer tours of the consecrated tourist attractions, aimed at the city's residents themselves. As Bottino and Costa (2018) explain, the Sou+Carioca project was developed by students on the tourist guide course, who wanted to offer guided tours through the city of Rio de Janeiro with people paying however much they wanted at the end of the tour. The first tours were undertaken through the centre of the city and the northern zone in the Madureira district. The students took turns to guide the tours and their target public were residents of the city and the state. For this reason, all the tours are held in Portuguese and the guides report that 90% of their public are residents of the city or its metropolitan region.

In this proposal, visitors are invited to enjoy a direct engagement with the spaces, sitting on their steps and street corners, in the buildings and squares, looking at plaques and statues. On these itineraries, there is a constant connection to the idea of a past that needs to be revealed, an African heritage that needs to be recuperated. One of the guides explained that while she does not refrain from stressing the horrors that happened there, she adapts her talk for each type of public, and admits to toning down the narrative for white tourists having perceived the discomfort of some of them, but without failing to make them aware, which, she argues, ends up also being a form of activism.

In the individual accounts of the visitors, feelings like surprise and shock are very common, or expressions of how they physically felt the African presence when they stepped on the flagstones of the Valongo Wharf, a shiver, a sensation that the spirits populated the space in question. The production of the image, photos that prove the materiality of the objects, writing and texts, are all extremely important.

Figure 4: Routes of the guided tours created by the Sou+Carioca group



As well as the visits, involving walks that last from two to four hours, touring the region's streets and monuments, the festive use of the spaces should also be mentioned. Candomblé followers, capoeira dancers, vendors of street food (*baianas de acarajé*), and members of samba schools hold a ritual of symbolically washing the memorial, now incorporated into the city's official calendar. During these commemorations, participants are encouraged to inhabit the world of the past, following the footsteps of those who came before, seeing the world like they saw it and "feeling what they felt," generating experiences, multisensory forms of historical knowledge (Bonilla 2011). In these cases, historical knowledge is transmitted not just through a textual or discursive involvement, but also through a sensory encounter with physical reality. History is also experienced (Bonilla 2011).

These gaps are filled in different forms by the tourist routes, whose guides add everything from personal histories to books and academic works that contextualize and legitimize the historical importance of this place. They also cite facts about public figures and describe the influence of residents, local workers, the region's graffiti, in order to recount the version of Little Africa that they wish to project. Combined with these perspectives are also personal accounts, sometimes strongly engaged in the form of activism, sometimes casual, reflecting more relaxed and fleeting visits.

On these guided tours, Rio de Janeiro's 'Little Africa' is not an undifferentiated unit. Rather, its boundaries assume a continually altering shape through relations promoted between broader views of the region's past and the sensibilities individualized by the walks themselves, creating a more or less tense dialogue with the macronarratives on the theme, with tourism, cultural heritage, festivities and leisure in the region and the diverse current demands for housing, recognition of identity and belonging.

The tours cater for the tourist's desire to experience the everyday life of the localities through which they walk, photographing and commenting on them. Walking through spaces also awakens a desire in local visitors to discover themselves, to experience their surroundings with their own eyes and simultaneously to broaden their points of view of the city, experiencing their locality and other times, to engage not just in an activity focused on leisure, or on an objectified transmission, but on knowledge acquired through the senses.

Comments are made during the walks but also in blogs and personal accounts published on the internet. One female visitor remarks: "Rio, a city that bears vestiges of our history on many of its street corners. Many of them have not been told for a long time." "I'm not going to recount everything I heard, since you need to experience this tour for yourself."[20] A black guide, 26 years old, says that he dislikes people using the place for commercial purposes. He adds that black and peripheral people like himself can pass on "the experiences, the pains and the invisibility felt since childhood."[21]

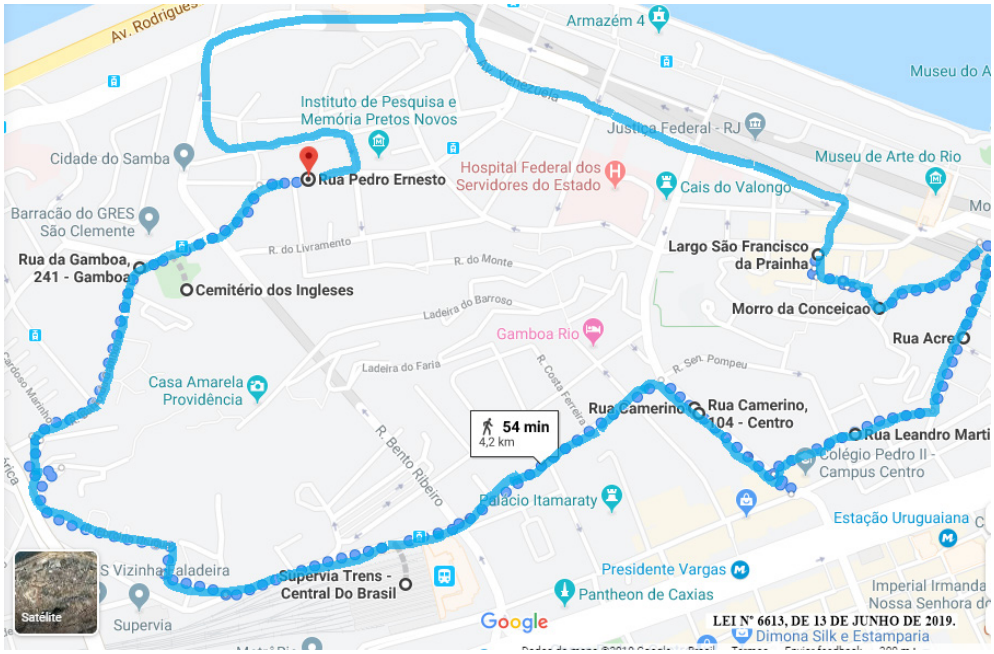
Rather than a dichotomous view, I wish to underline the ambivalent aspect involved in attempting to comprehend an African heritage, sometimes incorporated positively by the formulation of public policies, or by heritage listing processes at various scales, sometimes experienced by the sensibilities of the walkers led and prompted by guides.

Recently, formal boundaries were defined in legislative form. The city councillors Fernando William (PDT) and Teresa Bergher (PSDB) approved Municipal Law no. 6613 of June 13, 2019, which commits Rio City Hall to provide reparation for the crimes of slavery and demarcate the urban area in question as a 'historical territory' for the preservation of the memory of the presence of freed Africans and their places of work and dwelling in the city of Rio de Janeiro. As a signatory of the UN Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in 2001, Brazil is obliged to recognize the Transatlantic trade and enslavement of Africans as inviolable crimes against humanity, whose descendants have the right to reparation. It establishes norms, such as the requirement for reparation for the crimes of slavery and the demarcation of the historical territory.

20 Testimony of a visitor. Site consulted: https://chicaslokas.com.br/2019/04/16/tour-pequena-africa-no-rio-de-janeiro/ Accessed 08.09.2019.

21 https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/11/pequena-africa-recebe-turismo-que-resgata-historia-negra-do-rio.shtml Accessed 30.11.2019.

Figure 5: Boundary indicated by the municipal law for demarcation of the urban area delimited as Little Africa



The text of the municipal law makes explicit that: "Also recognized is the right of descendants of enslaved Africans to receive as reparation the demarcation of the geographically delimited urban area called Little Africa to preserve the memory of the presence of the free African released from slavery who maintained their place of work and dwelling in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro."

> § 1 The Executive must demarcate the urban area containing what remains of Little Africa to preserve the memory of the presence of the free African released from slavery in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro.
>
> § 2 The start and end of the perimeter of the urban area is delimited as Praça São Francisco da Prainha, skirting Morro da Conceição, the right side of Rua do Acre towards Rua Leandro Martins, the right side of Rua Camerino towards Praça dos Estivadores, Rua Senador Pompeu, Muro da Supervia, along the borders of Morro da Providência and Morro do Pinto, the right side of Rua Pedro Álvares Cabral, the right side of Rua da Gamboa, the entrance to the Cemitério dos Ingleses, Rua Pedro Ernesto, Praça da Harmonia and the surrounding area, the right side of Avenida Venezuela towards Rua Edgar Gordilho, Rua Edgar Gordilho, and Praça São Francisco da Prainha.

At the level of local government action, the definition of Little Africa requires concrete boundary demarcations, although these have proved relatively ineffective. The forms of mobility present in the grand entrepreneurial narratives of the urban renewal plans for the port region, with their wide expressways and efficient transport systems, are ambivalently related to the social groups, heritage recognition processes, and diverse itineraries. Requests like those of the members of the Quilombo da Pedra do Sal and Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi have remained on the margin of the urban renewal projects, however.

Official recognition of Little Africa as a heritage site is ambivalent since it can both affirm and symbolically contain the groups who had made demands for social recognition (Guimarães 2019: 387). The routes and itineraries, for their part, in promoting the lived experience of an Afro-Brazilian memory sometimes renew, but sometimes subvert, the sociohistorical legitimization promoted by historical, archaeological and anthropological research or by the seal of heritage attributed by contemporary public policies.

The routes of the visits thus became an important form of configuring spatial contours and enabling a convergence in the selection of the people and events associated with the fight for social rights and a policy of Afrodescendent memory, highlighting the groups installed there in their cultural centres, associations or institutes, sometimes converging with institutional narratives, sometimes opening up new possibilities for framing. As social and historical processes manifested through narratives, the events and experiences lived by the guided tours are selected dynamically, generating different memories, as well as new political, social and aesthetic processes.

The need to identify not only a broader and more abstract idea of an African legacy combines with an endeavour to delimit it as a materially constituted place with its streets, squares, visiting points and monuments. Located in Rio de Janeiro's port region, Little Africa becomes concretely present with the indication of these delimited contours, based on local houses, institutes and cultural facilities, and also in the expanding of the official and many other visitor 'circuits' organized by local associations.

It can be asserted, therefore, that as well as institutionalization, these many guided tours of the African legacy open up new forms of producing these places. The guided tours promoted by civil groups and associations through local references not only exalt the important points of sociabilities, urban facilities and Afro-Brazilian monuments (which sometimes also come to populate some of the official heritage narratives), they allow connections to be created between these points, including and traversing them with and through the local population.

The choices of physical borders made on these guided tours produce the boundaries of Little Africa and represent a change in approach and in the production of this place. This diverges from the more fluid image at the end of the twentieth century, when the idea of Little Africa was more imprecise, narrated in abstract form, comprehensively encompassing Afro-Brazilian cultural exchanges, and also diverges from the more atomized initiative of selecting particular monuments, squares and listed buildings.

As formulated by Rodman (2003), the 'place' performs a central role in the permanent formation of people's experience and also points to the production of self-awareness. Thus, the production of Little Africa experienced on today's diverse guided tours enables a new framing of this 'place.' On a concrete spatial and also subjective scale, it enables groups and individuals to experience an idea of Afrodescendent heritage that needs to be 'remembered,' but also concretely 'seen,' 'lived' and 'felt in the flesh.' As the places are apprehended and narrated by people, they narrate and produce themselves.

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