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THE WORLDMAKING POWERS OF LAW AND PERFORMANCE: QUEER POLITICS BEYOND/AGAINST NEOLIBERAL LEGALISM

ANDRÉ PRADO FERNANDES

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LAY SUMMARY

This thesis engages with two historically key political sites/strategies of LGBT politics seeking social justice and change: the (human) rights rhetoric and the performing arts. As the rhetoric of LGBT (human) rights became increasingly popular and defended in mainstream international law and politics over the past half century, activists and scholars began to question whether the popularity, indeed omnipresence, of the rights rhetoric as the best or only path towards social change did not amount to a displacement of other political strategies and colonisation of our political imaginary. To better understand what is at stake in translating/channelling LGBT political demands in/through the law, this thesis’ first overarching question is: what are the promises and pitfalls of the mainstream rhetoric of international LGBT (human) rights?

This thesis begins with two tasks. First, I trace the international rise and conjunction of two interconnected movements: the globalization of human rights and that of LGBT identities and politics. This tracing challenges the notion of a linear march towards progress or universality by examining some tensions between so-called developed and developing countries that arose from, and were compounded by, the emergence of LGBT human rights in international law and politics. Next, I address the first question posed above by means of a critical enquiry on the potentials and pitfalls of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights in order to understand how far the law can or will go towards delivering radical, substantive social change “beyond the books”. I contend and examine how this legal-political translation risks narrowing down fundamental political vocabulary, what we (as well as the law) understand, for instance, as violence, equality, and freedom. Besides this narrowing down, I examine the ways in which the mainstream legal rhetoric obscures and misunderstands the complex and multiple roots of political struggles and inequalities by rendering them individual, ahistorical issues.

Following the two tasks above, this thesis argues that, and illustrates how, turning away from the law may contribute to more radical vocabularies and forms of political resistance. More specifically, I turn to a ‘pre-rights’ era, to the sexy and outrageous
performances of the Dzi Croquettes, a theatre and dance group that emerged in early 1970s Brazil when the country was ruled by a military dictatorship. I turn to the past not out of nostalgia but to critique the present through an investigation of queer struggle/resistance “without” or “before” rights under/against a context of authoritarian restriction of civil liberties. I turn to the Dzi Croquettes via literature review, archival research, and oral history interviews in order to answer the remaining overarching question of this thesis, namely: What may be the potentials and implications of decentring the law from our political imaginary and praxis? How do queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes help expose and complement the limitations of the mainstream rights rhetoric? And what alternative paths for social change do they open up?

The juxtaposition of the mainstream LGBT human rights rhetoric with the Dzi/queer performances intends to illuminate the potentials of decentring law from our political imaginary and praxis. I argue that the Dzi, and queer performances more broadly, are sites where we may formulate and develop political vocabulary such as freedom and equality beyond/against the narrow understandings of the law. Further, I argue that performances may “reach” where the law fails to because performances have the potential to counter different, extralegal registers and modes of power. Further, I argue that queer performances have the potential to enact more radical ways of how we relate to our own selves and others beyond/against the individualism and possessiveness of the paradigmatic rights-bearing subject. This decentring does not propose an altogether refusal of the law but rather a dethronement and rethinking of its role in LGBT politics, a move that does not forgo the radical potentials of the law but is attentive to its inadvertent pitfalls.

This thesis contributes to critical enquiries on what happens, on what we may lose and/or gain, in/through the translation between queer politics and the law. It also advances the concept of legal decentring, which first appeared three decades ago but whose meanings and implications remain little theorised. In an effort to extend and develop the concept, I gesture towards what it may open up and/or close down, both its potentials and limits. Lastly, it contributes to debates of 1970s queer utopia and
communes in/from the Global South and to the literature on the political and affective potentials of performances as realms where we may collectively imagine and enact radical ways of being and doing queer(ness).
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the worldmaking powers of the law and of performances, two crucial sites/strategies of historical importance for LGBT and queer activists and artists. My focus is a particular rhetoric of LGBT rights circulating in the mainstream of international human rights law and politics that posits gender and sexuality as inherent, natural properties of self-bounded, sovereign individuals. I begin by offering a genealogical account that asks how this rhetoric went rather rapidly from global obscurity to omnipresence in, even preclusion and colonisation of, our political repertoire. Next, drawing on insights from feminist, queer, and critical race scholars and activists, my critique centres on some of this rhetoric's ontological and political limitations: its narrowing down of fundamental political vocabulary and concealment of historical injustice and structural inequality; its reductionist misconception of the operations of power and displacement of alternative, extralegal sites and knowledges; and its disavowal of social relationality through the myth of the self-sufficient, possessive subject.

My overarching purpose is to scrutinise this rhetoric's potentials and pitfalls for queer politics, a task I pursue with the purpose of not rejecting but decentring it from, even decolonising, our political imaginaries and subjectivities. To do so and foreground the potential of extralegal modes and knowledges of queer politics, I turn to a case study and foil against which the ontopolitical limitations of neoliberal LGBT (human) rights may be exposed and challenged. Namely, to the social contagion and social movement in/as the aftermath of the performances of the Dzi Croquettes, a 1970s Brazilian theatre and dance group/family whose style, language, and 'philosophy of life' leaked out of the stage and increasingly onto the streets, igniting incipient discussions about gender and sexuality. In order to illustrate how queer performances may help expose and challenge the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal LGBT rights rhetoric, I turn to this 'pre-rights' era under the Brazilian dictatorship in early 1970s to examine the Dzi Croquettes both qua performance group/family and social movement. At a time when Brazil was ruled by a patriarchal, fascist dictatorship, I argue that the Dzi performed and ventilated
alternative ontologies against the notion of the impenetrable male body and disidentified with structuring binaries such as male and female, public and private, even oneself and other. Based on a survey of the literature, on data generated through archival research and oral history interviews as well as on ephemera gathered on- and offline, I dwell on the group’s trajectory and oeuvre before presenting and analysing my participants’ accounts on the Dzi performances’ magnetic and disorienting powers.

I proceed by bringing both the legal and performative realms in conversation with each other. I demonstrate that the Dzi/queer performances more broadly ‘target’ affective and disciplinary modes of powers in ways the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric comes short of. Further, unlike the atomised subject to whom others appear primarily as dangerous or intrusive, the Dzi posited and valued alterity as fundamental to the knowledge and constitution of both oneself and the social world. The analysis of my participants’ narratives brings the Dzi performances under relief as catalysts for collective, multidirectional identification and resistance as well as of (re)formulation of political needs and vocabularies against/beyond those of neoliberal legalism. I conclude by examining what might be at stake in decentring the law and meditating on how it may fit and nurture a kaleidoscopic political arsenal as plural and diverse as the workings of power.

This thesis contributes to critical enquiries on what happens, on what we may lose and/or gain, in/through the translation between queer politics and the law. It also advances the concept of legal decentring, which first appeared three decades ago but whose meanings and implications remain little theorised. In an effort to extend and develop the concept, I gesture towards what it may open up and/or close down, both its potentials and limits. Lastly, it contributes to debates of 1970s queer utopia and communes in/from the Global South and to the literature on the political and affective potentials of performances as realms where we may collectively imagine and enact radical ways of being and doing queer(ness).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funnily or weirdly enough, over the past years I occasionally caught myself daydreaming about a specific and recurrent scene. I was always on a stage in front of a microphone, wearing a tam and a robe, looking for some way and searching for the words to really and fully thank Sharon and Claudio, my supervisors and mentors. I suppose this page is my stage, and this is the actual moment that I have been rehearsing for years. I have not yet found the ‘perfect’ words to express how important, provocative, formative, supportive, and encouraging both of you have been since day one. Likewise, without the broader support of the Law School of the University of Edinburgh, and particularly the Ewan Cameron PhD Scholarship, none of this research would have been possible. At the outset of this endeavour, in my first-year panel, Dr Chloë Kennedy and Professor Cormac Mac Amhlaigh offered me provocative insights that accompanied me the following years. I am also very grateful to Professor Wendy Brown and Dr Benjamin Bateman, who provided me with invaluable feedback during my Viva and who have truly inspired me for a long time. Furthermore, I am deeply thankful to my oral history participants, whose kindness in speaking to me and generosity in sharing their memories were fundamental to the realisation of this thesis. To Bayard Tonelli, for receiving me in his home and for all the conversations and recollections. To my family, my biggest supporters and uplifters. To my mum, whose effort to teach me English from an early age made all of this possible. To my dad and brother, who always remind me of where I/we came from and where I am going. To my friends in São Paulo, Cape Town, Edinburgh, and Palermo, for making my heart warm and serene amidst all the uncertainties and anxieties. To Jono, for the generosity and care over the past decade. And to Ciccio, for la bella vita that we have been building.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The year was 2010. I was overflowing with excitement and hope for the future. I had only just come of age, started law school, and had my first kiss. After years of self-denial and extreme shyness, I was starting to come out of my shell and to come out to myself. As a 1990s kid from a working-class family in São Paulo, Brazil, I was not exactly exposed to abundant or positive depictions of homosexuality growing up. But becoming a law student in downtown São Paulo, amidst its huge crowds, gave me a sense of freedom and anonymity. I eventually mustered up the courage to invite to the theatre an older guy I had met online, a journalist and activist who seduced me with his passion for Pedro Almodóvar and knowledge about Michel Foucault. A few weeks into our fling, he invited me to watch a recently released documentary about an obscure, all-male theatre/dance group of thirteen performers who rose to meteoric fame in 1970s Brazil despite it being the strictest period of the Brazilian dictatorship, despite (and because of) their queerness. Although this was my first ever cinema date, my memories are not of holding hands or giggling. As I replayed this scene over the years, the first time I ever heard of the Dzi Croquettes and watched their documentary, I invariably remember myself weeping. In hindsight, as I watched the Croquettes on the big screen, for the first time I fully believed that the failure to be straight could and did lead to a future of joy, beauty, and creation, or even to a future at all. I wept at the beauty of their lives and oeuvre, at the hardship afflicting those and many other queer people back then and now, and at the brutal and tragic killings that abruptly shortened some of their lives.

Fast forward one year. In May 2011, following a series of publicised killings of queer people around the country, the Brazilian Supreme Court issued a groundbreaking decision: in a unanimous verdict, the rights of heterosexual unions were extended to same-sex ones. I was at the Law School library watching the verdict online with other friends and students. It was manifest in the celebration that ensued—the hugs, smiles, and tears—that this was a historical moment. The ruling was part of a broader turn in favour of LGBT (human) rights during the eight-year mandate of the Brazilian President “Lula”, a shift towards left-wing politics that occurred in other parts of Latin America and
that became known as the “pink tide” (Friedman 2019). The pioneering programme “Brazil Without Homophobia” was launched in 2004, alongside other pioneering initiatives, policies, and institutional bodies. Calls for national LGBT conferences—the first in 2008, entitled “Human Rights and Public Policies: The Path to Ensure the Citizenship of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Travestis and Transexuals”—mobilised diverse sectors of political activists, civil society, and academics. These initiatives influenced other Latin American state policies and even Brazil’s participation in the UN, given that the country sought to actively align itself with the human rights framework defended by Northern countries in forums of international politics and law (Aguião 2018).

During this Brazilian ‘belle époque’ of LGBT politics, while the Parliament failed to recognise and enshrine sexual and gender minorities’ rights, the Judiciary and Executive Powers took matters into their hands. Among the highly anticipated achievements was the elaboration of an anti-homophobia kit to be distributed in public schools as part of the project School Without Homophobia. However, the project was controversially called off in 2011 by Lula’s Labour Party successor and Brazil’s first female president, Dilma Rousseff, after strong objections from religious and conservative members of Parliament and social organisations. Seeking re-election in 2014, Dilma disappointed many on the Left by putting out a letter to the “people of God” committing, were she re-elected, to make the family a government priority whilst cunningly deflecting her own powers by leaving issues like abortion and equal marriage to be eventually discussed by the Parliament. Unlike her predecessor Lula, Dilma did not finish her second term. Halfway through it, a coup d’état on 31 August 2016 overthrew the Labour Party whose reputation and popularity had plummeted after the controversial investigation (arguably lawfare) of Operation ‘Car Wash’, hitherto the nation’s biggest corruption scandal. The period from the interim president, Michel Temer, to the 2018 election and term of a far-right militaristic provocateur, Jair Bolsonaro, represented a radical shift and polarisation in Brazilian politics as well as democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Waldner & Lust 2018), which undermined the rights of ‘minorities’ such as women, people of colour, indigenous communities, and LGBT people.
Despite the pioneering initiatives to recognise and implement the rights and policies conceived under Lula and Dilma, Bolsonaro’s election led me, and presumably many others, to question an unshakable conviction that the law could or would change and ameliorate the lives of queers. Firstly, because this period brought into relief the difference between promoting and protecting LGBT rights as a party as opposed to a state commitment. Secondly, his election was propelled by a moral panic and hatred incited, in part, by the very legislation protecting LGBTQ rights, which the far-right and conservative electorate opposed vehemently. If only a few years earlier achievements in law reform and extension of rights were hailed as an indelible sign of modernity, the belief in a unilinear march towards progress and freedom was shattered. For queer people and other minorities, the feeling was of “going back” in time, indeed back to the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 and of which Bolsonaro has been an avowed supporter.

A year after Bolsonaro’s election, in direct opposition to the homo- and transphobia institutionalised in the Executive and Legislative powers, the Brazilian Supreme Court issued another historical decision in 2019 criminalising expressions of homo- and transphobia. This decision stood against manifold threats to the rights only recently granted to minorities in Brazil, such as the President’s moves to underfund and dismantle public bodies and policies under his power aimed at promoting the rights and protection of LGBT people, women, and Black people (Wasser & França 2020). The battle between the Brazilian courts and government complicates a monolithic approach to the nation-state and evinces the internal tensions and splits between state apparatus and actors around LGBT rights. In the months leading up to and following his presidential campaign, there was a spate of episodes of hate and bashing against queer people in Brazil, who palpably felt an increase in violence and fear. This was confirmed by 92.5% of the participants in a research study carried out with 400 people in São Paulo, Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro during and following the 2018 presidential campaign. It also revealed that 87% of the interviewees had heard of attacks against LGBT acquaintances in this period—83% of these attacks occurred on the streets or
other public spaces, whereas 39% took place within the family (Bulgarelli & Fontgaland 2019). In many of these attacks, some of which were filmed and shared on social media, the perpetrators were often seen yelling the president’s name and/or fundamentalist, phobic remarks.

1.1. Overarching Research Questions

The vignettes above serve as starting points for the current thesis and illustrate the backdrop against which its overarching research questions were formulated. The feeling of going backwards and ‘losing’ rights led me to a certain disillusionment with the rhetoric of (LGBT) rights, won after so much political struggle yet undermined apparently so easily. This was further compounded by the adamant gap between law in the books and law on the streets, which heightened my curiosity, and partly my scepticism, about how far the law could or would go towards effecting radical social change. In this vein, the vignettes illustrate a shift from—not as in replacement but rather coexistence of—on one hand, a belief and investment in law as the only/best source of protection from abuse and violence and, on the other, a disappointment and scepticism about whether the law would ever overcome the gap between formal and substantial rights, whether LGBT rights were mostly subject to, rather than a protection against, political tides and democratic backsliding. This scenario made manifest a common observation in the literature about the ambivalence of rights, examined more closely in Chapter Two: that if they seem to offer shelter and protection away from power, they are also a conduit and vehicle of power, an ambivalence that makes rights both desirable and dangerous with no clear-cut line (Brown 1995, Golder 2015). Against this ambivalent background emerged this thesis’ first overarching question: what are the potentials and pitfalls of the mainstream, neoliberal LGBT rights rhetoric for queer politics?

The feeling of reversing time and ‘rights backsliding’ also transported me back to the Dzi Croquettes’ performances under/against the dictatorship. Two aspects about this period and group are particularly striking. Firstly, I was particularly drawn towards the magnetic
power that the group exerted on the broader public: there are reports of fans in their hundreds breaking through the venue to watch the group perform and following them everywhere, even adopting their way of being, of dressing, and of speaking (Dzi Croquettes 2009). While I did not have the language to formulate it at the time, what initially impressed me the most were the affective/worldmaking powers of the Dzi Croquettes’ queer performances. I use ‘impressed’ here in two senses: more colloquially, as in astonished at the Croquettes’ magnetism and at their growing entourage, and more figuratively, that is, to connote the subjective and affective impressions they left on the younger generations that watched their documentary and on those who watched their performances in person. Secondly, that in early 1970s Brazil, the idea of queer people demanding rights from a democratic state and/or holding the state against a supranational set of human rights was impossible on two levels: pragmatically, in the absence of a democratic state, and epistemologically, given the hitherto unthinkability/unimaginability of being entitled to rights based on one’s sexual and/or gender identity.

These two levels foreground the recent nature and emergence of a particular notion of LGBT rights, which in a short period went from international obscurity to centre stage as the best/sole route towards justice, as the natural means/end of LGBT politics. More than just global popularity, however, the omnipresence of the rhetoric of LGBT (human) rights has been critiqued for its colonisation of our political imaginaries and preclusion of alternative, extralegal political strategies, and languages (Smart 1989; Brown 1995; Spade 2015). In light of this preclusion/colonisation, I pose the second question guiding my endeavour here: What may be the implications and meanings of decentring the law from our political imaginary and praxis? I approach this question both by reviewing the literature on the topic in Chapter Six and by mirroring the substance of the thesis into its form. That is, I turn away from the law, as it were, and towards the Dzi Croquettes qua group/family and movement in Chapters Four and Five, respectively. Since I argue that the colonisation of the neoliberal mainstream LGBT rights competes to displace other queer modes of being and doing, other sites/sights of politics and social change, I centre queer performances—illustrated here by but not restricted to the Dzi
Croquettes—to investigate whether and how they may ‘reach’ where the mainstream version of LGBT rights cannot or will not. I contend and demonstrate that the Dzi Croquettes and other queer performances have a crucial potential to challenge some of the key presuppositions and ontologies of the LGBT rights rhetoric as well as to offer alternative routes for radical justice and equality. In this vein, I turn to the Dzi Croquettes/queer performances to pose a third and final overarching question: How do queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? And what potential alternatives do they offer for radical social change?

1.2. Methodology

To approach the questions outlined above, I deploy multifarious methods and draw from a series of disciplines and sources, introduced briefly here and described with greater detail in Chapter Three. I review and engage with academic texts in traditions as diverse as critical legal, queer, feminist, critical race, and decolonial theory to performance studies, political theory, phenomenology, and (oral) history. Methodologically, this research makes use of what Jack Halberstam (1998: 13) calls “scavenger methodology”, which seeks to “combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and… refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence”. Halberstam justifies this scavenging based on the deliberate or accidental exclusion of queer subjects from traditional academia and archives, echoing the queering of evidence proposed by José Esteban Muñoz. Without leaving many traces, queerness enters the archive stealthily and instead of “being clearly available as visible evidence,” it exists as “innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere — while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility” (Muñoz 1996: 7).

If in this thesis I seek to “reconstruct” the Dzi Croquettes’ performances and movement, the limits of such a reconstruction must be acknowledged since performances are inherently evanescent and elusive to being fully captured by archives or by writing. Queer performances and performances by queer people are arguably more elusive,
since “the archives of queerness are makeshift and randomly organized” because of the “restraints historically shackled upon minoritarian cultural workers” (Muñoz 1996: 7). From this angle, rather than being neutral repositories of the past, archives appear as a product of broader power relations and of a bias towards certain objects, histories, and bodies informed by a notion of whose/which narratives of the past are worth preserving or not (Kumbier 2014). Challenging the ideological premises of orthodox notions of archives as well as their inattention to, even often dismissal of, queerness, José Esteban Muñoz proposes the idea of ‘ephemera’ as evidence — “all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself” (1996: 10). Like this notion of ephemera, the reconstruction of the Dzi performances and movement I offer in this thesis via literature, archives, and oral history charts the Dzi traces that lingered in the aftermath of their performances. I have scavenged for Dzi specks in/through books, articles, and conference proceedings to a film production, institutional and private archives, online footage, blog entries, and (oral history) interviews.

1.3. Structure of Chapters

The first overarching question on the drawbacks and promises of the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric begins to be addressed in the upcoming Chapter Two, which is divided into three sections. Chapter Two offers the theoretical framework and tools underlying this thesis’ approach to and analysis of both the law and queer performances. The first section, a genealogical account of LGBT rights, traces the geopolitical developments and tensions within and between the global North and South as part and result of the globalisation of LGBT identities, politics, and human rights. This section aims at charting this rhetoric’s curiously recent rise to global popularity in, arguably colonisation of, LGBT and other modes of politics when it was barely in use just half a century ago. Following this genealogy is a critical enquiry into what is at issue in the political-legal translation of queer needs and demands, particularly when this translation occurs within a neoliberal rationality and mode of governance. The critique developed in Section 2.2 identifies four main operations/pitfalls of neoliberal legalism: concealment, narrowing
down, disavowal, and displacement. In dialogue with scholars in the field, I show that the formal emancipation and abstract equality of individuals—as well as the essentialisation and propertisation of sexuality and gender—through the law conceal and obscure, rather than address or ameliorate, the structural, historical, and shared conditions giving rise to political needs and identities. Further, the critique contends that neoliberal legalism at once provides us with some at the same time as it narrows down other possible, more radical meanings of fundamental political vocabulary and ontology. In particular, I reckon with some of the political and ontological pitfalls of the sovereign, self-bounded subject of neoliberal LGBT rights to whom, on one hand, sexuality and gender are reduced to individual property whilst freedom/agency, on the other, to individual choice. Lastly, following the genealogical account above, the critique contends that a political orientation towards solely/mostly rights (as the means and ends of politics) has led to the loss or displacement of alternative modes, knowledges, and sites of queer politics. In this vein, the third and final section of Chapter Two looks at the concept of (dis)orientation and asks what the Dzi/queer performances may open up in this context of legalistic orientation/preclusion. More specifically, here I dwell on the Dzi/queer performances’ disorienting powers with the purpose of introducing key metaphors and concepts to understand their worldmaking powers. As Section 2.3. begins to outline (and Chapter Six continues to build on), I argue that the Dzi/queer performances’ magnetic and disorienting powers may be a powerful antidote to the ontopolitical limitations outlined in the critique and may open up our orientation and imaginary towards other sites and modes beyond/against the law.

A thorough description of my methodological framework and methods is the object of Chapter Three, which describes and explains the methods deployed in this thesis’ theoretical and empirical endeavours. Chapter Three begins with the practical aspects of my desk-based research in Brazilian archives—state-funded, private, and community ones—as well as of my oral history project: their purpose, sampling method, participants, interviews, and the analysis of the data generated. Besides the attempt to archive some of the memories and experiences of participants in the Dzi movement, I explain that the interviews aimed at eliciting and unpacking the phenomenological/affective impact of
the Dzi performances on participants and on the broader public. Besides describing the nuts and bolts of my fieldwork, in Section 3.2 I also provide the rationale behind how I sought to translate this thesis’ theoretical concerns in/through the oral history interviews, what my purposes were, and why/how these spoke to the overarching questions. The chapter concludes with a third section where I reflect on my own positionality as a researcher and (the navigation of) power imbalances in the interviews as well as on the ethical issues encountered in my engagement with participants.

Chapters Four turns to a ‘pre-rights’ time in 1970s Brazil where the theatre/dance group/family Dzi Croquettes emerged; a turn justified by an interest not just in the oeuvre of the group/family but also in their wider sociopolitical reverberation. I begin by sketching the political and cultural context in which the group emerged and acted despite/against the military junta that persecuted, incarcerated, and censored forms of sexual and gender ‘deviance’. Next, we dwell on their lives and oeuvre: the group’s historical trajectory in Brazil and eventually Europe, the structure and substance of their outrageous, sexy performances, and their contagious philosophy of life, which are described and examined for their potential to challenge conventional social mores and categories. While the chapter begins quite descriptive, towards its end I seek to evaluate the Dzi performances in relation to a concept introduced in Section 2.3, that is, in terms of their performances’ disidentification with/against normative binaries such as male/female, kinship/family, and public/private. The chapter concludes by introducing the Dzi ‘contagion’, a phenomenon whereby their magnetic and disorienting performances began to increasingly leak out of the stage and into everyday life, as growing numbers of Dzi enthusiasts followed the group/family and adopted/reworked a Dzi way of being.

Chapter Five’s focus is on the Dzi qua social movement. Although not exclusively, the primary source of this chapter comes from the oral history interviews carried out with some of the performers and participants in the Dzi movement. The presentation and analysis of the data generated through fieldwork are divided into four thematic sections, as explained in the methodology chapter’s section 3.2 (data analysis). The first thematic
sections dwells on the Dzi Croquettes’ audience, a common theme in all interviews and the more immediate ‘target’ of their contagion. I juxtapose participants’ narratives with archival findings to investigate the social composition of their audience and the multidirectional interactions before, during, and after the Dzi performances, i.e., those among performers and audience members as well as those among the audience members themselves. The second theme focuses on a phenomenon that started within the Dzi audience and that was unanimously mentioned by my participants: the less talked-about and all-female offspring of the group/family, the Dzi Croquetas.¹ The two final sections of Chapter Five proceed to build on and develop the two guiding metaphors drawn from the literature, magnetism and disorientation. First, I bring the notion of ‘identification’ to unpack the magnetic, contagious Dzi performances by tracing the subjective and affective repercussions of the Dzi performances on the broader public. Finally, the fourth and final section examines the notion of ‘Dzi-orientation’ through participants’ accounts of how the Dzi performances led to a sense of loss and/or gain of horizons, a greater sense of freedom and power as well as an estrangement of both the self and social world.

The preceding chapters above lay the ground for the central themes of Chapter Six, whose main task is to answer the remaining overarching questions of this thesis: What may be the implications and meanings of decentring the law from our political imaginary and praxis? How may queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes help expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? And what potential alternatives for radical social change may they articulate? The concept of ‘decentring’ the supremacy of law from our political praxis and imaginary is not exactly new, as will become clear in Section 6.1. Here I trace the use of this concept from feminist scholars in the late 1980s to more recent texts in order to contextualise it within the literature and develop the reasons and implications of such a decentring. Next, Section 6.2 draws parallels with Chapters Two, Four, and Five in order to foreground the extralegal, worldmaking powers of queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes.

¹ My emphasis to highlight the spelling with an ‘a,’ which marks the feminine grammatical gender in Portuguese.
Lastly, Section 6.3 brings both the legal and performative realms together to investigate how the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric and the Dzi/queer performances jar against and contribute towards each other qua political strategies/sites. I begin by explaining what I mean that queer/Dzi performances ‘expose’ and ‘complement’ the rhetoric of rights and then proceed to argue how they do so, in close dialogue with the critique in Section 2.2. Firstly, to counter the narrowing down of fundamental sociopolitical language identified therein, I contend that queer performances function as sites of “epistemic friction” and “kaleidoscopic consciousness” (Medina 2013) whereby the meanings and ontologies advanced by neoliberal legalism may be reformulated and debunked. Secondly, against another of the legal rhetoric’s shortcomings identified—its misconceptualisation of power and oversight of its operations beyond the juridical, top-down, and individual model—I argue that queer/Dzi performances constitute extralegal sites of counterdisciplinary, embodied knowledge production and resistance against disciplinary and affective power. I approach queer performances as ‘contagious’ invitations for social and personal critique and refashioning through a series of individual yet interconnected sets of “chained action” (Medina 2013). Thirdly, I propose that queer/Dzi performances circulate ontologies of (sexual and gendered) selves that compete against, and denounce the false universality of, the liberal rights-bearing-subject. In particular, I investigate how the Dzi/queer performances may help us challenge the propertisation and atomisation of sexuality and gender, therefore avowing social relationality and the formation of sexual and gender identities as political/public matters. In doing so, I foreground the potential of extralegal knowledges/sites of queer politics in order to look for alternative paths for social change and to enquiry on which role(s) the law should play in a decentred, kaleidoscopic political imaginary.

This research emerges out of a broader concern with social change and queer politics with(out) the law. More specifically, out of an interest in the engagements between LGBT politics and the law as well as in the hegemony of the rhetoric of (human) LGBT rights to the detriment of other political strategies/knowledges. This thesis scrutinises and critiques the worldmaking powers of two political strategies/sites that are crucial for queer politics. That is, it enquiries on the promises and drawbacks of the mainstream
LGBT rights rhetoric by, on one hand, looking into what is at stake in channelling queer/LGBT politics through the neoliberal framework of rights; on the other, by looking at another extralegal political strategy Queer performances are a good place to look for queer politics/knowledge beyond neoliberal legalism because it considers and investigates these performative “political efforts...as productive of particularised and local political knowledge,” which Aultman and Currah contend is “the first step toward...epistemic justice—bringing the pluralism of transgender [and queer] politics into the narrative of political action” (2017: 39). Therefore, my critique consists of both a turn towards and away from the rhetoric of rights. Yet, it is important to note from the outset that I am critiquing not the law in toto or even the notion of rights in the abstract, but a particular neoliberal model that has dominated, arguably monopolised, our political imaginaries and repertoires. This critique leaves open the space for, indeed invites a collective imagination towards, reconceptualising law away from/against its foundational neoliberal rationality as well as rethinking the role(s) that it should (not) play in queer politics.

Throughout these years of doctoral research, I have searched for some vocabulary as well as gathered and generated some data to help me give form to an initial intuition that first pulled me to the Dzi Croquettes. That intuition began in front of a movie screen, next to my first fling, as I wept and got moved by their utopian and transformative lives/oeuvre. My intuition began in this both individual and collective movement because of/around the performances of the Dzi Croquettes. The juxtaposition of their performances with the rhetoric of LGBT rights emerged amidst the context of simultaneous hope and scepticism in the law described in the opening vignettes above. The promise of freedom and justice through individual, formal emancipation seemed to jar against the embodied effervescence and sense of liberation stirred by the Dzi performances/movement. Critiquing LGBT rights from the Left may sound controversial given the potential accusation that it might resonate with conservative attacks on the legal victories of queer people. Yet, we must be careful not to conflate the LGBT rights’ critique of radical activists and scholars with the attacks of right-wing bigots. If the latter stems from a sense of a lost past before queer people had any entitlement and
protection, as though LGBT rights were “too much”, the former critiques the neoliberal language of LGBT rights with a view to more radical and livable futures, because the rights rhetoric is “not enough” to fully redress and ameliorate the life chances of sexual and gender minorities. Likewise, while some may argue that it is all too easy to critique rights in a post-rights scenario, that is, once they have already been granted, I partly draw from post-rights literature precisely to learn how activists and scholars in these locations believe the LGBT rights rhetoric could/should be pushed forward, away from neoliberal waters. Indeed, in order to guide the reader’s expectations regarding my critical investigation in Section 2.2, below I expound upon what critique is and does in this thesis.

1.4. On Critique: Meanings and Doings

This thesis’ critique of the mainstream LGBT legalism seeks to unpack what is at stake in channelling sexual and gender politics through the law. However, the reader should not expect this critique to arrive at a resolution either for or against rights, at a final adjudication of the dismissal or endorsement of the law to advance queer political claims. Without presuming a specific outcome, critique here does the work of scrutinising “the form, content, and possible reworking of our apparent political choices” so that we “no longer have to take them as givens” (Brown & Halley 2002: 27). The present critique intends to be diagnostic and transformative: on one hand, a diagnosis of some of its ontological and political insufficiencies, on the other, aided by the lens of queer performances, an expansion, imagination, and rethinking of fundamental legal/political vocabulary and paradigms. Rather than a priori rejection of law’s potentials to further queer political struggles, my belief, hope, and claim is that collective critique and praxis may help us open the law up to the possibility of being otherwise.

The just-italicised term points us towards the notion of contingency, i.e., that current arrangements and conditions that structure our lives and worlds are neither a historical fatalism nor an unchangeable necessity. However, the claim that we are able to act upon and transform our surroundings should not slip into “false contingency,” as Susan
Marks (2009: 10) alerts us: “just as things do not have to be as they are, so too history is not simply a matter of chance and will.” The possibilities for action are not absolute since they stem from, and are thus limited by, the very social world upon which we seek to act. This boundedness of how we can, could, or ought to act in the world is not then “just a question of human finitude, but a directly political question concerning the present limits to rethinking social and political arrangements—limits often embedded and iteratively reproduced within those very arrangements themselves” (Golder 2015: 87). We may here think of rights, with Golder, as representing those very limits to our imagination and action, their worldmaking powers at once enabling and constraining, their conveying of “certain understandings of human being, of human flourishing, of community—and not others” (ibid.)

That said, the present critique resonates with narratives of legality such as “optimistic legal realism” (Cowan 2020) and “collective dissent” (Halliday & Morgan 2013). Both suggest that a more nuanced narrative is missing from the prestigious schema of three types of legal consciousness proposed by Ewick and Silbey (1998): two hegemonic types, before the law and with the law; and a counter-hegemonic one, against the law. Interviewing trans-identified people in Scotland about their experiences of and responses to the law, Sharon Cowan arrived at another type—optimistic legal realism—that differed from the notorious triad in that it encompassed a dynamic and seemingly paradoxical relationship among all three. In other words, Cowan’s participants demonstrated a “complex interwoven blend of cautious, equivocal but also passionate acceptance and/or rejection of the power of law to achieve true equality”, a simultaneous reconciliation between “optimistically embracing the promise of law” while critically “observing what the law can realistically deliver” (Cowan 2020: 210-211). In a similar vein, although with less optimism, Halliday and Morgan’s examination of secondary data on radical environmentalists in the UK through the lens of cultural theory revealed a knotty orientation towards the law that compounded the above trio and portrayed “legality as having simultaneous facets of illegitimate villain, useful tactical collective tool, and higher ideal” (2013: 14). I hope that the critique advanced in Section 2.2 will aid the discernment and navigation of the intricate and oft-ambivalent
potentials of the law. In doing so, we may take considerable weight off the law’s shoulder and decolonise our political imaginaries by asking whether some of the much-lauded promises of liberal legalism are overblown or indeed desirable for radical queer politics.

1.5. Terminology

As a coda to this introduction, let me provide some clarifications on the terminology deployed throughout this work. While my object of scrutiny is the mainstream rhetoric of (neoliberal) LGBT rights, I also make references to the law more broadly. The rights rhetoric is a particular deployment of/approach to the law, which encompasses but exceeds the former. That the political potential of the law is not reduced to, and is arguably misguided by, the rights rhetoric will become clear particularly in Chapters Two and Six. This LGBT rights rhetoric intertwines the discourses of supranational/international human rights with national/citizenship rights. While it promotes the idea that LGBT rights are human rights because sexuality and gender are natural traits of all individuals, their realisation and protection remain largely dependent on national states. As such, national states may align or misalign with the recent developments of international LGBT (human) rights, and these may be used by local LGBT/queer activists to legitimate or denounce how sexual and gender minorities are treated by a certain nation-state and/or institutions, organisations, and individuals. These supranational/international and national conceptions of rights are not interchangeable, yet there is no clear-cut line that separates them as these discourses mutually influence each other. Having said that, my lexical choice of “LGBT” rights follows the terminology most deployed in international human rights texts and forums. There are other, longer variations of this acronym that seek to be more representative and inclusive of the plurality of sexual and gender identities. Yet, as Julia Serano (2016) reminds us, there is no perfect, fully inclusive, or undisputed terminology to talk about sexual and gender minorities as language inevitably fails to capture the dynamism of political vocabularies, experiences, and identities that change rapidly over time. Although I refer to “queer people”, “LGBT people” and “sexual and gender minorities”
interchangeably, there is a distinction in how I refer to “LGBT” as opposed to “queer” politics. If both politics are closely related in their struggle to transform the lived realities and experiences of sexual and gender minorities, the orientation and scope of their struggles vary. The literature has widely noted that “inside” LGBT politics/movements there are different and diverging strands—some more mainstream and ‘palatable’, others more critical and radical. Therefore, I use “queer” politics throughout this thesis in opposition to the “homonormativity” (Duggan 2003) of a neoliberal, mainstream approach that targets mainly/solely LGBT formal rights. Moreover, a crucial distinction between LGBT and queer politics is that the former’s object is constricted to sexuality and gender, whilst the latter acknowledges the impossibility of talking about sexuality and gender in isolation from other identitarian vectors such as race, ethnicity, and gender. I will return to this distinction and tensions in the following chapter.

Following the above introductory notes, let us turn to the theoretical framework and tools with which this thesis juxtaposes and scrutinises the worldmaking powers of the law and of the Dzi/queer performances.
CHAPTER TWO: LEGAL AND PERFORMATIVE PRODUCTIONS/PRECLUSIONS—THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

As this chapter seeks to demonstrate, turning to the rhetoric of liberal/human rights is riddled with powerful opportunities of (re)shaping our worlds and ourselves as much as paradoxes and pitfalls. Some have gone so far as to announce their “endtimes” (Hopgood 2013), while others continue to believe in human rights’ slow but steady march. Alison Brysk (2018: 16) passionately defends that “this is not the end of the human rights journey; it is the beginning of a new stage, as we are bound together across stormy waters in a leaky, listing, but ultimately sound craft. This is no time to abandon the ship—it is time for ‘all hands on deck’ to navigate the storm and plot a new course.” It is beyond the purview of this thesis to investigate human rights’ competing narratives of beginnings or ends, but I do take up Samuel Moyn’s (2010) provocation that the almost taken-for-grantedness of human rights and their current omnipresence are not as age-old or universal as some may think or tout, especially if we consider the international framework of human rights for LGBT people. Therefore, the chapter begins with a genealogical account of LGBT (human) rights’ international ascendance—not a linear trajectory from beginning to end but a shift from obscurity to ubiquity, a process of growing inundation, omnipresence, and arguably colonisation, of the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric in international forums and politics. In doing so, I seek to trace the coalitions and tensions between (and within) the global North and South that arose from and compounded the globalisation of the rhetoric of LGBT human rights. Next, following Brysk’s call for a new course for human rights, I make a dual move.

On one hand, Section 2.2 below zooms in on the mainstream rhetoric of LGBT human rights to critique and investigate its promises and drawbacks for queer politics, answering therefore this thesis’ first overarching question. The critique unpacks some of this rhetoric’s (un)desirable and (in)advertent promises and pitfalls, particularly when underpinned and eviscerated by a neoliberal agenda and rationality. It also aims at ‘grasping’ the limits of the law qua strategy for queer politics’ fight for social change and justice “beyond the books”. I trouble the notion of the law as a mere tool we may or
should ‘use’ by showing how we are also deployed and constituted in that process in ways that are not fully transparent or knowable. On the other hand, in the third and final section of this chapter I turn away from it and to the performances of the Dzi Croquettes, a theatre and dance group/family from 1970s Brazil who emerged in a ‘pre-rights’ era during/against the country’s two-decade-long military dictatorship. The reasons for (and the insights I intend to derive from) juxtaposing the law against/alongside the Dzi Croquettes and queer performances more broadly will become fully clear in Chapter Six of this thesis. In this chapter, however, I start to outline the theoretical framework with which I approach not just the first but the other two research questions. To this end, Section 2.3 provides some theoretical tools that will assist this thesis’ analysis of queer/Dzi performances’ potential, on one hand, to expose and complement the limitations of LGBT human rights and, on the other, to help us elucidate and elaborate on the notion of decentring law from our political thinking and doing.

The substance of this chapter draws predominantly from literature that often exceeds the boundaries of discrete academic disciplines or even those between theory and praxis. I hence seek to illuminate the promises and drawbacks of the LGBT rights rhetoric based on theoretical and activist insights from, inter alia, performance, feminist, queer, critical race, and post-/decolonial scholars/activists. The legal equality path dominating mainstream LGBT politics was in part carved out by ‘sibling’ movements, so it would be unwise not to engage with critical insights born out of their praxis and theories. There are, however, no complete or immediate overlaps among them, just as there is no way to speak purely about sexuality or gender in a vacuum without considering the intersections of these other vectors of power and social markers, lest them be “reduced to a point where it is readable along a single social relation or a single set of interpretive terms” (Lalor 2011: 685). This thesis’ intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1991) to sexuality and gender thus presupposes that they are not the privileged or exclusive objects of any discipline and are always and already constituted by and constitutive of other vectors of subjection (Ferguson 2005; Eng et al 2005).
2.1. LGBT Human Rights: From Obscurity to Ubiquity

The year 1968 has accrued widespread symbolic importance as a watershed of social, political, and cultural upheaval in many parts of the world. From Apollo 8 and radical student, anti-capitalist, and anti-war organisations to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., one curious event went somewhat unnoticed amidst all the effervescence: the United Nation’s declaration of 1968 as the “International Human Rights Year”. This declaration, however, did not resonate much outside the confines of the UN since human rights then “remained peripheral as an organizing concept and almost nonexistent as a movement” (Moyn 2010: 2). Such a feeble impression may astonish younger generations to whom the rhetoric of human rights seems so readily available and widespread. Moyn makes his case by demonstrating an inflection between conceptions of liberal and human rights. Contrary to accounts that age-old vestiges or even foundations of human rights may be found in ancient Greece, in the eighteenth-century revolutions or in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, Samuel Moyn (2010) contends that it was not until the mid-1970s that human rights—our “last utopia”—gained international prominence in the vacuum left by the demise of other internationalist, utopian emancipatory projects. As opposed to former liberal notions of natural law and individual rights, which served as a foundation for the nation-state and legitimised its sovereignty, human rights recast rights “as entitlements that might contradict the sovereign nation-state from above and outside” (2010: 13). Moyn’s is a genealogical enquiry that, as such, seeks not to ascertain the truth of human rights’ origin as much as to unveil and denaturalise the taken-for-grantedness of the human rights rhetoric by asking why and how it has, in less than half a century, achieved such great prominence, indeed ubiquity, in global politics and international law.

Following Moyn’s provocation, one could pose similar questions about the surprisingly recent emergence of (and political struggle for) “LGBT rights,” commonly said to have begun at the 1969 Stonewall Riots. Despite the UN declaration just the year before, manifestos written by emergent post-Riots movements in the United States, such as Radicalesbians’ ‘The-Woman-Identified Woman’ and S.T.A.R.’s (Street Transvestite
Action Revolutionaries) manifesto in 1970, made no explicit reference to human rights (Kissack 1995; Kollman & Waites 2009: 4). Two decades later, the term appeared once in ACT-UP’s 1990 The Queer Nation Manifesto, in its stated commitment to mobilise “against the human rights violations of other countries,” but with no reference to sexual and gender politics. The encounter between “gay and lesbian politics”, to use the lexicon of the time, and human rights was to take place throughout the 1990s by means of a “double movement of globalisation,” whereby both human rights and “same-sex sexualities as identities” went global and then merged (Stychin 2004: 953-954). Fundamental to this phenomenon were the infrastructures and momentum built throughout the AIDS/HIV international struggles over the 1980s and the exchange of knowledge, lobbying, and funding across countries as well as coalitions among actors and organisations grappling with the tragic and moralising effects of the pandemic (Adam et al 1999).

In the late 1990s, sexual rights were famously proclaimed “the newest kid on the block in international debates about the meaning and practice of human rights, especially women’s rights” (Petchesky 2000: 1). Two crucial events for the arrival of the sexual rights newbie on the international agenda were the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 World Conference on Women, where feminist activists brought sexuality to debates on health, reproduction, and eventually rights (Petchesky 2000). Another landmark and foundational episode of what we may tentatively call nowadays a global LGBT movement was the 1995 Zimbabwean Book Fair themed “Human Rights and Justice”. One week before the event, the government sent a letter to the Fair organisers after learning about the participation of activists from the movement Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ). The permission for GALZ participation was withdrawn and President Robert Mugabe delivered a series of public attacks against sexual minorities, leading to international controversy and reprimand from organisations such as Amnesty International and Parliament members from New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States. By the turn of the millennium, an incipient but growing literature began to document and analyse the sprouting up of political movements the world over and sexual rights’ quick rise to the global spotlight.
With modernity ostensibly in its linear and teleological progress towards universality, freedom, and equality, the twenty-first century began with the recognition and promotion of LGBT rights as a *sine qua non* condition for actual and aspiring liberal democracies. In the early 2000s, the acronym “LGBT” came to replace “gay and lesbian” in political circles, academic research, and international law texts to recognise and include the political identities of bisexual and trans people. This shift was reflected in two high-profile documents: the 2006 Declaration of Montreal and the 2007 Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, which sought to bring some consistency in approaches and terminology as well as map violations and demands in the international arena (Swiebel 2009; O’Flaherty & Fisher 2008). Such was the effervescence and wide reach of the LGBT (human) rights pairing that even the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, famously and somewhat outdatedly declared in 2011 that “gay rights are human rights.” Clinton’s statement illustrates the popularity and political currency that human rights, including those of LGBT people, had gained in the new millennium when just a few decades earlier Illinois had become the first state in the country to repeal its anti-sodomy laws. From the grassroots to the international, actors, movements, and organisations gathering under the human rights banner have been mapping and denouncing abuses as well as building networks of calling out, boycotting, and lobbying against discriminatory practices and states. Civil society activists, scholars, and policymakers from different countries have congregated to discuss the commonalities and particularities of the struggles of sexual and gender minorities, share knowledges and skills, and build coalitions.

LGBT human rights have become a crucial international battlefield to lay claims, denounce abuse, and indict nation-states, who somewhat paradoxically remain largely responsible for (and barely accountable for failing) the protection and promotion of such rights. If (LGBT) human rights have recast previous notions of liberal rights and are said to exist regardless of recognition from nation-states, they have not substituted as much as come to intermingle and coexist—at times in cooperation, at others in tension—with
liberal/citizenship rights conferred by sovereign states over their territories. Far from achieving homogeneity or ready acceptance, the globalisation of LGBT rights/politics has produced a mix of similar and uneven effects in different parts of the world. A 1979 article entitled “Human Rights, Legitimizing a Recent Concept,” acknowledges that, from their genesis, advocates of the universal applicability of human rights were accused of “attempting to impose Western values on other peoples” (Pagels 1979: 58). This accusation remains prevalent in many parts of the Global South and has likely been compounded by geopolitical tensions arising from international LGBT politics. The 1995 Zimbabwean Book Fair, for instance, reflects a broader discourse in Southern Africa that romanticises a (heterosexual) precolonial time and traditional culture at the same time that it seeks to render homosexuality un-African, a “white man's disease” and a Western import purportedly incompatible with post-colonial states (Phillips 1997; Hoad 1999). Ironically, claims that homosexuality is a European import are not altogether ungrounded. Michel Foucault (1978) has examined the emergence of the figure of the homosexual in medico-legal discourses in late nineteenth-century Europe, in which the sexual went from being something one does to being something one is. Equally ironic, however, is that many anti-sodomy laws that have partly fuelled homophobic attacks in post-colonial countries in the global South are also an import, or an imposition, from colonial rule. A 2008 study based on a Human Rights Report showed that the legislation of more than half of the countries criminalising homosexual activity had roots in the anti-sodomy laws first introduced by the British Empire (Gupta 2008).

Notions of the traditional and authentic have been differently mobilised and constructed by opponents in such debates, with activists countering accusations through a number of different strategies, “chief among which is a redeployment of the very communitarian arguments that have been used against them” and the assertion of “an authentic gay past, prior to its condemnation by the colonizer and the missionary in the name of civilization and Christianity” (Stychin 2004: 958). Yet, in countries like Brazil, there was no recourse to a pre-colonial rhetoric to attack or embrace the emergence of LGBT rights and politics in the (inter)national agenda, simply because very little is known about such a period. The opening statement on page one of a usual textbook and class
on the history of Brazil starts with its “discovery” by Pedro Álvares Cabral, a Portuguese explorer, on 22 April 1500. The peoples, cultures, histories, languages, and knowledges that the Portuguese colonisers found were virtually wiped out after centuries of genocide, slavery, and pillaging. Unlike South Africa and India, for instance, Brazil had its independence formally proclaimed in the early nineteenth century. Therefore, not only is a pre-colonial past quite unimaginable, but the presence/threat of colonial forces seem perhaps more distant and less “real” due to the particularities of the Portuguese colonisation (Holanda 1995). What Brazil does have in common with, for instance, South Africa is that both their late-nineties and early-two-thousands formal embracement of LGBT rights may be seen partially as attempts at alignment with a modern international community and as redemption from previous decades of authoritarianism and racial segregation (roughly twenty years of a military dictatorship and fifty years of the Apartheid regime). This partly explains South Africa’s pioneering inclusion—the first in the world—of sexual orientation under the equality clause in its 1996 Constitution, which opened up queer bodies in South Africa as a “sight of struggle” that shaped how they perceived themselves and were perceived in society (De Vos 1996).

In the hegemonic narrative of international LGBT rights, as evident in critical queer immigration research (Luibhéid & Cantú Jr. 2005; Morgan 2006; Bruce-Jones 2015), the global North appears as a safe haven for queers whereas the South is depicted as lagging behind, as inherently homophobic and barbaric. This civilising ethos deploys LGBT rights as a marker of Northern superiority at the same time as it advances a global cartography that distributes and organises violence and salvation (Bruce-Jones 2015). What this narrative overlooks, however, is not simply the blatant violence and abuse faced by queer people in the very heart of the so-called rich and developed world—particularly those further away from normative embodiments of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nationality—but the very connections of the American religious right with, for instance, the infamous 2014 Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill (Gevisser 2020: 71) or the failures of Northern benchmarks of liberation and progress, such as the act of coming out, to apply to other, Southern contexts (Manalansan 1995). Analysing U.S.
foreign policy, Jasbir Puar (2007) has exposed how the reduction of the West as haven and the ‘rest’ as homophobic has buttressed discourses of “homonationalism” that realigns sexuality, gender, race, and nation with imperialist and nationalist agendas. While these considerations shed light on geopolitical tensions and a false dichotomy that turns both North and South into opposing monoliths, they do not suggest that the worldwide development of politicised movements or the proliferation of LGBT-identified people were a Western imperial imposition. Indeed, such a dichotomy is false precisely because it simplistically reduces Southern queers to passive dupes in need of salvation with no agency, desire or discernment. Instead, these identities were, have been, and continue to be “actively assumed and proclaimed from below” (Phillips 2001: 18) in a process of hybridisation at once drawing from and reworking the global(s) and the locals (Binnie 2004).

The global campaign for equal marriage offers a multi-layered illustration of the tensions between South and North, recognition and regulation. In several parts of the world—not just in countries where this campaign has been won—campaigners have decried states' delegitimisation of same-sex relationships and the asymmetrical set of rights and privileges afforded to the sanctity of heterosexual marriage. The extension of this set of rights to same-sex couples, however, rather than making everyone equal, runs the risk of redrawing the line of (il)legitimacy, legitimising those (and perhaps not many) forms of bonding and intimacy that most resemble the dominant heterosexual, classed, and racialised social form of kinship against which recognition and legitimacy are granted (Butler 2002; Young & Boyd 2006; Ball 2016; Richardson 2018). This redrawing may also advance the interests of one minoritarian group on the surface while deep down delegitimising others. Chandan Reddy (2008) addresses this dynamic in relation to the repeal of U.S. anti-miscegenation laws that allowed the union of interracial couples just as it covertly entrenched heteropatriarchy and marginalised sexual minorities; whereas Dean Spade (2015: 140-165) examines the term and practice of "pinkwashing," i.e., how the public embracement of a stance of equal marriage, and pro-LGBT rights more broadly, helped polish the images of the American and Israeli governments and deflect attention from their militaristic undertakings in Afghanistan and Palestine.
An intricate manoeuvre in the global campaign for equal marriage is that the institutions of the family and marriage seem to be reasserted as the benchmark of legitimacy at the same time as their meanings have become subject to ongoing political contestation and public debate. It appears to be, on one hand, a watershed and arduously-fought-for or arduously-sought-after victory, depending on where one looks; and on the other hand, also the victory of a neoliberal rationality of minimalist state and privatised responsibility, where the family relieves the nation-state purportedly burdened with caring and providing for their populations. As Diane Richardson observes, the prevalence of claims to the right to equal marriage “is a perfect example of how sexual politics can be seen as supportive of neoliberalism’s focus on private welfare, as well as underscoring discourses of individualism and the freedom of ‘choice’” (Richardson 2018: 154). This is not to say that same-sex couples who marry before the state are gullible pawns of neoliberalism or heteronormativity. There are multiple material, idiosyncratic, and symbolic reasons that cannot be overlooked in same-sex couples’ decision to marry. This is to challenge the notion that same-sex marriage simply extends or universalises equality and to show that in that very extension other forms of exclusion and inequality become entrenched, so that the right to marriage entails both recognition and regulation, both inclusion and exclusion, of sexual and gender minorities. These points bring into relief the pitfalls of believing that marriage equality represents the endpoint/inauguration of equality, that it ushers in a ‘post-equality era’, particularly if we consider that the global campaign for marriage equality partly obscured and replaced “the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized the national groups as they first emerged” a few decades earlier (Duggan 2003: 45).

Another central point of contention in twenty-first-century LGBT politics has revolved around diverse gender identities and expressions exceeding and challenging the male-female cisgender binary. In the foreword of the third edition of ILGA World’s Trans Legal Mapping Report released in September 2020 on the criminalisation and gender recognition of trans people the world over, the association observed that this is currently “a difficult time for trans communities globally, which is reflected in the regression or
stagnation in legal gender recognition rights” (ILGA 2020: 7). The Report charts just under 100 countries where legal gender recognition is available, although great nuance exists among them in terms of more or less prohibitive and medicalised requirements. The establishment of gender recognition in the international LGBT agenda, and of trans rights more generally, has met considerable backlash and moral panic incited by an intercontinental “anti-gender ideology” movement targeting the supposed degeneracy brought about by feminists and LGBT people’s political struggles (Corredor 2019).

Interestingly, criticism of the mainstream rhetoric of LGBT rights came not only from conservatives but also from trans activists, scholars, and organisations. Rather than an extension of gay and lesbian rights to trans people, for instance, trans organisations such as the youth-led organisation ‘Trans Student Educational Resources’ (TSER) gestured towards a rejection of those rights through slogans like “Queer Justice Not Gay Rights” or “Equality Is Not Enough”\(^2\). We cannot assume that there is or was a univocal, unanimous demand or direction in any given trans movement(s), and so I am not bringing these slogans as representative of ‘a’ or ‘the’ movement. Rather, these slogans serve to illustrate a split between “trans liberalism” (Raha 2015) and other more radical strands. While the former welcomed the extension of the legal strategies deployed by gay and lesbian movements, the latter pointed to its limitation and even to its inadvertent, undesired side effects (Raha 2015; Spade 2015; Aultman & Currah 2017). From this lens, trans rights and politics problematise and complicate LGB rights claim more generally, rather than being a mere extension or continuation thereof. Section 2.2 will dwell on these challenges and insights in greater depth, which will unpack the above slogans and investigate why some trans organisations and activists seek “queer justice not gay rights”, or why “equality is not enough”.

If above I dwelt on this relatively recent process of consolidation of a/the international LGBT movement, I do not suggest that there is a single monolith nor a concrete entity that may be easily pinpointed and named as such. Even from a domestic perspective, one struggles to find much unity since several groups, organisations, and actors have

\(^2\) https://transstudent.org/
adopted multiple and heterogeneous modes of doing politics. Accounts of the trajectory of movements in many countries show that, far from coherent unities, inner strands often compete within movements in terms of who has more (or less) voice or visibility, which issues to prioritise, which coalitions to form or end, and which strategies to adopt or relinquish (Adam et al 1999; Aguião 2018; Epstein 1999; Facchini 2005; khanna 2016). Varying across geographical location, historical context, and sociopolitical conditions, a diverse array of political practices and strategies have not just coexisted but at times competed with each other for legitimacy and, importantly, for funding. Concepts such as “homonormativity” (Duggan 2003) and “queer liberalism” (Eng et al 2005) have drawn attention to the split and lack of representation between grassroots, broad-based movements and the more mainstream organisations that have come to dominate LGBT politics at the national and international arena. From this perspective, what circulates in the mainstream is not the consensus or univocal position of a given social movement but negotiations and ruptures arising from (mis)alignments between progressive and conservative forces (consider the discussion on India’s Section 377 in Narrain & Gupta 2011; khanna 2016).

If there is no easy or fully exhaustive definition of ‘the’ LGBT movement of a given location, then how might we describe an international or even global LGBT movement? However elusive or intangible, I refer to a/the international LGBT movement to emphasise and scrutinise a worldwide trend that began to emerge across continents from the 1990s onwards: the ubiquity of the law (reform) in LGBT politics through the rhetoric of human/liberal rights. Legal reform has been a predominant, albeit contested, strategy to redress inequalities and pursue social justice. The frequent targets of such legal reform projects have ranged from the decriminalisation of certain acts, as in repealing anti-sodomy and cross-dressing laws, to the inclusion or extension of bases on which discrimination is legally prohibited, to the more recent equal marriage campaigns as well as anti-hate and gender recognition laws. This international trend is illustrated, for instance, in the recent publication of a book with a seemingly ordinary title: “The International LGBT Rights Movement: A History” (Belmonte 2021). However, at a historical and political conjuncture where it is trite to state that LGBT political
movements have come to address pretty much all spheres of life—from intimacy, kinship, the workplace, and unemployment to health care, religion, shelter, and the issuance/change of official documents—what does it mean to name LGBT movements as “rights movements”? On one hand, it seems to advance the notion that rights are/can be a metonymy able to encompass and meet the diversity and complexity of all political needs and demands of such movements. On the other, it works to secure rights as the natural means and ends of LGBT movements, as though they were oriented towards rights as a matter of course, as if the rhetoric of rights were the only—or best—means to convey the needs, claims and hopes of sexual and gender minorities. The now omnipresent and seemingly inextricable channelling of LGBT politics through the realm of the law has come to occupy the centre stage in our political imaginary as the primary, or even sole, path towards social justice, equality, and freedom, despite the warnings and insights of dissenters from the late 1980s (Smart 1989; Kingdom 1991) to more recent years (Spade 2015, Raha 2015, Cowan 2016).

As posed by Stychin (1995), the question of why sexual and gender minorities have come to desire the law so much is as interesting as its reverse: why has the realm of the law come to desire queers’ desire for the law? This question unveils that, rather than a mere historical coincidence, the rhetoric of rights has actively sought to recruit queer desire as the ultimate utopia of redress and emancipation inasmuch as the state further legitimises itself, via self-arrogation, as the natural guarantor of justice and addressee of struggles for liberation (Reddy 2008, Ferguson 2015). A central manoeuvre to be observed is that, rather than coexisting peacefully with alternative and extralegal strategies/vocabularies, the institution of rights has sought exclusivity in our current political arsenal and imaginary. Given the increasing omnipresence and dominance of the language of human rights in the last quarter of the 20th century (Moyn 2010), it is not at all surprising that human rights are perceived/present themselves as so readily available in a diversity of domestic settings. Yet, this legal omnipresence has depended on a series of exclusions and displacements, making it possible for the rights-based strategy “to present itself in a hegemonic fashion as ‘the’ movement—as what all gay politics boiled down to in the end” (Epstein 1999: 43). This right(s) way of doing politics,
then, has conveniently sought to and secured its place as the primary and ultimate source of freedom and equality. The colonisation both practical and epistemological of our political repertoire and lexicon has hinged on the loss of, and has arguably stolen, the political vocabulary to describe the conditions of violence or exploitation behind purportedly individual issues (Brown 1995).

Therefore, if the human rights rhetoric “displaces, competes with, refuses, or rejects other political projects, including those also aimed at producing justice, then it is not merely a tactic but a particular form of political power carrying a particular image of justice, and it will behove us to inspect, evaluate, and judge it as such” (Brown 2004: 453). In the brief genealogical account above, I have addressed some of the political-legal inflections, texts, forums, and developments that, mainly over the past four decades, have secured the rapid ascension of and shaped this pairing between LGBT politics and rights. I have sought to debunk the global mapping of freedom and violence that reproduces a colonial ethos of civilisation, slyly advances imperialist projects, and strips Southern queers of agency and freedom. Besides these North-South tensions, scholars and activists’ suspicion about the global pervasiveness of LGBT rights has led to careful and critical investigations of the broader (mis)translations between LGBT politics and neoliberal legalism. In this vein, the coming section addresses the first overarching question of this thesis by investigating the drawbacks and promises at stake for queer politics in this legal-political translation.

2.2. Prospects, Potentials, Pitfalls: How Far Can or Will the Law Go?

As stated in Section 1.4, the upcoming critique aims at diagnosing the limits and drawbacks of LGBT rights in achieving social change, or why and when queer political actors might consider rights claim (un)desirable. The critique’s transformative approach, that is, my gesturing towards an alternative and more radical reconceptualisation of the rights rhetoric, is elaborated in Chapter Six when I juxtapose the worldmaking powers of both law and queer performance. To repeat a point already made, the critique is not directed at law in abstract or in toto but at the mainstream model of LGBT human rights
that, as will become clear in this section, have been underpinned and eviscerated by a neoliberal rationality.

Neoliberalism, it should be noted, is not so much an external or top-down force acting on law but constitutes, in decentralised and ramified ways, the very landscape on which rights are understood, exercised, and claimed. Elusive to all-encompassing or exhaustive definitions, neoliberalism generally refers to a global, though not homogenous, set of practices, policies, and governing rationality that unevenly expose growing populations to social disparity, abandonment, dismantling, and imprisonment. Cultural, political, economic, and even affective arrangements have not gone unscathed by neoliberalism’s ubiquitous market principles of privatisation with its multi-scalar effects—from the statist dismantling of welfare and social infrastructure to the level of subject production (Brown 2019). The globalisation of LGBT rights and politics was propelled by and intertwined with the encroachment of neoliberalism, which has sought to assimilate them through its “hallmarks” of “co-optation and incorporation”, to “produce results that disserve the initial purposes for which they were deployed” and thus undermine “the effectiveness of their resistance” (Spade 2015: 13). Put otherwise, neoliberalism has come to favour piecemeal, single-interest demands and reforms to the detriment of broad-based, grassroots movements and radical demands (not suppressed altogether as much as displaced and underfunded).

Part of this critique’s diagnostic endeavour, therefore, entails exposing the limits and disavowals of a particular historiographical operation of rights that “forgets” the radicalism of political coalitions around gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity that mobilised these categories as “seeds for establishing forms of community and intimacy other than those offered by dominant institutions and imaginaries” (Ferguson 2015: 156). Instead, in a contemporary political landscape rife with neoliberal appropriation and state arrogation, LGBT rights have arguably consolidated the state as the sole “domain of resolution” while promoting “rights-based practices as the raison d’être for political agency, making rights the point of political action and political transformation” (Ferguson 2015: 151). The rights globalisation/colonisation as the strategy par excellence of LGBT
struggles, concomitant and intertwined with the neoliberal encroachment, has led to
what might be called “the right(s) way of doing politics” and “the right(s) way of having”
sexuality and gender identity. The parentheses signal both this colonising pull, i.e., the
displacement and loss of alternative conceptions, and the possible (mis)translations
upon speaking the language of rights. These “right(s) ways” will be developed below in
a series of questions in an effort to address this thesis’ first overarching research
question: what are the potentials and pitfalls of the mainstream, neoliberal LGBT rights
rhetoric for queer politics? This question presumes and suggests that our political
investment in the law is riddled with worldmaking possibilities as much as paradoxes
and perils. This chapter constitutes, ultimately, an enquiry about meanings, about the
upsides and traps of writing queer struggles, claims, subjects, needs, and desires into
the text of liberal law.

The upcoming sub-sections enquire about how political vocabulary as fundamental as
violence, discrimination, equality, and freedom are produced/constrained by the law as
well as how power, resistance, and the (sexual and gendered) subject thereof are
conceived. Furthermore, I consider the potentials of a performative instead of a
trumping approach to rights and conclude the critique by introducing in Section 2.3
below the critical/transformational roles of queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes via
the concepts of disorientation and disidentification.

2.2.1. What Counts as Violence or Discrimination for the Law?

At the core of the political organisation of sexual and gender minorities, from the
grassroots to the global, lies the struggle for sheer survival and thriving amidst myriads
of forms of persistent and systematic exposure to precarity and disenfranchisement.
Lest one think such an extreme portrayal is a thing of the “past” or exclusive to Southern
“primitive” countries, let us turn to the so-called global trailblazer/haven of LGBT rights.
In his 2015 book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and The
Limits of Law*, Dean Spade urges the emergent trans movements in the United States of
America not to easily buy into the former dominant strategy of the gay and lesbian
movement of seeking legal inclusion and recognition. Spade’s work is relevant to the critique advanced here because it draws from and builds on the needs and conditions of many communities that have remained “in the margins” in spite of—or partly because of—the formal equality and individual rights model (particularly the fight for anti-discrimination and anti-hate laws). His is a theoretical and practical engagement with the law based on academic exegesis and the provision of free legal service in New York City under the Sylvia Rivera Law Project to immigrants, people of colour, transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people. The myriads of calls for help that the Project received made it evident that being trans was far from being the sole “issue” for trans people, who oft-times also grappled with, inter alia, racism, imprisonment, immigration, severe poverty, unemployment, basically inexistent health care, and homelessness compounded by sex-segregated access to shelter.

Drawing from women of colour feminism and critical race theory, as well as queer and disability studies, Spade proposes a theoretical framework for a critical trans politics and practice seeking substantial equality and justice beyond some of the empty promises and inadvertent misfires of the law. More specifically, Spade looks at the mainstream gay and lesbian package of anti-discrimination and hate crime laws and asks which place, if any, these could/should have in critical trans politics. There are two fundamental questions here: for the law, what counts as discrimination and what counts as violence? This mainstream legal approach relies on what Spade demonstrates is a misconception of power and resistance that, once exposed and reformulated, could turn our attention to other sites of intervention within and without the law. Spade’s work is relevant here not just for the sharp analysis of liberal law’s limits but also, as I take forward in Chapter Six, for this thesis’ juxtaposition between law and queer performance. Let us now consider more closely, with Spade, what critical trans politics entails and how it could or should engage with the law.

Taking up insights from critical race theory, particularly Alan Freeman’s analysis of the “perpetrator perspective” bias in discrimination law and its underlying misunderstanding of the ways racism works (Freeman 1978), Spade explicates that this perspective
understands discrimination “through the perpetrator/victim dyad, imagining that the fundamental scene is that of a perpetrator who irrationally hates people” (2015: 42). It thus individualises, both in the perpetrator and in the victim, the harms of “systems of meaning and control such as racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia” (Spade 2015: 5-6). Discrimination is therefore (reductively) understood as an individual, intentional wrongdoing (subtraction) against another individual; and so is violence narrowed down as individual and intentional physical injury. Furthermore, discrimination and violence against LGBT people are understood as the acts of a ’monstrous’ individual unacceptable in a liberal democracy, a move that in itself disregards the “ordinariness” and the “structural” forms of violence and discrimination against queer people that precede and exceed any individual act (Spade 2015, Raj 2020, Stanley 2021).

The archetypal hate crime laws, similarly sharing such a perpetrator bias, profess to protect the lives of marginalised constituencies even if their deterring effects are far from unanimous and even if their focus is on post-deed punishment, not on pre-emptive measures. Furthermore, and more perniciously, these laws may obscurely direct resources, power, and legitimacy to criminal systems that have historically targeted many of these marginalised constituencies. Turning to the law to address violence and hate, Spade alerts emerging trans political movements, may risk not simply a failure or inefficiency in improving conditions of violence and harassment but instead, and inadvertently, expand and reinforce the capacities and resources of systems of harm and maldistribution. This expansion occurs through, for instance, the augmentation of the police force and resources, “a system that targets the very people these laws are supposedly passed to protect” (Spade 2015: 45).

As both the origin and the end of discrimination and violence are reduced to the individual, liberal law passes over the ways that collective groups and minorities have been subject to historical and structural forms of violence and discrimination. From this “perpetrator-perspective”, once the law proclaims that we are all equal, and once the individual wrongdoer breaching the law is identified and punished, an illusion is created:
that equality and fairness have been achieved, marking an endpoint to struggles (Leckey 2015). However, the legal promise that, with the stroke of a pen, ‘we are all equal’ and that certain characteristics shall not be taken into account when making a decision conceals a fundamental point for the material pursuit of equality: the historicity and persistence of collective, structural, and uneven allocations of (in)equality. In this way, the liberal-legal framing of discrimination and violence passes over and narrows down broader, systemic, and historical instances of discrimination and violence. It is thus no wonder that many anti-discrimination and anti-hate laws have been put in place precisely at periods when the devastating effects of neoliberalism have exposed increasingly greater numbers of people of colour, women, immigrants, and queers to disproportionate poverty, destitution, and precarity (Raha 2015). These simply do not count as violence or discrimination from a victim/perpetrator perspective insofar as, lacking a tangible wrongdoer and a one-on-one nexus of intention, they are rendered a matter of dehistoricised, individual (mis)fortune as opposed to shared, collective conditions (see also Brown 1995).

In her pioneering and influential work, Carol Smart forewarned us over thirty years ago that the law’s self-arrogation as the ultimate source of equality and freedom puts us “into the narrow confines of ‘how do we achieve this equality, which laws need changing, how do we incorporate difference, and so on?’” and, in turn, such “narrow (and liberal) forms prevent us from redefining the issues and the role that law may have in addressing these issues” (1989: 85). Analysing the directions taken in the United Kingdom by the abortion debate and struggle around women’s right to choose, Elizabeth Kingdom offers another practical illustration of this narrowing/deflection. The notion of such a right being a moral entitlement inherent to the individual regardless of social and economic conditions places the concept of free choice into traditional liberal grounds and away from, for example, socialist and feminist debates on solidarity and collective decision-making (Kingdom 1991: 54). Wendy Brown and Janet Halley point to, in an illuminating excerpt quoted at length, some broader and correlated implications of liberal legalism for progressive politics in general:
the preemptive conversion of political questions into legal questions can displace open-ended discursive contestations: adversarial and yes/no structures can quash exploration; expert and specialized languages can preclude democratic participation; a pretense that deontological grounds can and must always be found masks the historical embeddedness of many political questions. […] Legalism that draws its parameters of justice from liberalism imposes its own standard of fairness when we might need a public argument about what constitutes fairness; its formulas for equality when we might need to reconsider all the powers that must be negotiated in the making of an egalitarian order; its definition of liberty at the price of an exploratory argument about the constituent elements of freedom (2003: 19-20).

In addition to the narrowing down of fundamental political paradigms and vocabularies, the liberal model of rights reductively misconstrues the workings of power as a top-down imposition/prohibition. Although not fully inaccurate, this juridical conception of power and resistance is only one angle/mode of the kaleidoscopic operations of power. Based on the oeuvre of Michel Foucault, Spade foregrounds two modes of power that exceed the individual-intentional framework of the perpetrator-perspective: the disciplinary and population-management modes of power, whose primary operations are not through negative prohibition but positive incitement, inculcation, distribution, and categorisation (Spade 2015: 50-72). Rather than coercing individuals via external punishment, disciplinary power seeks to inculcate onto the subject deep, subtle investments in normative notions about “proper” and “improper”. These investments are policed both “externally”, through peer pressure and shame, and also “internally” by the very subject. While the individual body—be its health, education, desires, expressions, comportment, or other (un)desirable traits—appears a crucial site of disciplinary power, what Spade names the “population-management” mode of power governs, primarily via concerns with national security and health, the whole national population as opposed to individuals. This mode of power underlies programs and policies of nationwide application that have historically (re)constituted the nation, that is, who is considered “us” and who are the “others”, those whose lives are to be cultivated and those to be
abandoned. Population-management interventions, in this way, target not individual discipline but the (re)production of “a racialized-gendered maldistribution of life chances” (Spade 2015: 36). Reckoning with these ramified and decentralised operations of power is essential if we want to imagine and reconceptualise modes and avenues of resistance that reach more effectively where liberal rights cannot or will not arrive. In order to keep unpacking what we may expect or ‘yield’ from the rhetoric of LGBT rights, let us consider the instrumentalisation of the law towards pre-determined outcomes and how/why we may not only fail to use the law that way but also how we may ‘be used’ in ways that challenge a master-tool dyad.

2.2.2. What Do We Do/Seek In and By Claiming Rights?

To shed further light on the law’s failures and limitations in trumping certain sociopolitical conditions or biases and bridging the formal/substantial gap, we may ask whether trumping is what rights claims can realistically deliver or in fact whether the radical democratic value of rights resides in a presumed or actual trumping capacity. In other words, can the law deliver (or can we wield the law so as to achieve) pre-determined, expected outcomes? Law’s failure to do so may have less to do with our ‘failure’ to find the correct wording or reform and more with the failure of a dominant, liberal (mis)conception. As Karen Zivi (2012) expounds, this misconception is the notion of rights as trumps—as though rights were mere tools to be put to use towards guaranteed outcomes, to bring an end to political contests and socioeconomic disparities. Zivi (2012) provokes us to think about law’s unpredictability and fallibility not as failures to be remedied but as features of the performativity of rights claim(ing)s to be reckoned with and even embraced. The democratic value of rights, Zivi argues, lies not in their purported trumping capacity but in approaching “rights claims as performative utterances and rights claiming as a performative practice” (2012: 8; emphasis in original).

In foregrounding the performativity of rights, Zivi defends that their political value is less about what rights are and more about what we do in and by rights claim(ing)s, the effects of which are quite frequently beyond our instrumental control or authorial
intention. Drawing from speech act theory (Austin 1975), the performativity of rights displaces notions of rights claiming as sheer descriptions of what we (ought to) have and illuminates them as utterances/practices that (re)fashion our worlds, identities, communities, and senses of selves. Such worldmaking power, however, is not necessarily tethered to progressive or emancipatory politics but to a double-edged ambivalence, as Ben Golder’s Foucauldian account illuminates:

Rights can enlarge, expand, or protect the sphere of action of subjects (as well as performatively bring new worlds and communities into being). But at the same time, they can also be the conduit, or the vehicle, for relations of power that constitute those very subjects and communities in particular ways and hence reinscribe them within existing forms of power, often recuperating and domesticating the political challenges they might pose. (Golder 2015: 91)

From this angle, rather than in formal legal reform or achievement of rights, the ‘pinnacles’ of political movements are substantiated in what happens before, during, after—and even beyond—struggles and mobilisations under the banner of rights. This observation serves to demystify legal equality, which appears not as a remedy for systemic injustice as much as a feature thereof (Spade 2015: 19). Understood then as a set of complex political, moral, juridical, and linguistic activities often beyond our control or intention, rights claim(ing)s work akin to “telling a story or crafting a particular perspective on the present and the future” (Zivi 2012: 9). This social and collective crafting unsurprisingly entails acts of persuasion among opponent and often polarised contestations about which political values and commitments to espouse. What we do in and by claiming rights emerges then as a collective “opportunity to contest, reimagine, and enact different practices of good citizenship” (Zivi 2012: 22), which at once reflects and (re)shapes shared understandings of citizenship and community. Rights, from this light, provide marginalised groups with an opportunity to join an important democratic space: to undertake “acts of democratic citizenship that shift the very meaning of democratic community” such as publicly speaking, acting, and crafting political subjectivities (Zivi 2012: 23). Echoing the performativity of the law, Didi Herman points
to the institutional recognition bestowed by equality before the law as “one of the foremost ways in which human subjecthood is recognized, or called into being” (1994: 19; my emphasis). Significantly, the struggles to transform the law are not always confined to the law itself, in the same way as legal utterances go beyond the legal arena to produce and entrench knowledges. Contestations under the banner of the law thus entail a forum wherein alternative, counterhegemonic visions and accounts may be articulated and disseminated (Smart 1989: 87).

The performativity of the law is sharply examined by Silvia Aguião in her ethnographical investigation of the contemporary constitution of LGBT-rights-bearing subjects in Brazil. What is at stake in this ethnography, essentially, is the potential of the legal worldmaking powers to set into motion the very constitution and mobilisation, rather than just incorporation, of LGBT subjects and entities, who also (re)fashion the law in turn. Through their engagement with the law and government branches, both these subjects/movements and the state itself are subject to an ongoing constitution: the former as the bearer of, the latter as committed to, certain values and prerogatives. Aguião’s starting point is a presidential decree from November 2007 calling civil society representatives for the first LGBT National Conference, whose purpose was to discuss and “propose guidelines for the implementation of public policies and the national plan promoting the citizenship and human rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, travestis, and transexuals” (Aguião 2018: 48). Even if many of these public policies were eventually discontinued due to a shortage of funding or change of political tides/parties, Aguião examines how the decree (and legal recognition more broadly) triggered a cascade of organising commissions, civil society mobilisation, political alliances and antagonisms as well as publicity in the media. If to an external gaze the consolidating national movement seemed to gain coherence as a whole, Aguião’s closer examination reveals a dynamic process of internal ruptures and alliances revolving around issues of leadership and representation along the lines of, inter alia, gender, race, (cultural) capital, and geographic origin. In and through these engagements with the law and the state, a heterogeneous web comprising members of civil society, activists and
organisations, policy makers, and scholars participated in a collective crafting of not just demands but identities and ways of being LGBT rights-bearing-subjects.

Highlighting the multiple and oft-competing coalitions and demands within the Brazilian movement, Aguião converges with Akshay Khanna’s analysis of the Indian LGBT/queer movement in that it came to imagine itself as a ‘movement’ in the first place due to centripetal encounters and struggles within the legal realm. As Khanna observes,

In response to the contingencies of engagement with the juridical register, in this case the specific demands of sustaining a litigation in Court, activists had to formulate mechanisms through which this coherent and unconflicted whole is both produced and gleaned. At the same time, the demand for coherence is not made just by the juridical register and its bookkeepers—it is equally an effect of contestations between activists over the conditions under which a Queer voice may be represented in interactions with the law. This is to say, there were two directions from which the demand for a coherent Queer voice were made—one was from the juridical register, and the other from multiple politico-ethical positions of disparate activists who demanded that their voices, experiences and constituencies play a role, or at the very least be seen to play a role, in the constitution of the voice. (Khanna 2016: 195)

A crucial point about the performativity and ‘fallibility’ of rights claiming examined above is that the radical political value of rights is located not in gestures of a pen stroke or formal reforms, but in what happens under its banner—the gathering of bodies taking up the streets with their complex rhythms of moving, stopping, chanting, demanding, denouncing, and imagining new realities. Yet, this gathering is not always a taking up of a/the street because what may be at stake is the very need and fight for public spaces to exist and be occupied, for the infrastructure necessary for us to live, gather, move, and thrive (Butler 2015). More than the streets or public spaces, these gatherings are also instances when social movements come to fashion a sense of shared identity and demands under or even in the absence of rights. The critique of this section, then,
concerns the reductionist approach to the political value of rights, whose ‘misplacement’ in the fictional trumping of social conditions (as though political struggles could come to a final resolution) brushes over the radical potentials in engaging with the law performatively as a site where, or a banner under/around which, we gather to demand more livable lives, to expose our self-relationality and the need for sustaining infrastructures. The notion of rights as trumps/individual entitlements reinforces the myth of self-sufficient, self-bounded subjects by disavowing social relationality. This disavowal occurs both at the level of intersubjectivity and interdependence (separation of the subject from others) as well as of the social and the historical (separation of the subject from context/history), according to the argument pursued in the sections below.

2.2.3. How Does the Law Account for Context, Culture, and History?

This question is particularly relevant in light of international LGBT human rights’ sought-after and professed universality. One of the most notorious rejoinders comes from the oeuvre of political theorist Wendy Brown. In one of her earliest and most widely cited pieces, Brown argued that attempts to ascertain political value in the essence of rights misreckon that “the question of the liberatory or egalitarian force of rights is always historically and culturally circumscribed; rights have no inherent political semiotic, no innate capacity either to advance or impede radical democratic ideals” (1995: 97). This, Brown notes, poses a paradox in that, while the force of rights stems from their situated operation in particular contexts, cultures, and histories, they also “necessarily operate in and as an ahistorical, acultural, acontextual idiom: they claim distance from specific political contexts and historical vicissitudes” (ibid.) This distance-taking invites us to exert caution and ask whether seeking redress for shared injuries via identity-based rights ends up not redressing as much as obscuring the conditions underlying said injuries. Following Marx, Brown argues that through the abstract and ahistorical emancipation of subjects via the law, the material and historically sedimented conditions giving rise to the need for rights risk being entrenched and overlooked, rather than acknowledged and redressed.
This risk arises from the inscription of social differences into liberal law that essentialises and renders them “equivalent” in their failure to conform to certain ideals and, as such, posits difference as an unquestionable and eternal given while surreptitiously reinforcing these normative ideals (Lalor 2011: 688-691). These observations echo Dean Spade’s warnings about the ways that legal victories such as affirmative actions to secure marginalised communities’ inclusion in, inter alia, employment, education, and decision making may be—and have been—eviscerated by pernicious claims of reverse racism or colour-blindness product of a liberal, abstract, and ahistorical ‘resolution’ to social difference/inequality. In other words, this evisceration occurs as the formal prohibition against using social difference as a ground for discrimination becomes a blanket prohibition against using historically marginalised forms of social difference as grounds for affirmative actions.

The point here is not to refuse rights a priori but to “refuse them any predetermined place in an emancipatory politics, and to insist upon the importance of incessantly querying their place” (Brown 1995: 121). That the rhetoric of rights does not inherently belong to leftist and emancipatory claims, and that it may be even used to thwart progressive politics, became increasingly more evident as the twenty-first century unravelled and witnessed the surge of antidemocratic regimes and far-right leaders in several parts of the world. Their platforms have found convergence in demagogic appeals to, for example, crusade against the so-called gender ideology, rescue the traditional family and the values of Christianity, and secure the borders of the nation against unwelcome (and racialised) immigrants (Brown 2019). Despite the attainment of formal equality and anti-discrimination rights for racial, gender, and sexual minorities, the twenty-first century has not inaugurated an era of pacific and respectful coexistence in a multicultural and plural society as much as a right-wing polarisation and recasting of such minorities as themselves the source of discrimination and injustice. This ahistorical, or indeed anti-historical, recasting works through inversion to create the archetypical subject of privilege—the white, cis- and heterosexual—as himself the “dethroned” victim of discriminatory bias and subject of external coercion. In this illusory inversion, he becomes the new minority under threat of having his rights undermined or violated.
by a tyrannical majority. This recasting/inversion evidences that, in contemporary political struggles, it is often the case that

Rights are the flying wedge with which democratic commitments to equality, civility, and inclusion are challenged in neoliberal legal battles. But the forces behind them, staging incursions against society and democracy, are the values and claims of the market, combined with those of heteropatriarchal Christian familialism. (Brown 2019: 114)

In line with Michel Foucault, Brown questions the notion of excluded, pre-existing subjects seeking to be included in/by the law as though from the outside looking in. Instead, her Foucauldian exegesis reveals the law as a site of discursive production and regulation of political subjects who do not exist fully prior to or outwith but are significantly constituted in and through their emergence as rights-bearing-subjects. The paradox Brown illuminates between rights' acontextual operation and contextual force, between their universality and contingency, restages another age-old and correlated scholarly debate: essentialism versus social constructionism. More than simply an attempt to locate origins, whether in biology or culture, this debate has had relevant implications for the global circulation of an LGBT human rights discourse perhaps still overly reliant on essentialising knowledge from biomedical and psychological disciplines (Waites 2009). The idea of an essence transcendentally bonding LGBT people across time and space, the notion that “we are born this way” and share universal, intrinsic (sexual and gender) traits inherent to human beings have, on one hand, created a sense of identification and solidarity that powerfully bonded political movements and actors while, on the other, proved to be rather fit for law’s search for a fixed, homogenous, and demarcatable ‘minority-like’ community upon which to grant recognition and inclusion (Duggan & Hunter 2006).

However alluring, this essentialist perspective permeating much of the LGBT human rights rhetoric circulating globally has also been denounced for its centring of whiteness and class privilege, with radical feminists and critical race scholars decrying
essentialism’s failure to account for sexuality and gender as phenomena whose meanings and expressions are contingently and historically produced in/through local power relations, in intersection with other social markers and conditions (Crenshaw 1991). Central to these debates is the warning against interpreting certain conditions and identities—as well as inscribing them into the law—as a product (solely) of biology or historical fate (the ways we “are”) to the detriment of the political critique and transformation of—as well as the collective solidarity and knowledges in/through collectively reckoning with—the systemic ways in which we “are made” (Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983; hooks 1981; Oyèwùmí 1997; Massad 2002; Lugones 2003; Matebeni et al 2018). In challenging the notion of universal, pre-existing subjects or identities that are simply assimilated into the law, we may also interrogate how the law partly produces a particular ideal of sexual and gendered subject(hood) with its accompanying, and arguably constricted, notion of freedom.

2.2.4. How Does the Law Produce/Constrain Sexual and Gendered Subject(hood) and Freedom?

Such an essentialist framework is often referred to as depoliticising because it detracts from, and thus comes shy of accounting for, the workings of societal and cultural arrangements in materially (re)producing political needs and identities. It fails, in other words, to expose that certain identities and conditions are not natural traits or misfortunes of an individual but systematically, differentially, and historically allocated. Debunking this essentialism invites us to consider that the definitions and categories of sexual and gender diversity that have come to circulate in the global mainstream name or represent not universal and timeless human traits as much as a “globalized localism,” as Boaventura de Sousa Santos provokes: “what we call globalization is always the globalization of a given localism; there is no global condition for which we cannot find a local root, a specific cultural embeddedness” (Santos 1999: 41). The influential work of Joseph Massad (2002) sheds light on the Western embeddedness of the professedly universal gay subject and shows how, travelling alongside the discourse of human rights, it subjects Arab men to new forms of discrimination by turning an activity into an (imperial) identity (see also Katyal 2002). Debunking this humanist approach to
sexuality and gender by acknowledging the Western bias of human rights could lead to the advocacy of or search for multiculturalist ways of naming and representing sexual and gender diversity. In this way, one might set out to look for Southern synonyms or analogies to be subsumed under a broader, more inclusive framework.

Yet, the mere expansion of this sexual and gender framework takes for granted the very epistemological/ontological framework and evades a consideration of whether and how it may (fail to) apply to non-Western contexts. This expansion may inadvertently reinforce the framework itself, that is, the Western sexual and gender epistemology/ontology that elevates them as ontological traits of humanity, as an essence of being, which hence gives rise to the universal and individual entitlement to rights (Sabsay 2013). Under this ‘glocal’ epistemology, “a particular historical and cultural trajectory for experiencing, imagining, and understanding sexuality is universalised and subsequently understood as the point of reference with respect to which any experience associated with the sexual is to be judged” (Sabsay 2016a, np). Through the universalisation of this epistemology/point of reference and incorporation into international law,

A certain normative ideal of identity is inscribed within law and then becomes the occasion for a disciplinary interpellation and thence regulation of the rights claimant… The urge to juridify in rights discourse and, moreover, to specify the contours of that identity with some precision means that rights discourse becomes not the neutral mechanism for achieving liberation for oppressed social groups, but rather the occasion for constituting those groups and subjecting them to modes of surveillance and control. Would-be rights claimants are called upon to internalize and perform a particular identitarian script in the pursuit of their rights (Golder 2015: 100)

The narrowing down and displacement of alternative political strategies and meanings, as examined above, is mirrored in microoperations at the level of sexual subjectivity and self-subjectivation. This “identitarian script” underlying international human rights
presupposes and casts the sexual and gendered subject of human rights as one under a specific type of social contract whose specific relationship to its own subjectivity, desire, and pleasure is foundational to personhood. The conditions of intelligibility to be(come) a proper rights-bearing subject requires sexuality and gender to be conceived in specific ways: as ontological attributes that a self-enclosed, transparent, and sovereign subject is said to possess. In other words, in this liberal understanding of self-ownership, in order to come into the realm of law and receive protection, sexuality and gender become the property of individuals who, either via self-knowledge or self-production, are entitled to exert autonomous and individual choice over them (Sabsay 2016a). Just as in the foundational scene, indeed “fantasy” of the social contract, it is the property of the sovereign, male, independent subject that marks the limits and protection—mistranslated as freedom—from external interference, whether by the state or others. When understood in these terms, “freedom from encroachment by others and from collective institutions… entails an atomistic ontology, a metaphysics of separation, an ethos of defensiveness, and an abstract equality” (Brown 1995: 6). This is an ontologically severed and clearly bounded subject whose sexual or gender “truth” seems to be already formed and fixed prior to ‘his’ entry into the public sphere, as though just awaiting expression to be tolerated by others. When conceived as individual sovereignty, this version of freedom narrows down broader understandings that the daily and free exercise of freedom substantially stems not from atomised subjects but from the interstices and relationships between them (Nedelsky 1990).

This myth of separateness is foundational to the defensive and heterosexual subject of liberal individualism, who is imagined in the inaugural moment of the social contract—reduced to a means of resolution of conflicts—as an adult male defending his private property (Butler 2020: 27-38). What this defensive ethos disregards and conceals is that we come to be constituted by, and inhabit the world with, others—who may be a source of threat or intrusion but are also, however alluring or undesirable, fundamental to our own constitution. Finding “others” in oneself challenges not just the subject’s self-boundedness but its transparency too, as though one could look “inward” in fully self-knowing and self-mastering ways and then represent “outwards” the mirror image of this
inner essence. Yet, what does it matter to critique this particular epistemology and ontology? These (mis)representations and disciplinary interpellations about proper ways to “have” a sexual orientation and gender identity underlying international human rights discourse constitute a benchmark against which claims will be judged and assessed; as such, it has practical implications in diverse sociohistorical and cultural contexts where Western understandings of gender identity and sexual orientation do not easily travel or translate (Morgan 2006; Camminga 2018; Millbank 2009; Berg & Millbank 2009). Yet, the point here is not a multicultural reformulation of more diverse and inclusive terms, but a reckoning with the fact that the Western epistemological and ontological framework of gender and sexuality do not or cannot always travel (Sabsay 2016a; 2016b).

To illustrate this difficulty or impossibility in how terms travel and translate, akshay khanna searched on the Internet for pictures of Indian men holding hands. Khanna noted that the majority had been posted by North American or European travellers to whom men walking in public, hand in hand, seemed rather remarkable. What Khanna found more remarkable, however, was the “strikingly similar titles” accompanying these pictures: “‘just good friends’, ‘friends’, and ‘men holding hands—a normal occurrence in India’… ‘they are NOT gay’, and ‘Yes…men in India hold hands. At first I thought everyone was homosexual, then realized it’s a sign of friendship!’” (Khanna 2016: 7-8). However, as Khanna shrewdly points out, the crucial point in question was not whether these men were gay, since this question “already presume[s] an easy commensurability between a ‘western’ epistemology and the sexual in India” (Khanna 2016: 10). The incommensurability refers not just to different terms and identities that Indian people may and do use to describe themselves, but moreover to a distinction from the Western elevation of sexual and gender to ontology, which posits them as foundational aspects of subjecthood. In other words, Khanna challenges the Western universalisation of its historical, local epistemologies and frameworks by coining the term “sexualness”. Sexualness, rather than sexuality, points to Khanna’s understanding of how the erotic and the sexual in India “need not speak to the sense of self or the definition of self (…) There is, in other words, a ‘sexualness’ that escapes the frame of sexuality, desire and
eroticism that flows through people without constituting them as subjects” (khanna 2016: 12).

Therefore, it is not that the global discourse of human rights “just” misrepresents the ontological and epistemological realities of queer subjects who do not subsume to the Western framework; in this misrepresentation lies the very conditions of (un)intelligibility for queer selves to be (il)legible as proper rights-bearers. The term “proper” here points to the disciplinary workings of power in and through the law, the slow and subtle inculcation of norms shaping individuals at their core, without emanating from a centralised or fully deterministic source. It should be noted, however, that “the law fuels rather than singlehandedly creates this discourse”, given the fact that “sexuality is a complex production, influenced by many discourses and desires, and attempts to find one foundational truth of its production are not generally very helpful” (Lalor 2011: 687). So while the law appears as one site/means for the tenuous inculcation and disciplining of sexual and gender norms, if we want to approach the law as a site of counterdisciplinary resistance and praxis we ought to conceive of more radical alternatives to the pitfalls critiqued above. Put otherwise, while the law appears as a site of instantiation and dissemination of disciplinary power, critics have worried that “disciplinary control is inadequately addressed by law reform–centered strategies for change. Law reform efforts taken up under the banner of anti-discrimination have often failed to alter these norms” (Spade 2015: 56). Chapter Six will return to this point on (counter)disciplinary power/resistance and the roles of the law therein.

Let us pause momentarily to recapitulate on the two tasks above and signpost the third and final endeavour of this chapter. The genealogy and critique developed so far had two primary goals: to map the historical and geopolitical inflections/events that have catalysed and compounded Northern-Southern dynamics in what I loosely call the international LGBT rights movement as well as to scrutinise some of the promises and limits of the mainstream, neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT (human) rights towards radical social change and justice. By “limits” I intend the extent to which law may (not) go towards delivering substantial change, an endeavour that, as expounded above,
requires a practical and theoretical reckoning with the notion that, if we are not masters able to instrumentally yield rights to secure certain pre-established intentions, neither does the law simply describe or include as much as produce subjects, working to “position, constrain, and conduct those who deploy them and subtly contour the subjectivity or self-understanding of the rights holder who is their supposed master” (Golder 2015: 97). While the ambivalence of rights' worldmaking powers and their contextual performativity frustrate an *a priori* celebration or refusal, the literature review above exposed some onto-political limitations and more radical potentials of rights claim(ing)s.

The key ontological and political limitations of the LGBT human rights rhetoric critiqued above concerned the displacement of alternative, extralegal sites and knowledges, the conceptual/linguistic narrowing down of fundamental political vocabulary; the concealment of the collective, structural roots of needs through individual emancipation and rights; the reductionist misconception of the operations of power and therefore of sites/modes of resistance; and the disavowal of social relationality through the myth of the self-bounded and possessive subject of (LGBT) rights.

A powerful yet simple way of thinking about these limitations comes via the concept of the “Four Pillars of Social Justice Infrastructure”, which I introduce here and return to in Chapter Six to answer the remaining overarching questions of this thesis. Developed by the Miami Workers Centre, the concept is used by Dean Spade (2015: 102) to analyse “how multiple [political] strategies can fit together to build participatory, mass-based movements” and which role the law may play among these strategies. The Pillar of Policy targets change in public policies and institutions and comprises more tangible advancements and progress indicators. The Pillar of Power aims at developing a political base and leadership in order to nurture bottom-up power and influence through large-scale organisations as well as grassroots leaders. The Pillar of Consciousness encompasses the realms of the media and public education and includes strategies targeted at shifting political paradigms and public consciousness. Lastly, the Pillar of Service concerns the provision of essential services such as food, health support, and
shelter. While all work in tandem towards achieving social change, Spade argues that the most neglected and most important one in the current political conjuncture is the Pillar of Power, which must be supported by the other pillars (2005: 102).

Despite its pitfalls and ruses, the rhetoric of rights works as a powerful sign under which “political base and leadership” gather, deliberate, and make demands. While this might be one of the most radically open-ended and powerful features of rights’ worldmaking powers—and one reason not to let go thereof—we must defend the possibility and find ways of disentangling queer politics from the neoliberal legalism and rationality/ontology. Yet, after the critique above, the reader may be wondering what to do with rights since, as stated earlier, neither espousal nor rejection are not the end goals here. As part of the political task of reworking and rethinking the limits of liberal rights for queer politics, in Chapter Six I engage with the notion of decentring the rhetoric of rights (Smart 1989). Therein, I ask what legal decentring might mean or do, what other sites and modes of doing queer politics it might bring to the fore, and why we should nurture a multi-pronged, polymorphous political arsenal in which rights are not always the best or sole tool. Moreover, another central task/question of this thesis concerns whether/how queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes may help expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the law raised in this section, and what alternative paths for social change they may open up.

In order to answer these questions, this chapter concludes by delineating the theoretical tools guiding this thesis’ approach to the worldmaking powers of queer performances and of the Dzi Croquettes, who will be the subject matter of Chapters Four and Five. For now, let us return to the point made above regarding law’s preclusion/colonisation of our political imaginary, subjectivity, and vocabulary. The critique of conceiving rights as the natural/best orientation of LGBT movements invites us to reflect on other possible orientations for queer politics. In this vein, the suggestion to decentre rights is more productive when understood not as shifting our gaze to another fixed direction or object but as an enquiry, in this context of hegemonic orientation towards rights, on what a notion of disorientation might open up and foreground. As elaborated in the next section
and taken further in Chapter Six, the concept of (dis)orientation is particularly relevant to understanding the Dzi Croquettes and queer performances' worldmaking powers and potentials as both political sites and strategies alongside/against neoliberal legalism.

2.3. The Disorienting and Magnetic Powers of the Dzi/Queer Performances

The Dzi Croquettes are often regarded as one of the precursors of the organised Brazilian homosexual movement that started to consolidate in the late 1970s, even if, as we shall see, this is an arguably reductionist reading that was indeed contested by the Dzi themselves. Such was the ripple effect of their sensuous and disorienting performances that a new term—tiete—was coined by the group to refer to their fans, who increasingly started to adopt the Dzi way of being. Their ambiguous and provocative performances had a deep emotional repercussion on those within its reach, which led the Dzi way of being to rapidly spill well beyond the stage and onto the streets, through and via the tietes. Rosemary Lobert, a first-hand witness/anthropologist of the Dzi phenomenon, suggests that the encounters between performers and spectators were marked by magnetism and disorientation (Lobert 2010: 215). While Lobert uses the latter quite literally to describe spectators’ reactions of bemusement or lack of understanding, my usage is more figurative and phenomenological. Phenomenology is particularly useful to understand the social effervescence around the Dzi Croquettes and the widespread social/affective impact of their performances because a “phenomenon is, first of all, phenomenal; something astonishing” (Ferguson 2006: 17; italics in original). Phenomenology thus is concerned with the power that things have to generate astonishment and, as such, posits subjects that are always and already inseparable from the objective world and from (queer) objects that inspire, shape, and orient them.

In her 2006 book “Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others,” Sara Ahmed examines what possibilities may open up for queer studies if we think about the “orientation” of sexual ‘orientation’ with and through phenomenology, so that “[i]f orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of how we reside in space, and who or what we inhabit spaces with” (2006: 1).
One of her aims in writing about (sexual) orientation from a phenomenological perspective is to scrutinise how our consciousness is structured and perceived, challenging notions of natural dispositions inherent to human beings. Rather, Ahmed (2006) exposes them as effects of power, which works to organise and reproduce/forestall certain orientations towards certain objects—whose meaning is not reduced to material objects but includes, *inter alia*, “values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles” (86). Ahmed explores the ways in which bodies become oriented by taking up space and time, a spatiality that is also constitutive of sexuality, gender, and race. This taking up involves the reaching towards objects available within our horizon, different objects that gather on/create the ground on which we, in turn, gather. The different gathering of objects, Ahmed goes, and their nearness or distance to us are not a matter of chance or fate but of their *and* our “conditions of arrival,” foregrounding both the historicity of objects perceived and of the perceiving body. This historicity is not always evident, as some objects may appear to have always been *there*, even disappear from view as we face them. Objects have histories of arrival that make them ‘faceable’ in the first place, while some are relegated to the background and only co-perceived, and others cleared from the ground so that their absence is not even processed as a loss or absence.

Let us consider the example of heterosexuality, which in popular rhetoric circulates as a natural trait beyond intentionality or consciousness. We may challenge this rhetoric that, first, one is (born) heterosexual and then orients oneself towards heterosexual love and desire, for instance, by inverting the scheme and positing that the nearness of heterosexual objects and the repetitive/habitual investment in the straight norm ‘makes’ one heterosexual. This inversion was at the core of the concept of “performativity” developed by Judith Butler (1990; 1993), which shed light on the ways that the reproduction of gendered structures is not (merely) a matter of human essence or nature but rather relies on and enforces the repetition of norms. Echoing Butler’s notions of performativity and of mourning homosexual desire, Ahmed writes that “it is not that the heterosexual subject has to turn away from queer objects in accepting heterosexuality as a parental gift: *compulsory heterosexuality* [a term coined and
developed by Adrienne Rich (1980) makes such a turning unnecessary” (Ahmed 2006: 91; my emphasis). Ahmed observes that accepting or resisting the forces that press us into following certain lines and directions (forces that can take the form of familial love and pride as well as social violence) come, respectively, with social awards in return for our investment or ostracisation for the failure thereof. This acceptance or failure are not so much a once-off commitment but a continuous temporal/spatial process.

Similarly, orientation depends on the continuous and repetitive taking up of space and time, and on the body’s capacity to affect and be affected by the external world, so that we are shaped by how we dwell on space and shape space through our dwelling. This point may be illustrated by how different bodies may feel more or less “at home” or welcomed in certain spaces, a distinction between familiarity and strangeness that is informed by, on one hand, how bodies are gendered, classed, sexualised, and raced; and, on the other, how some bodies align (and thus disappear) or misalign (hence stand out) with the orientation of that space. To be in line, and indeed to follow lines, is a performative effect:

Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. (Ahmed 2006: 16)

We are oriented, therefore, when we are in line: when we are facing the same direction as others. A central contention of Ahmed’s account is that we should think of direction as collective and organised rather than idiosyncratic and casual; hence why some bodies face certain directions more than others. Before I continue this ‘line’ of argument in the next paragraph, one brief clarification is that this section is more interested in the contributions of affect theory and phenomenology to understanding queer performances’ worldmaking powers instead of offering a social ontology of the body, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am, however, aware of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of
talking about a/the body in the abstract and how a/the/each/every body opens up and is opened up to/ by others. Arguably, whether and how a body opens up and is opened up by/to others, and the modes and intensities thereof, are not equally shared but unevenly distributed along “certain categorial and prescriptive schemes of race, gender, sexuality, and embodiment, which are deployed by normative regimes to organize, induce, adjudicate, and sustain affect differentially” (Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 164). I come back to some of these gendered/sexual tensions that challenge the idea of an abstract/universal body’s capacity to (equally) affect and be affected in the next chapters’ discussion of the Dzi Croquettes.

This notion of turning to a direction/ being directed evokes Louis Althusser’s influential theory of interpellation, where subject formation proceeds from the “turning to” the ideological call (Althusser 1972). Ahmed shrewdly observes the etymology of “direction”: a set of orders or instructions about where, how, and what to turn to, whereas being “direct” “relates to ‘being straight’ or getting ‘straight to the point’” (ibid.) And yet, as argued by Foucault, there is no subject formation without the possibility of resistance: no perpetual following of lines without the possibility of going astray. After all, the performative iteration of norms produces not an identical copy but a “variation on that repetition,” a source of queer resistance that frustrates full and identical reproduction (Butler 1990: 145). Such queer moments, for Ahmed, happen through disorientation: when objects appear on a slant, when accidental encounters make us go off-piste and redirect us. Contra Merleau-Ponty (2002), Ahmed proposes that, rather than hindering bodily action and needing to be overcome, inhabiting the disorientation of queer moments, of being/feeling slantwise, may take us towards less well-trodden paths and objects, towards new possible directions and futures. She proposes a term from landscape architecture, “desire lines,”

to describe unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow. Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such
lines are indeed traces of desire, where people have taken different routes to get to this point or that point. It is certainly desire that helps generate a queer landscape, shaped by the paths that we follow in deviating from the straight line. (2006: 19-20)

If “it is certainly desire that helps generate a queer landscape”, it is because it introduces the possibility for misrecognitions and failed interpellations of queers, whose “desire for a bad object offsets that process of reactionary ideological indoctrination” (Muñoz 1999: 15). Ahmed’s claim that queer cultures labour to make new worlds by wedging desire lines into and against the straight lines (2006: 106) resonates with José Esteban Muñoz’s analysis of queer performances’ potential to build and reshape reality through a strategy of disidentification. To develop the concept/strategy of “disidentification”, Muñoz employed the Gramscian notion of organic intellectuals “to emphasise the theory-making power of performance” (1999: 33) and drew from a wide variety of cultural workers from Latin America—from comedians, performance/video artists, and playwrights to terrorist drags and televisual activists.

For Muñoz “[o]ppositional counterpublics are enabled by visions... [and] are the aftermath of minoritarian performance... Worldmaking performances produce these vantage points by slicing into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere” (1999: 196). In other words, worldmaking/disidentificatory performances have the potential to transport both performers and spectators to a vantage point where social change and radical politics are imagined/imaginable, a vantage point that may even serve as a point of departure for critique and transformation. This potential for critique and transformation was the first linchpin of queer performances that led to this thesis’ investigation of whether and how the Dzi/queer performances might serve as a point of departure for critiquing the rhetoric of LGBT human rights and for material, extralegal social transformation.

In his reflections on the negotiations between identification, desire, and ideology, Muñoz elaborates on the concept/strategy of disidentification by reworking the Althusserian
scene of interpellation and the subject’s responses. Taking the lead of French linguist Michel Pechêux, this scene is reimagined beyond the symmetrical response of either turning towards the call (identification/assimilation) or away from/against it (counteridentification/anti-assimilation). The third mode of engaging with dominant ideology is disentification: neither strict assimilation nor opposition but a “working on and against” that “tries to transform a cultural logic from within” (Muñoz 1999: 11). Pre-empting charges of it forestalling political action, or even of it being a sidestepping from politics, Muñoz states that disidentification is based on an anti-assimilationist rhetoric but seeks to reckon with Foucauldian insights about the paradox of power. More precisely, that power is not homogenous or centralised and that subjects are not “below” or “outside” power but formed within/through/by power relations, so that power is both the target of and pre-condition for resistance. A survival strategy and mode of queer performance, disidentification means to hold on to objects while seeking to invest them with new energies and lives, to recycle and reshape hegemonic culture on/against its own terms, to imagine and enact new counterpublics and modes of sociality. This working from within and against the majoritarian culture by inaugurating new forms of counterpublicity and sociality was the second linchpin that led to this thesis’ concern with the ways that queer performances—such as the Dzi Croquettes and their social contagion—might ventilate alternative notions (as well as ethical-political implications) of being with others in opposition to the atomised, defensive subject of LGBT human rights.

One of the cultural interventions Muñoz examines is that of activist Pedro Zamora’s in the 1993 season of MTV’s reality series Real Worlds. If MTV used him as a token for the show—a handsome and young Cuban unashamed about being gay and HIV-positive—Zamora used MTV even more. He became the show’s protagonist and ignited nationwide debates about homosexuality and HIV through his activism in life and untimely death. Remarkably, when the prospective of two men kissing on the television was barely imaginable, Zamora and his also HIV-positive partner Sean shared cuddles and kisses as their marriage was broadcast by MTV. Muñoz alerts that to understand Zamora’s interventions, indeed to understand how Zamora’s “performances function as counterpublicity,” one needs to imagine the impact that they might have on queers with
limited or no access to queer cultures (1999: 154). At a time when the HIV health crisis and homosexuality were relegated to the private realm, Zamora turned them into public spectacles. Zamora’s’ brownness and Sean’s blackness made the televisual broadcasting of their bonding/marriage even more symbolic considering that same-sex marriage was illegal and that interracial marriage had been declared legal by a U.S. Supreme Court only a couple of decades before. Zamora’s televisual performance helps Muñoz outline “an ethic of the minoritarian self,” inspired by a Foucauldian ethics of the self but reworked from the margins (1999: 145). Within this framework, the minoritarian subject’s care of/work on the self is meant “to veer away from models of the self that correlate with socially prescribed identity narratives,” a disidentificatory rejection that is not simply “an individualistic rebellion” (ibid.) Illustration to this point is found in a friend’s toast to Zamora and Sean’s ceremony:

It gives me a lot of pleasure and I see it as a real pleasure to speak on behalf of Sean and Pedro and to them. In your love you remind us that life is about now and love is about being there for one another. It is with real bravery that you open your hearts to each other and I think it’s with real hope that you promise your lives to each another. We stand with you defiantly and bravely and with real hope. To the adorable couple. (Muñoz 1999: 158)

The toast is deemed significant because it shows how the couple’s “being for themselves (‘to each other’) is, simultaneously, a being for others (‘We stand with you’)” (ibid.). Zamora’s representational and political interventions, that is, his public performance of a minoritarian ethics of the self, went beyond an individual contestation of dominant ideology but, importantly, led to the possibility of new counterpublics by wedging space for new formations within the social.

Taking up the theoretical tools above, Chapter Six further builds on the world-making and theory-making powers of the Dzi Croquettes as well as of the counterpublics enabled as/in the aftermath of their performance—their ‘being for themselves’ that functioned as a ‘being for others’, others who were rapidly infected by their way of being.
The powers of the Dzi/queer performances function in this thesis as both a foil to critique neoliberal legalism and a point of departure to imagine what an approach of disorientation/disidentification towards LGBT rights may look like or open up. As argued above, if orientation involves operations of background-relegation and clearance/arrival of objects, what kinds of objects or backgrounds are cleared (or do not even ‘arrive’) through or because of our orientation towards/colonisation by this particular model of LGBT rights? And what might disorientation, via queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes, mean or open up for queer politics with(out) the law?

Before going on to describe and examine the Dzi Croquettes in Chapters Four and Five, the upcoming chapter dwells on the methodological framework and methods deployed in the empirical and theoretical endeavours to answer, in Chapter Six, the remaining research questions of this thesis: What might the notion of legal decentring open up or entail for queer politics? How may queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes help complement and expose the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? And what potential alternatives for radical social change are offered thereby?
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In order to answer this thesis’ remaining overarching questions, besides the literature review and theoretical framework provided in the preceding chapter, I also deployed what Section 1.2. introduced as a ‘scavenger’ methodology (Halberstam 1998). The relevance, in fact necessity, of this methodology becomes manifest in light of the elusive and make-shift nature of queer archives described in that same section following Muñoz (1996). The empirical work described and justified below function, on one hand, as a means of looking for and drawing from queer archives as well as building on them, for instance through my oral history interviews. On the other hand, this empirical work supports a conceptual point, that is, the investigation of the Dzi Croquettes aims at supporting theoretical insights into/against the ontopolitical limitations shown in Section 2.2. as well as into the potentials of decentring the law in our fight for queer justice and social change. In light of this, as part of this thesis’ scavenger methodology I looked for traces of the Dzi Croquettes phenomenon beyond the conventional canon. These alternative sites varied between online and physical, between visual and aural: from a short series of Instagram lives, YouTube videos and interviews, blog entries, and web miscellanea to public archives in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as well oral history interviews.

A survey of the recent and growing body of scholarship on the Dzi Croquettes reveals a certain (over)reliance on two canonical texts. This expanding but still relatively small body of work on the Dzi Croquettes has tended to largely focus on the group itself but not as much on the Dzi movement, a gap that this thesis seeks to address. Besides this focus on the Dzi movement, the conduction of archival and oral history research also aimed at addressing a criticism of the contemporary production of knowledge on the Croquettes posed by Martins Freitas (2016): the risk of stymying new readings for the general over-reliance on the “holy duo”, that is, the Dzi Croquettes 2009 homonymous documentary (directed by Tatiana Issa and Raphael Alvarez) and Rosemary Lobert’s 2010 book based on her three-year-ethnography with/on the Croquettes in the 1970s. While these two sources are undeniably necessary for any researcher engaging with
the Dzi Croquettes, the new set of data generated and presented in this thesis through archival and oral history research seeks to complement the existing literature by examining their social, political, and affective impact on the broader public.

I would posit that the methodological framework hereof is ‘queer’ in two salient aspects. First, by interweaving ‘high’ and ‘low’ theory. I take inspiration from Jack Halberstam (2011: 2), who proposes a darting “back and forth between high and low culture, high and low theory… in order to push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing.” Second, by providing a ‘queer’ juxtaposition between the law and performances to think through issues of queer politics, social justice, non-sovereign freedom, as well as critical roles of and approaches to the law. The chapter begins with an overview of my engagements with public, private, and community, as well as online, Brazilian archives searching for specks and ephemera of the Dzi Croquettes’ contagious performances and social reverberation. Next, we dwell on the purposes, sampling method, participants, settings, and data analysis regarding the oral history interviews conducted with thirteen people, including surviving Dzi members and participants of the broader Dzi movement. To conclude, I offer a brief theoretical and then a personal account regarding the need for self-reflexive thoughts on my own positionality as well as the ethical issues encountered during the process of reaching out and speaking to other, queer, older people.

3.1. Archival Research and Findings

How, if at all, are the lives, memories, histories, and experiences of sexual and gender minorities preserved and disseminated in Brazil? In which archives could I expect to find any information on the Dzi Croquettes? These two questions were the starting point of my archival research. Two pioneering although still incipient initiatives I found in São Paulo, Brazil, were the state-funded Diversity Museum and the community-led Acervo Bajubá created in the early 2010s. Many of the findings on the Croquettes, especially the newspaper entries cited herein, came from the main public archives of São Paulo.
and Rio de Janeiro. Against my initial expectations of constant in-person visits, many of these archives had been partly or mostly digitised. The Brazilian National Library’s online database, for instance, had an impressive array of newspapers, periodicals, and magazines available online. Two of the country’s most traditional newspapers, O Estado de São Paulo and Folha de São Paulo, also had decades of publication digitised and organised in a sleek database.

Other websites such as that of the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo, or of the National Arts Foundation and the National Archive in Rio de Janeiro, made clear that their entry into the digital world was only partial, indicating the presence of possible archival entries without showing the actual content. I therefore went to these archives in person, and archivists were in general very kind. They helped me to arrive at category labels they thought most appropriate and even pointed me towards other possible directions when I found little or nothing on the Croquettes (or on individual members, as was sometimes the case in archival entries). I also used Rosemary Lobert’s newspaper and magazine references as a guide in my search through non-digitised print media and TV programmes. The newspaper entries, critics reviews, and performance scripts of the Dzi Croquettes and Dzi Croquetas included or referenced in this thesis, unless when stated otherwise, were found during my engagements with online/physical as well as public, private, and community archives. I have chosen to reference these archival findings through footnotes rather than in-text citation to signal to the reader that the corresponding references are found not in the bibliography but in Annex II, which lists the online and physical archives I visited.

The bulk of the material I encountered in these institutional archives—which will be woven into Chapters 4 and 5—comprised print media, some photographs, and a few performance scripts at the National Archives and the Brazilian Society of Theatre Authors (SBAT). This archival research, however, is by no means exhaustive (as though there were such a thing). I did not, for instance, visit the archives of television

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3 The all-female counterpart of the Dzi Croquettes, as considered in greater detail in the following chapters.
networks such as *Rede Globo*, Brazil’s leading and one of the world’s largest broadcasters. Despite claiming that the research was strictly academic, non-commercial, and in the public interest, I failed to convince them of waiving the rather prohibitive fees to access their archives. *Rede Globo* charged R$500.00 for a mere *bullet point list* of their archival material on the Dzi Croquettes. I was told that it was not possible to know whether there was actually anything before paying this amount and then learning there was nothing. In case archival material existed, they charged another R$200.00 per archival entry in case the person (and I obviously) would want to see it. At *TV Cultura*, while access was free and easily granted, I did not find the TV programme mentioned by Lobert. At others, like *Rede Bandeirantes*, despite a series of e-mails and phone calls, I failed to get concrete information on (or access to) the Croquettes’ participation in the TV programme *Band 13*, as I was told by a participant who was this programme’s host and interviewed the Croquettes in 1973.

In one of my oral history interviews, more on which comes in the following section, the Dzi Bayard told me that he has been gathering material on the Croquettes over the past decades. As he customarily does with other people researching the Dzi Croquettes who contact him, he offered to open his private archive to me. He proposed, and I agreed with, the amount of R$500.00 for his time and effort in gathering and preserving this material over so many years. While all the oral history interviews were conducted online, for this occasion we met at his house in Rio de Janeiro following all the pandemic protocols and measures in place. I emailed my supervisors before and after I met Bayard to give them a summary of the meeting and clear any concerns. As in the online interview, an endless stream of memories and reflections just seemed to pour out of Bayard’s mouth. We spent five hours in total in his flat, me with the recorder and a notebook listening attentively, him describing the myriads of pictures, newspaper clippings, magazines, and ephemera as we went through each. It felt surreal after so many years of doctoral research to finally meet him and see all that material, to be in the presence of a Dzi Croquette with so much passion for remembering and sharing that period with me. Yet, I never felt star struck because Bayard welcomed me so
warmly from the first time I contacted him until our actual meeting on a summery December afternoon in Rio de Janeiro.

3.2. Oral History Interviews

The in-depth, oral history interviews were approached as a ‘learning situation’ (Portelli 1991: x), that is, a project of collaborative nature. In this mutual project, the researcher provides the time and space for the narrator’s recollections and directs the interview with questions, which may create new understandings and reflections for both researcher and narrator. Knowledge is thus co-produced in/through the interaction between the narrator and the active listener rather than objectively extracted from the interviewee. This is all the more relevant if we consider that recollecting is not about retrieving pre-arranged data in a passive repository but, as Thomson (2012) expounds, a process of creation and reconstruction at once social, neurological, and psychological. Both an object and subject of oral history scholarship and practice, memory and remembering have attracted as much criticism as enthusiasm for their open embrace of partiality and subjectivity. Memories may be performed differently to particular audiences, whose divergent expectations shape how narrators recreate and reconsolidate past experiences. Oral history interviews thus are more akin to performance and storytelling than to mirror images of times gone by, since meanings are not only recalled but indeed (re)made in the act of recalling (Thomson 2012). That said, the methodology to engage with queer oral histories begins with an agreement between a narrator and a researcher to record memories of queer genders, sexualities, and desires. If there is not a narrator to claim that sexual space of queer historical being and its retelling, and a queer researcher to hear, record, and draw out yet more details, desire, and meaning from it, no queer oral history is possible. (Boyd & Ramírez 2012: 1)

There is an intergenerational aspect that is both interesting and challenging in this project. As the majority of participants were in their 70s, listening to their narratives, experiences, and trajectories was an opportunity to document, process, and analyse the
historical knowledges of a previous generation of queers (Cane 2019), and tease out what provocation and resonance they bring to the present. Since one overall purpose of this project is to unpack the Dzi performances’ subjective and agentic repercussions on ties—as explained in the upcoming ‘purpose’ section—the choice of an oral history methodology allows the engagement with oral sources beyond archives or written texts. According to Alessandro Portelli (1998: 67), more than any other source, oral sources allow the historian to investigate “the unique and precious element” of the speaker’s (and possibly a group’s) subjectivity, “not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.” Luisa Passerini argues that oral sources derive from and refer to the sphere of ‘subjectivity’, it being

a term sufficiently elastic to include both the aspects of spontaneous subjective being (soggettivita irriflessa)\(^4\) contained and represented by attitude, behaviour and language, as well as other forms of awareness (consapevolezza) such as the sense of identity, consciousness of oneself, and more considered forms of intellectual activity. The importance of this term, moreover, is that it embraces not only the epistemological dimension but also that concerned with the nature and significance of the political. (Passerini 1998: 54)

The findings and analysis of the data generated through interviews with thirteen participants are included primarily in Chapters Four and Five; below I detail the practical details as well as some ethical considerations regarding the purpose, sampling, participants, interviews, and data analysis in the conduction of this oral history project.

**Purpose**

The more I got to learn about the Dzi Croquettes over the years, I felt increasingly intrigued about the Dzi contagion, the way their performances allured and changed so many people, the way that their way of being and philosophy of life spread to/through

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\(^4\) Italian terms between parentheses are included in the original quote.
others almost surreptitiously without being noticed, at first, by censors. The more I read the critique from feminist, queer, critical race, and trans scholars/activists, the clearer I grasped the shortcomings of liberal myths of the self-bounded individual and of the intrusive, encroaching other. I thus had an intuition, which I sought to develop and elaborate on via literature and the oral history interviews, that queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes may and do work as political strategies and sites where these myths and limitations could come under relief and possibly be challenged, perhaps reconceptualised. To guide my theoretical and oral history endeavours here, I drew from and built on two metaphors coined by Lobert (2010) in her 1970s ethnography on the Dzi Croquettes to encapsulate spectators’ general reactions in the aftermath of the Dzi performances: magnetism and disorientation. Chapter Five returns to this point to explain in what ways my usage of the metaphors converges and differs from Lobert, and to expound on how these metaphors help us unpack the Dzi performances’ worldmaking powers.

With the conduction of these oral history interviews, I sought to generate a richer description and analysis of the counterpublicity enacted by the Dzi performances as well as their repercussions on spectators’ subjectivities and personal trajectories, the directions and objects toward which participants (were) turned and the meanings derived in/as the aftermath of the Croquettes’ disorienting performances. Therefore, my overarching interest in reaching out to people who witnessed and participated in the Dzi Croquettes phenomenon was twofold. On one hand, I wanted to understand how and why people felt such a magnetic connection with and attraction to the Croquettes, what about them seduced and ‘infected’ so many people; an infection/contagion that I believed might counterpoint the liberal myth of the self-bounded individual. On the other hand, to better understand the so-called Dzi behavioural/social revolution—often attributed to the Croquettes but not as often described or examined in depth. This second interest had to do with an assumption I had prior to fieldwork, which I wanted to test and develop through the oral history interviews. Namely, that the worldmaking powers of the Dzi performances were embodied in and disseminated by the effervescent cluster expanding around them. In other words, that the Dzi Croquettes
rapidly growing entourage was an instantiation of their performances’ counterpublics, a concept introduced in Section 2.3. And since the constitution of this entourage/counterpublics was intrinsically tied to performances’ emotional/phenomenological reverberations on spectators, I wanted to understand how the affects generated in/through the Dzi performances enabled the formation and dissemination of new modes of sociality.

I thus sought to ‘translate’ my theoretical concerns into practical, oral history questions. The backdrop of my oral history interviews was this thesis’ research questions on how the Croquettes can help expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of LGBT rights critiqued in Section 2.2, and on which potential alternatives for radical social transformation they may offer. These potentials, I believed, would help foreground why we should decentre law from our political repertoire and look at extralegal sites/strategies beyond/besides the law. Having interviewed both Dzi performers and participants in the Dzi movement more broadly, I had to adapt my questions accordingly. For instance, the four Dzi Croquettes could not offer first-hand recollections of the Dzi performances’ impact on spectators because, as they observed, their on-stage perception was rather limited. If they could see a growing number of people wearing Dziesque garments and make-up, the less visible influence they had on spectators only became clear when/if spectators, either backstage or after performances, expressed how much the Dzi Croquettes had influenced/changed them. Claudio Tovar was a curious exception, as he went from being an audience member/admirer to joining the Dzi Croquettes.

The Dzi Croquettas whom I interviewed seemed to be in an ambivalent position. While the majority of Croquettas I spoke to were first in the position of Dzi spectators, eventually they too became performers and were thus able to share recollections both from on- and offstage. Because my interest was in the broader Dzi movement, I wanted to interview the Croquettas to understand how the all-male group unsurprisingly popular among male homosexuals resonated so deeply as well with (those) women. Furthermore, I was curious about why a group/family professing on stage that there was
no such thing as sex or gender had separate all-male and all-female shows. In interviewing both Croquettes and Croquettas, I sought to unpack potential gendered nuances within the Dzi family and also perhaps between Dzi performers and the audience. In other words, another purpose of talking to/about the Dzi Croquettes and Croquettas in my interviews was to understand the stark difference in how the public and critics received them. Chapter Five looks at the Croquettas’ emergence and trajectory to question whether performances’ reception and generative potentials, as well as the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected, take place despite or because of their sociohistorical contexts as well as power and gender relations.

**Sampling**

In my endeavour to reach people who had been part of and witnesses to the Dzi Croquettes movement in the 1970s, my selected sampling method followed a purposive, snowballing approach. Snowballing proved to be the most suitable approach for the queer methodology I crafted for this thesis as it easily allowed me to reach a specific niche of people, particularly in the context of an underground/countercultural movement that took place several decades ago. The limitation of snowballing is that it likely restricted the diversity of participants, given that sampling tended to be constrained to small circles of friends and acquaintances, and thus the data generated may not be generalisable. The method was purposive because I was looking for specific people who had been first-hand witnesses of/participants in the Dzi movement. I relied less on my judgment and more on those of the participants, since I asked them to point me to people who would be willing to talk about their participation in and knowledge of the Dzi movement. Given the qualitative nature of this research project, the focus of the oral history interviews was the generation of a “thick description, analysis, and interpretation of people’s lives through probing the past in order to understand the present.” (Janesick 2007: 111).

As I asked strangers to share intimate memories and experiences with me, upon the very first contact with potential participants I sent them a pre-recorded short video
where I introduced myself and the research. I spent weeks trying to record this video and not let my self-consciousness get in the way. Over time, I reflected that my initial posture, tone, and shirt were probably too formal for the video. I put on a flamboyant floral shirt and sat in a more relaxed ambiance, concerned with being concise, clear, and friendly rather than saying all words according to the script. After all, I had about five minutes on camera and I did not want to come across as an aloof legal researcher. I wanted them to feel my pleasure of researching the Croquettes and my anticipation in interviewing them, to feel interested enough to want to talk to me. In addition to this YouTube video, I provided all participants with an information letter and consent form, so they could arrive at an informed decision. These forms included more detailed written information on my purposes, their rights as participants, how the data would be stored and processed, and the interview to be recorded and transcribed. Participants had the option to choose to remain anonymous or have contributions attributed to their own names. I e-mailed these forms to all participants and asked if they were happy to print them out, fill them in, and send me a picture of the completed consent form. I also offered to print these forms myself and mail physical copies to participants if they so preferred.

Since I had no e-mail address or telephone number of any potential participants, I first reached out to the three Dzi Croquettes I found and wrote to on Instagram—Claudio Tovar, Ciro Barcelos, and Bayard Tonelli. After clarifying that my research had no audiovisual or commercial but strictly academic purposes, the three agreed to speak to me and snowballing ensued. At the end of the interview, I explained my snowballing method and asked them to point me to however many people they could think of. Some participants gave me the contact details of other potential interviewees straight away, but the majority preferred to double-check with them first. On average, I snowballed two or three further contacts from each participant. A few participants either gave me no suggestions (in which case I reminded them once but did not insist more) or pointed me towards people I had already contacted. In the event of duplicate suggestions, I asked participants to kindly let me know if they eventually thought of alternatives. Duplicates became increasingly more common over time, and the point of sampling saturation was
reached when snowballing led to nowhere but the people I had already contacted or those who had not replied.

**Participants**

Annex I to this thesis provides two tables that will hopefully help the reader navigate Chapters Four and Five. The first table indicates the thirteen members of the Dzi Croquettes classic formation while the second, of particular interest to this section, includes coincidentally the same number of people: the thirteen participants I interviewed for my oral history interviews, and a short biography of each. Participants had the option in the consent form to remain partly or fully anonymous or to have their contributions attributed to themselves, a piece of information I also included in the information letter and introductory video sent to them before the interviews. Only one participant chose to remain anonymous, and therefore I have sought to remove any identifying features from this participant’s quotes included herein. The biographical information on each participant comes mostly from what they shared with me when introducing themselves and at times from generally available information, as in the case of the Dzi Croquettes. There were about five people I did not manage to get hold of, be it due to their busy schedules or lack of response. In the latter case, my general approach was to contact them once more to try my luck. I did not ask explicitly about participants’ age, gender, race, or sexual orientation, yet some participants touched on these topics spontaneously.

The age group of participants varied from late 60s to early 70s, and out of these 13 participants (excluding the anonymous one), seven were men and five were women. Of the men, four were surviving Dzi Croquettes performers and the other three self-identified as homosexuals, out of whom two were relatively close friends with the Croquettes and another clearly identified as a *tiete* (fans). Of the women, four were members of the Dzi Croquettas and one was a type of Dzi (god)mother. While some had started as members of their audience and others had always been friends with them, eventually all women became very close to the Dzi Croquettes. I was curious
about this notion of proximity or distance to understand how participants positioned themselves in relation to the Dzi Croquettes, to what extent the Dzi Croquettes’ world was more or less (un)usual to participants. Although a relatively low number, the viewpoint of two participants who saw them as admirers/outiders offered an interesting contrast to those who were friends/insiders. Section 5.3 returns to this notion of proximity/distance and how it informed participants’ identification with the Dzi Croquettes.

The majority already were at the time, or have become since then, relatively well-known dancers, artists, journalists, and intellectuals. They boasted an eloquence and casualness that betrayed that they had been interviewed and spoken about the Dzi Croquettes many times before. For a couple of participants, it was visible that interviews or eloquent recollections were not second nature. Unprompted, two participants identified as white and one as Black. That the majority was part of urban, intellectual, and artistic circles in the early 1970s suggests an affiliation to a middle class, although only two participants explicitly described their background in these terms. Unsurprising due to the snowballing method chosen, a few participants belonged, back in the 1970s, to the same circle of friends in a medium-sized town on São Paulo’s outskirts. The road trips they did together almost on a weekly basis seemed proof of their love and admiration to see the Croquettes perform. A common assertion among these participants was a shared feeling back then about that town being “too small” for them, that others there were too close-minded. Yet, they all recalled a certain sense of pleasure or thrill from drawing stares or even getting kicked out of venues. Known as the town’s “black sheep,” as many of them put it, commuting to São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro seemed an opportunity to get lost, rather than stand out, in the crowd.

**Interviews**

The original plan was to conduct in-loco interviews with participants, whom I expected to be located mostly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent ethical/practical readjustments of interviewing elder
people, all interviews ended up taking place over the Internet in order to safeguard participants’ and my safety. This shift from in-person to online interviews had mixed benefits. As much as I looked forward to being in the same room with participants, in hindsight I had not anticipated all the logistics involved in physically reaching participants. About half of them did not live in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro but in the outer skirts of these cities, so the extra commute and accommodation would have compounded the projects’ financial and practical aspects. If online audio/video calls were more convenient in this sense, their downside was that the photo-elicitation originally planned—using either participants’ pictures or those I would have selected beforehand—ended up being unfeasible. The application chosen gave no option to share slides or visual material, and often participants and I could just hear each other. Not seeing each other, or seeing but not being in the same space, somewhat affected the rapport I hoped to build with participants. Firstly, connection issues and lag between emission and reception meant that participants and I would sometimes speak over each other and awkwardly apologise before negotiating who should continue speaking. While I can hardly say that the online approach made for “cold” interview(ee)s, I surmise that sharing the same physical space, and particularly the moment of photo elicitation, would have contributed to the rapport and trust as well as to our “immersion” in times gone by.

Given my initial concerns that participants would have busy schedules and/or struggle with accessing applications like Microsoft Teams or Zoom, which I judged unusual for Brazilians in their late 60s to early and mid-70s, I gave participants the option to choose where and how they would like interviews to take place: their preferred application, time, and date. The overwhelming majority of participants chose WhatsApp, mostly video but some audio-only calls. Although the consent and information letters informed so, I started each interview by double-checking if they were happy for me to record our conversation. Putting our conversation on my mobile’s speakerphone, I then used my laptop to record the interviews. The audio files were sent to a professional transcriber under a specific non-disclosure agreement to ensure that such professional would treat the data with the same security and confidentiality standards as those required from me under the university’s ethical clearance guidelines, undertaking to destroy all material
after the delivery of transcriptions. The aid of a professional transcriber was rather convenient as I expected this stage to be considerably time consuming and was already a few months behind schedule due to the readjustments and new ethics clearance arising from the pandemic. Transcription was not the only opportunity to get closer to the data. I still had to double-check each written transcription against the original audio file and then analyse and translate interviews into English myself, since all interviews were conducted in Brazilian Portuguese. In the future, I hope and wish to translate this thesis, or parts of it, into Portuguese in order to make it more accessible in Brazil and also to participants and other researchers. I hope to do these translations myself in the future, either in a post-doctorate scenario or on my own initiative.

The interviews took place between November 2020 and March 2021, with an estimated six-week break due to festivities and holidays. Notes about each interview—such as ambiance, date, interactions, and reflections—were recorded in a journal after each interview. The journal also helped me assess the methods and techniques used in the project and keep track of my thought process, fundamental to the stages of analysis and reporting (Janesick 2014). As a general guideline, I told participants they might expect our conversation to last for about 60 to 90 minutes. I made clear to participants that they should take their time and not worry about mine, whether that meant slightly shortening interviews to fit into their schedule or else allowing them to take however long they liked. I sought to follow the own rhythm of each participant—if they seem a bit more reserved and speak slowly, or if they appear more extroverted and talkative, I ensured that my rhythm and tone matched theirs. This also meant allowing time for pauses and reflections without interrupting or rushing them to move on to the next point. The shortest interview lasted for exactly 60 minutes, and nine out of thirteen interviews lasted for no longer than 90 minutes. Three exceeded the estimated maximum time, with the longest two lasting for 120 and 180 minutes. Prior to the first interview, I prepared a general interview guide which was slightly reworked throughout the process based on predecessor answers and reactions. The general guide for the semi-structured interviews was designed around potential themes and assumptions I had gathered from the existing literature, which also informed this thesis' overarching
questions on the Croquettes. I was attentive to let questions change over time based on
the answers of previous participants and to let them guide the course of the interview,
not my presuppositions.

With a semi-structured framework, I expected to give interviews a certain direction while
allowing for participants’ diversion. I made an effort to pose open-ended questions so
that narrators could choose the direction that they wanted to follow. This was to ensure
that topics or directions previously unknown or deemed irrelevant were not excluded by
a rigid structure (Yow 2005: 39). Throughout the interview, more direct questions were
helpful to probe and follow up on points raised by narrators or to introduce topics
hitherto unmentioned. It is important to find a balance between unstructured and more
direct questions, allowing participants the freedom to cover a wide broad of topics
according to their own will but also providing relative focus and direction so that key
elements are not left out. In cases where I had specific relevant information about a
participant—such as Lu Grimaldi’s controversial performance of a female, topless Jesus
Christ (Lidoka 2012) or Claudio Tovar’s interactions with government censors (Dzi
Croquettes 2009)—I would fit those in to show prior research and thus seek to gain their
sympathy/trust. I reassured participants about the value of their memories and
experiences by emphasising that my interest was in participants’ involvement and lived
experiences in the Dzi movement. As I read before and became acutely aware during
the oral history interviews, they require critical awareness of ways of asking and
emphasises the request for illustration and examples of the narrator’s points, so I
probed and followed up on matters or raised missing ones after participants paused and
signalled it was my turn to speak. At the end of each answer, I allowed a moment of
silence before posing the next question in case they had more to add. Arguably we
should go as far as to ‘shed’ our agendas during oral history interviews, so that the
process of analysis is “suspended or at least subordinated in the process of listening”
(Anderson & Jack 1998: 161). This is to prevent an academic search for generalisations
from occluding the researchers’ presence in and attention to the interview itself.
While the trajectory and content of each interview varied somewhat according to the interactions and responses, it is possible to outline a general structure. I began interviews by thanking participants for their contribution to the project and for welcoming me into their “home,” capturing their oral consent to being recorded and providing a moment to clarify any queries. My opening question concerned participants’ youth in the late 1960s and early 1970s: their background, dreams, aspirations, passions, and struggles. I then enquired about their first encounter with the Dzi Croquettes, which some experienced as outsiders and others as insiders, when the group was still being formed. I sought to elicit their first impressions and sensations, beginning to build on the notion of magnetism by asking what seduced, what pulled them towards the Croquettes, and why the group found such resonance at the time (or, for performers, what they believed drew and attracted so many people into their orbit). At this stage, many recounted briefly how they developed relationships and interacted with the Croquettes over time. I then referred to the Dzi philosophy of life as “dangerously contagious” and asked them to summarise in a few points what they thought were this philosophy’s main principles, at which occasion some participants would also comment on the tropes of danger or contagion. Because the metaphor of disorientation, central to this thesis, is closely linked to a notion of transformation and change, I proceeded to follow up on participants’ references to the transformative changes catalysed by the Dzi (to themselves, to others around them, and to the social world more broadly).

Since this transformation was usually linked to transgressing social norms and familial expectations, at this point I was curious to learn how they navigated public spaces or dealt with potential challenges and hostilities. After asking how they believed that the Dzi influenced themselves and/or others, I went a bit further into the topic of the Dzi Croquettes movement by focusing on the Dzi Croquettas. I asked participants what they knew about the all-female group. Some had little or very vague recollections, whereas others had been close witnesses/participants. Nearing the end of our conversations, my closing questions shifted the interview gaze from then to now, inviting participants’ reflections on why the Dzi Croquettes continue to captivate younger generations and, in hindsight, what that particular moment/movement represented in their life story. At last,
we swapped roles and they had the chance to ask me any question. The majority wanted to know why I was doing this research, where my interest in the Dzi came from. Virtually all congratulated me for researching and contributing to the Dzi memory and legacy, showing particular excitement about the acceptance and funding of such a project by a university in Scotland. Considering that the analysis of the data is made in a foreign language different from that of our interviews, I did not think sharing analytical material with them would be a productive way to engage with participants in a post-interview setting. Rather than sending them material in a foreign language, upon request I sent participants a copy of the audio recording in case they wanted to keep a record thereof and/or make any amendments.

Data Analysis

Because the transcription was done by a third party, I made sure to read transcripts against the audio recording as soon as I received them. This was a way of getting closer to the data as well as checking transcripts’ accuracy—as reasonably as one may expect the turning of orality into written text not to change the object under transformation, given that “by abolishing these [vocal] traits, we flatten the emotional content of speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document” (Portelli 1998: 66). I asked the transcriber to include expressive emotional responses or interactions, but by no means did or could this render the transcript equivalent to the oral source. I sought to alternate the reading of past transcripts and the conducting of new interviews as much as possible, so that when speaking to a new participant I could have a better sense of how their recollections might stand in relation to those of past narrators. As Bryman (2012) advises, if practical, the stage of data generation should be intertwined with its transcription and analysis, so that relevant emerging patterns may shape the collection of further data. After the transcription of all thirteen interviews I began a thematic analysis by repeatedly reading and coding the data generated, first using the printed transcripts and a pen, and then a more in-depth examination using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Through a process of
iterative coding and clustering, which allowed me to rework and expand codes, a few patterns and themes stood out.

In this sense, the analysis was inductive as it reduced the extensive data into condensed findings organised by four thematic categories in Chapter Five. My aim was not just to find similar or recurrent data but also those that jarred against or diverged from others. Because the findings are derived from the raw data but also from my assumptions and metaphors derived from the literature, that is, because my research agenda and interview guide played a role in what kind of data was generated in the first place, the analysis may be said to be partly deductive too from this perspective (Thomas 2006). The Dzi audience, the first thematic category analysed in Chapter Five, emerged out of both my curiosity about who had (cultural and material) access to the Dzi Croquettes and participants’ unprompted and almost unanimous references to (other) spectators. Similarly, the second category on the Dzi Croquettas was almost “inevitable” in an account of the Dzi movement. Therefore, while the Croquettas are divided as a separate section partly because I posed specific questions about them, I would have to do so anyway even had I not included them in my interview guide. Far from an addendum to the Dzi history, virtually all participants treated the Croquettas like a distinct and central chapter. In fact, some Croquettas were among the very first snowballing suggestions.

The third and fourth themes of Chapter Five revolve around the metaphors of, respectively, magnetism and disorientation drawn from Lobert (2010) and extended via this thesis’ oral history interviews and theoretical framework. Besides “magnetic”, the title of the third subsection contains a word mentioned by virtually all participants: identification. Here, to analyse the political-affective force of their performances, with participants I trace the fluxes of identification from performers/performance to spectators and vice-versa as well as among spectators before, during, and after each performance. The fourth and final subsection looks at the notion of disorientation in and as the aftermath of the Dzi performances. Section 5.4 builds on the affective reverberations of the Dzi performances to ask primarily not what this Dziorientation was but what it did. I
briefly address a terminological point (and preference) concerning ‘freedom’ and (over) ‘liberation’ and move on to investigate the metaphors of “opening up” used by participants to capture this sense of freedom inaugurated/encouraged by the performances. I end the section by warning the reader against too romantic a notion of transgression and by examining in what ways the “behind,” the “internal,” and the “external” of the subject of transgression/freedom at once enables and limits the pursuing thereof.

3.3 Self-Reflexive and Ethical Considerations

Having outlined above the practical aspects of my research, I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my positionality as a researcher as well as on the ethics of doing research with/on (queer) older people. Before, let me explain why such an endeavour is desirable or indeed necessary in a thesis of this nature. My engagements with older people through oral history interviews sought to produce a thick description of their emotional and personal investments in, as well as reverberations of, the Dzi performances: how and why people felt ‘liberated’ through/after them, how they interpreted the Dzi philosophy and aesthetics, and in which (new) directions they were turned. I conceived of this endeavour as a queer oral history not necessarily because all participants are/identify with as ‘queer’. Indeed, the term was cited explicitly only by one participant, given that it remains relatively unknown outside academic and activist circles in Brazil. As stated earlier in the introduction of this chapter, I sought to create a dialogue between this thesis’ theoretical and methodological frameworks crafted to address its overarching questions. Put otherwise, this led to an effort to think of a methodological framework informed by critical insights from feminist, queer, critical race, and post-/decolonial (anthropological) literature on doing fieldwork with/alongside others.

As such, reflecting on self-positionality is not self-indulgence but rather a reckoning with the fact that the figure of the detached, distant observer/academic who is able to objectively know, capture, and represent reality through ‘his’ aerial, detached view (Haraway 1988; Grosfoguel 2011) has been under intense critique at least since the late
1980s “and was central to what was dubbed the *crisis in representation* in anthropology” (Jackman 2010: 115; emphasis in original). Relinquishing pretensions to full objectivity or neutrality does not mean a lack of academic rigour or commitment, but rather that the figure of the researcher ought to come to the fore as an acknowledgment of the politics of knowledge production, of the subjective and embodied limits thereof as well as the of intersubjective and ethical reflections raised during this process. As such, I appear as a central rather than invisible actor in the production and interpretation of the data generated through/with my participants. It is in this vein that I offer the reflexive notes below, since “queer reflexivity offers a means of theoretical manoeuvring by exploring the connection between ontology and epistemology”, which “offers the possibility of articulating the relationships between researcher/writer and the texts we produce, the possibilities of knowing and the worlds we construct in our writing” (Rooke 2010: 35).

In this vein, I am a 1990s kid from a working-class and relatively violent neighbourhood in São Paulo, Brazil. I felt there was something wrong or different with me from a very early age but could not elaborate further until I was about 17. I was bullied at school for many years for being an awkward and nerdy kid, extremely thin, and not as masculine as I was supposed to be (or as others expected). For several years I tried my best to be invisible, not be a problem, not draw any attention. I have very few memories of my teenage years, which I assume is due to the isolation and depression of those years. What I do remember is that I found refuge in books. I read everything I could get my hands on: the Japanese manga that I bought using all my monthly allowance plus spare coins earned after helping relatives with house chores, the textbooks my mum used at work as an English teacher (from whom I inherited the passion for the English language). Despite struggling with the world in many ways, I always remained deeply curious. Even if I was very shy or barely spoke much, behind my deadpan expression I felt rage and a desire for rebellion.

When I was 17, my literature teacher, an openly gay man whom I secretly desired, spoke about his passion for Hilda Hilst, a ‘damned’ Brazilian writer with a penchant for controversial topics and underdog figures. I went to the bookshop and spent all my
savings on five or six of her books, which I devoured in about two weeks. After laughing, crying, and even vomiting, her books somehow led me to the formulation and acceptance of, even pride in, my failure to be straight/heterosexual. I nowadays identify as a queer/gay cisgender man, a viado or bicha. I am also culturally and economically middle class in Brazil (less so in the United Kingdom where I went to pursue this doctorate). My parents’ financial condition improved significantly from the mid-2000s when the Labour Party’s candidate, President Lula, was elected and governed the country for eight years. I am the only person in my family to have attended a public university, never mind a foreign one. The five years I spent at the University of São Paulo’s Law School were a watershed event in my life. There, with and through others devoted to student activism, I became increasingly interested in political and theoretical debates around anticapitalism, feminism, racism, homo- and transphobia, and radical social change that permeate and shape this thesis, from beginning to end.

My time at the University of Cape Town, where I went to do my Masters, was also incredibly (trans)formative and influential in who I have become as a person and researcher. In my first week there I found myself in a group of other students after a seminar on Frantz Fanon delivered by a white doctoral researcher from Germany. All of these students were Black, many South Africans, although in that circle were also one Egyptian and Ghanaian students I had just befriended. Most voiced that they believed a Black staff member should rather be teaching Fanon, particularly in a country like South Africa. When everyone looked at me to hear what I thought, I hesitated and said I was unsure if I could/should express my opinion since I was white. From their reactions they seemed very bemused by my response, and I was very bemused by their reactions. I heard two or three students say: “what do you mean you are white? You are Black!” Another said: “To me he is white!” Another complemented, increasing my confusion: “Perhaps you mean he is white-passing?” and turned to me, posing a question whose answer still eludes after so many years: “How do you see yourself?”

That was the first of several times that I was called/seen as Black in Cape Town and even got invited to all-Black spaces or events during my studies at UCT. I remember
feeling like a fraud and sharing with my friends my anxiety about inadvertently deceiving people since I had never been seen/seen myself as Black hitherto. I became a bit obsessed with trying to discover what race I ‘was’ and/or how others saw me in terms of race and ethnicity. I asked friends and acquaintances in South Africa and Brazil how they perceived me, as though their answers could point me to one as well. Their responses varied significantly. In South Africa, in academic or political circles, I was mostly perceived as Black or as a “person of colour”. I also noted that if I was around a group of other people of colour, I was seen (or passed) as a person of colour. However, when I was with my former, white South African partner at a café or on the beach, street vendors would frequently approach me and ask if I came from Spain, Portugal, or perhaps Italy. In hindsight, it was not that surprising that my mixed background and light brown skin were illegible or confusing in South Africa when the country had legally banned interracial marriage for so long. Moreover, the theoretical point that social categories such as race and ethnicity are not universal but socially and historically constructed/construed became intriguingly clear.

In the self-reflexive section that I wrote for my master’s dissertation a few years ago, I reflected further on this experience in South Africa (Fernandes 2017). ‘Biko Black’ is surely a concept that has accompanied and intrigued me since I first heard it in that circle of friends/students in Cape Town. As the other students briefly opined on how they saw me, one response in particular struck me: “You know, I don’t see you as Black like ourselves, but like Biko Black.” The concept, which I would hear many other times in Cape Town, refers to the famous and celebrated anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko. In September 1974, under the apartheid regime, Steve Biko and other leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement were arrested after a pro-Frelimo rally. The trial lasted throughout 1975 and 1976 and found, under the Terrorism Act, all nine leaders guilty, who were sent to the prison in Robben Island. During this high-stake trial, Judge Boshof asked “why do you refer to you as blacks? Why not brown people?”, to which Biko famously replied:
historically, we have been defined as black people, and when we reject the term non-white and take upon ourselves the right to call ourselves what we think we are, we have got available in front of us a whole number of alternatives, starting from natives to Africans to Kaffirs to Bantu to Non-whites and so on, and we choose this one precisely because we feel it is the most accommodating. (Biko 1987: 104)

During this period of intense reflection and confusion, I spoke to some family members and friends in Brazil to see how they identified/saw themselves. My dad said he sees himself as Black and recounted episodes he attributes to racism that he had never told me about. My mum followed by asking my dad, sounding a little surprised, “You are Black?!” I tried to explain to my mum that there are light-skinned Black people just as there are dark-skinned white people, and that skin shade was not the only or sole determining factor in how one saw oneself or others in terms of race and ethnicity. My mother said she identified as parda, a contested category used in the Brazilian national census. According to my mother, she saw herself as a ‘mix’ of both white Portuguese ancestors from her mother’s side and African Black ancestors from her father’s side. In Brazil, most but not all people I spoke to said they saw me as white or whiteish. I believe that partly because of my phenotype, class, education, and because of how colourism works in Brazil, I feel (seen as) ‘white’ in Brazil more than anywhere else. Yet, I soon realised that speaking to others did not and would no answer the questions I had inside of me, whose answers I still do not know to this day. Yet, unlike a few years ago, I gave up searching for ‘a’ or ‘the’ final answer about my racial identity/perception. I have come to accept that it changes considerably, that it depends on where I am, that how others saw me and how I saw myself in South Africa was/is not the same as in Brazil and let alone in Scotland. ‘Brown’ (Muñoz et al 2020) could be an (English) word/notion that describes my racial experience/perception, although these are never static and thoughts on this matter are ever coalescing.

If studying at the University of São Paulo already felt like a huge achievement, studying and living in Edinburgh was mind-blowing. It was such a big dream that at times it felt
like it was “too” big for me. For the first months, I struggled with impostor’s syndrome and anxiety. I felt ‘frozen’ and as though I was always doing or about to do something wrong. I feared that I was not on par with other PhD researchers, that I did not write or read in English as well as others, that I lacked the necessary tools or skills to carry out such a huge project. Yet, over time with the support and encouragement of people, including my supervisors, I began to regain confidence in myself and in my work.

After so many years reading about the Dzi Croquettes, speaking to the thirteen participants was for me one of the main highlights of this whole trajectory, from coming up with a research project to writing up this thesis. I was relatively nervous as it was my first foray into oral history and I was speaking to people I admired and respected. I rejoiced at what I felt was a privilege to hear those stories, enter their homes (even if via a Whatsapp call), to be given the sense of trust required to be allowed a glimpse of their lives. I was aware that the extent to which or how they opened up to me depended on their perception of me and on the type of rapport we were able to create in light of our similarities and differences. To illustrate this, even before our actual (online or physical) encounters, I was already concerned with crafting a certain image of myself. As I said above, weeks went by before I was happy with the introductory video to be posted on Youtube, and the main image that I was trying to impart was that of a friendly young nerd as opposed to a ‘cold’ professional academic.

When conducting interviews, a key challenge I encountered was keeping a balance between a certain ‘distance’ to think about follow-up questions and look for patterns or disjunctions with other accounts, and a certain proximity so as not to come across as disinterested or aloof. In certain respects, I had to negotiate positions of power imbalance as well as senses of “insider” and “outsider” in order to gain their trust and interest in speaking to me. Undoubtedly, being a researcher from a British university was a source of prestige and curiosity. Many, if not most, of the interviews ended with participants asking how I ended up in Edinburgh and expressing their approval of and admiration for the Dzi Croquettes being studied abroad. I sought to counterbalance the grandeur of a foreign PhD by modulating my vocabulary, that is, less theoretical or
academic and more colloquial and straightforward, which was facilitated by the fact that I am Brazilian. That I was an “outsider” was most evident in the intergenerational gap between us. A recurrent observation among participants was “you were not there” to mark the temporal and epistemological limits separating us. The utterance “you were not there” seemed to carry another implicit claim: “You can/do not know what it was like”.

I tried to bridge these limits by showing that I was somewhat of an “insider” and had extensively researched the topic. All participants seemed to respect and appreciate it, which became clear when they forgot certain information and I was able to remind them. I was cognisant that how they perceived me affected their willingness and the extent to which they would open up to me. Yet, in some cases I wondered if their openness had to do with a sense of mutual trust due to our shared identities as homosexual men despite the age difference. In some cases, I was in fact slightly surprised at how openly some participants shared recollections of their youth: the joy and hardship of those times; the after-parties, shared joints, and orgies; the quarrels and gossip. In general, the women I spoke to were less open about their sexual orientation or experiences, which may be due to issues of gendered sexual respectability. Rather than identifying with a particular category, women’s references to their sexuality were limited to the statement that most were not lesbians. The men, however, tended to be more straightforward and explicit about drugs and sex, rather than just alluding to it through verbal and physical language.

On a few occasions I wondered if their interest in talking about sex with me was due to their interest in having sex with me, if I was misreading some of the remarks or whether they were indeed flirtatious. These were the most overt moments of eroticism and of a certain unease, not because of the idea someone twice my age might perhaps be interested in me or that I might be interested in them, but because of the fears and worries I had in trying to keep a ‘proper’ boundary between participants and me, where I felt split as a researcher and as a potentially desiring/desired person. It was my first foray into oral history interviews and I was not sure which place eroticism could or should have in this endeavour, but as I read the literature the matter of eroticism is still a
question that the literature is starting to reckon with and avow as (integral) part, rather than a silence taboo, of doing researching with others (Rooke 2010; Jackman 2010).

The bulk of these fun and sexy remarks constitute sensitive data and, as such, have been left out unless when relevant and necessary for the purposes outlined in this chapter, that is, to answer the questions guiding my thesis. At times participants explicitly made clear that the information was to remain between us, but even when they did not, I judged whether a given piece of information warranted inclusion herein based on the minimisation and necessity principles set forth in the United Kingdom’s 2018 General Data Protection Regulation, particularly regarding sensitive data. Nevertheless, these sexual remarks (including those towards me) were just the most explicit moments in a process that I believe was permeated with eroticism: from ‘seducing’ someone into wanting to trust and open up to me, to share their memories, experiences, maybe even traumas. For people to whom transgression and free spirit informed much of their youths/lives and often careers, this openness is not all that surprising. Certainly not as surprising as its opposite, such as one participant who shared rather conservative views, not to say fake news and conspiracy theories. I wondered a bit bemusedly how or at which points that participant went from then to now, how they turned/were turned conservative.

Despite my bewilderment at times, I strived as much as possible to remain open and non-judgmental so as to respect all of my participants’ trajectories and recollections. I was particularly aware of a sort of ‘tension’ between different generations of activists that I had noted during my engagement with the LGBT political activism in São Paulo years ago during my undergraduate studies. Some younger activists I encountered seemed to dismiss older ones as though these had lagged behind in time, as if previous generations were old-fashioned or outdated. Besides being condescending or closing down productive intergenerational dialogue, this posture is oblivious to the fact that previous generations of activists were and are the bedrock of our contemporary struggles, which are in many ways only possible because of those who came before us. It is in this vein that the upcoming Chapter Four steers the reader to the past, to the Dzi
performances and lives under the strictest years of the military dictatorship, to advance an intergenerational dialogue that may assist us in illuminating the potentials of extralegal, queer performances at a time when the notion of LGBT rights, as we currently know and even take for granted, was not an option in the quest for social change.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE DZI CROQUETTES GROUP/FAMILY

In this and in the following chapter, I turn to the social phenomenon stirred by the Brazilian theatre and dance group/family Dz Croquettes in the early 1970s, in a 'pre-rights' era where such a rhetoric was unavailable and to some extent even unimaginable for queer people. My goal is ultimately not to accurately portray historical events, but to look for their relevance today, the ways in which the Dz Croquettes may offer us insights about alternative political strategies and roads that may complement and/or challenge some of the key presuppositions of the contemporary LGBT rights rhetoric. Regarded as a central, but not exclusive, source of momentum for the incipient discussion around gender and sexual norms in Brazil, the Dz Croquettes emerged in Rio de Janeiro during a period known as Anos de Chumbo (Years of Lead, 1968-1974), the most repressive years of a military dictatorship infamous for persecuting and killing 'subversives.' Despite the impressive success and influence that the all-male dance and theatre group achieved both regionally and internationally in the first half of the 1970s, it was only about four decades later that the Dz Croquettes secured a place in the Brazilian imaginary and memory. A homonymous 2009 documentary on the group, whose main stated goal was to rescue the group from this state of 'amnesia,' has indeed catapulted the group back into the public eye.

An incipient but growing body of academic work has recently turned to the Croquettes to better understand the danger posed by thirteen men performing apparently silly and nonsense sketches on stage, at a time when political resistance was generally understood by both junta supporters and opponents as armed struggle. My turn to the Dz Croquettes is informed by a certain sense of nostalgia, but not of the type that aims to thoroughly depict or long for the way things were. Rather than romanticism, what motivates my turn to the Dz is “a turn to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present… propelled by a desire for futurity” (Muñoz 2009: 30). In other words, I argue that investigating the Dz phenomenon offers us more than just a glimpse of past days:

5 ‘Group’ and ‘family’ were their preferred self-referring words (Lobert 2010).
it might reveal a perspective from which to critique current arrangements and to strive for a different future. If below I dwell at some length on details about the Dzi Croquettes, it is not because I am interested in the group/family solely in and of themselves. A crucial motivation for my turn to the Croquettes is the ripple-out and ‘dangerous’ effects of the Dzi performances in the social and political landscape. I address these mainly in Chapter Five, whose subject matter is the Dzi Croquettes *qua* (aesthetic/political) collective movement.

This chapter will begin with a brief contextualisation of Brazil from the late 1960s onwards to situate the Dzi Croquettes as concomitantly products and producers of their socio-historical context. Next, I will provide an overview of the group/family’s life trajectory, both before and after their meteoric—albeit fleeting—rise to (inter)national fame. This will be followed by an account of their performances and of their ‘philosophy of life’. The chapter concludes with an analytical enquiry into how their performances achieved a set of disidentifications (as introduced in Section 2.3) in the broader social and political world. To this end, the account below is mainly derived from academic and visual texts as well as primary data generated through archives and oral history interviews.

4.1. Historical Context and Conjuncture

The emergence of the Dzi Croquettes in late 1972 becomes particularly remarkable and, prima facie, paradoxical when we consider that Brazil was under a military junta since the *coup d’état* on 1 April 1964, which was supported by segments of the civil society, religious groups, and the American government. The 1964 *coup* was met with strong resistance from cultural workers and clandestine organisations linked to Marxism-Leninism, which had been gaining prominence in the national political landscape and was used by opponents as evidence of the imminent threat and need to ‘save’ the nation. The government’s initial focus on combating radical armed struggle gave for some time relative leeway to political dissent through public demonstrations and leftist cultural production, which flourished in the realms of theatre, cinema, and popular music.
(Dunn 2016). Within a broader context of the Cold War and American imperialism, opposition to the regime and the repression thereof grew increasingly over the years. The junta resorted to persecution, censorship, and even the extensive use of torture and execution. The target of such authoritarian measures included, without being limited to, a vague and broad list of communists, leftist organisations, trade unionists, feminists, Black activists, artists, intellectuals, hippies, and homosexuals. Conflating political subversion and moral deviance, the government regarded (particularly male) homosexuals as a menace to the nation’s values and youth (Cowan 2014). The main homosexual danger that the government attempted to eliminate was the public manifestation of sexual and gender ‘deviance’ (Green 1999: 232). Cassandra Rios, the first female writer to sell over a million books in Brazil, was known nationwide both for her lesbian eroticism as well as for being the country’s most censored writer: 36 out of 50 novels. The military junta used growing levels of prostitution as a pretext in their attempts to keep homosexuality out of sight by means of arbitrary police raids and imprisonment backed by vaguely-worded, outdated vagrancy laws. Those that the police would potentially deem vagrants would have better or worse luck depending largely on, for instance, their location, gender conformity or deviance, race, and socioeconomic status (Freitas Ocanha 2014).

This threat of moral and behavioural subversion which the dictatorship dreaded and sought to ‘protect’ the nation from was not entirely imagined. For about two decades, there had been a proliferation of sites of public sociability for homosexuals such as carnival balls, bars, clubs, and saunas in urban centres like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Green 1999). Furthermore, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed great political, cultural, and social upheaval in Brazil and the world over. News about the countercultural and political movements in other countries started to make their way to Brazil through an incipient alternative press, which reported on the latest developments of the Vietnam War, the anticolonial movements in Africa, May 1968 in Paris, the

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[6] At the time there was no political vocabulary or visibility for trans identities, which were reduced to a form of homosexuality (Green & Quinalha 2014: 11). Therefore, the term ‘homosexuals’ in this passage is not entirely synonymous with gay men or lesbian women, as a more modern usage may suggest.
struggles and achievements of the women’s civil rights movement, the Black Panthers, the Woodstock Festival, the Stonewall riots, and the Apollo 11 mission. A participant I interviewed brilliantly captured the zeitgeist of the period: “Technological revolutions that used to happen every 50 years would now happen every 3, 5 years. And the truths changed. So, it was a period of great effervescence. All sorts of changes, technological, behavioural, philosophical, economic… And on top of that, in 1970 Brazil won the World Cup. It was a sensation, man!” (Dario).

From 1968 to 1973, the country’s economy saw an extraordinary growth that became known (and translates) as ‘economic miracle’. The military state, through international subsidies and agreements, made investments in the cultural industry and in mass communication. The middle class’s increasing purchasing power and access to goods generated a boom in university enrolment and consumption of literature and theatre, including homosexual-themed works and some stereotypical imports from Hollywood. Greater female sexual freedom and looser gender roles—causes of great anxiety among military officials and epitomised in Leila Diniz, an actor from Rio that symbolised the ‘new’ liberated woman—were associated with the rapid urbanisation process, the increasing availability of contraceptive methods, and the expanding middle class (Green 1999; Dunn 2016).

1968 has accrued international symbolical importance as a landmark year of transformations, and it was not different in Brazil. The country’s countercultural movements started to take shape in dialogue with broader phenomena, such as the influence of rock’n roll, soul music, psychoanalysis, communitarianism, sex liberation, and a growing use of marijuana and hallucinogens. Although many similarities were shared with the American and Western European countercultural movements, Brazil did not witness a simple restaging or mimicry but incorporated and responded to local particularities, such as the existence of an authoritarian and patriarchal state (Dunn 2016; Castro Diniz 2017). Significantly, the years 1967-1968 ushered in the Tropicalismo or Tropicália movement, one of the main ingredients in the national countercultural cauldron. The name of the movement comes from Hélio Oiticica’s 1967
*Tropicália*, a groundbreaking work of the Brazilian neo-concrete movement consisting of a large installation through which visitors could walk. Approaching it, one would see a gravel path dotted over sand and surrounded by tropical plants, poems on wooden boards, two live caged parrots, and two structures named ‘Penetrables.’ The first, smaller, and open-roofed penetrable was painted in bright colours and contained herbs and soil. The second, larger, roofed penetrable created a series of rooms and corridors with different materials and patterns, including a TV atop a wooden crate broadcasting local channels. The work’s penetrability—its openness to the outside and to others—and its carnivalesque anthropophagism (the satirical/deconstructive juxtaposition of dichotomies such as tradition and modernity, high and low culture) illustrate some of the main characteristics of the tropicalist movement (Favaretto 1996).

*Tropicalismo* refers to a heterogeneous and experimental set of practices that reached greatest audiences and fame in the realm of popular music, even if its main laboratory was the theatre (Napolitano & Villaça 1998). Foreign influences were assimilated into and reworked through Brazilian elements, leading to radical aesthetic innovations. Musicians adroitly expressed social and political concerns in their lyrics, echoing local youth’s inclination towards sociopolitical parody and transgression. The ‘Third Festival of Popular Music’ in 1967, when electric guitars controversially made their way into Caetano Veloso’s song *Alegria, Alegria*, is seen as a symbolic genesis of the movement. Some leftist cultural workers and audiences were quite distressed about the song’s lack of direct criticism of the military junta as well as its incorporation of elements from rock’n roll, which some saw as a symbol of American imperialism and of Veloso’s purported abandonment of revolutionary ideals.

Driven by aesthetic innovation and the desire for existential, bodily, and subjective freedom (as opposed to what were perceived as more orthodox political needs), *tropicalismo* reflected an increasing disillusionment about the ‘truths’ of Marxism-Leninism. This scepticism was coupled with a growing inability to voice criticism in an

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7 For further information see: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/oiticica-tropicalia-penetrables-pn-2-purity-is-a-myth-and-pn-3-imagetical-t12414
overtly militant way, so tropicalismo innovatively found ways to disguise criticism through parody, allegory, and ambiguity to bypass censorship (Hollanda 2004). The movement shifted the temporal focus from a promised deliverance in a tomorrow-after-the-revolution to “a concern with the here and now,” that is, “the need to revolutionise the body and the behaviour, breaking away from the serious tone and lack of flexibility of the current political praxis,” which signalled the emergence of “a critical language, especially in the sense of subversion of values and behavioural standards” (Hollanda 2004: 70). Whereas the privileged subject of former radical cultural works had been mainly ‘the people’ or the proletariat, tropicalismo valorised the so-called ‘minorities’—people of colour, women, homosexuals—as well as “the urban marginality, the erotic liberation, the experience of drugs, [and] the festive…” (Hollanda 2004: 75).

Besides this countercultural effervescence, 1968 also saw the hitherto largest national demonstration against the dictatorship as well as its most infamous and authoritarian move. In June that year, diverse sectors of the civil society were mobilised in the ‘March of the One Hundred Thousand,’ sparked by the police execution of an eighteen-year-old student, Edson Luís, in Rio de Janeiro. By December, to thwart the increasingly vocal and organised opposition, the regime issued the Institutional Act n. 5 (“AI-5”), also known as “the coup within the coup”. AI-5 revoked constitutional rights and guarantees, shutdown the National Congress, toughened censorship, and “signaled the definitive ascension of hard-line forces within the military regime” (Dunn 2016: 22). Only two weeks later, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil—national icons and central contributors to the tropicalist movement—were briefly imprisoned for supposedly offending national values and symbols. Thereafter, they were forced to exile in London and only allowed to return in 1972. Maria Bethania and Gal Costa—two of the most revered Brazilian singers ever, from those to these days—were also under the radar of the dictatorship, unhappy about their deboche (mockery) and irreverent eroticism that stirred rumours about them being lesbians. Although Veloso and Gil, for instance, self-identified as heterosexual men, their public appearances and performances evoked “to varying degrees images of androgyny and homosexuality,” like Veloso’s much-awaited and
talked-about concert upon return from exile where he exchanged a series of hugs and kisses on the lips with Gil (Dunn 2016: 175).

The events above foreshadowed the decade of the 1970s, which in Brazil became known as the ‘decade of the desbunde’. A crucial neologism in accounts of the period, the meaning of desbunde is ambiguous and contingent on context and speaker (Castro Diniz 2017: 71). It also had the forms of verb (desbundar) and adjective (desbundado/desbundada). On one hand, it was used affirmatively among those, mainly in the artistic realm, who saw desbunde as a revolution within the self, a process of liberation from social norms and conventions including, but not limited to, gender or sexual roles. It was often associated with the hippie movement and with the self-expression (or self-discovery) through the arts, sexuality, drugs, and spirituality (Castro Diniz 2017: 73). On the other hand, it was used pejoratively to refer to those who had purportedly given up revolutionary ideals and succumbed to what the orthodox Left perceived as a hedonist, selfish, and bourgeois fad deflecting from the ‘real’ revolution; or what the dictatorship deemed a communist, alien corruption of traditional (Christian) values (Dunn 2016: 36-72). Desbunde was tantamount to ‘deconstruction,’ said the Dzi Croquette Ciro Barcelos in our interview. The deconstruction of the system (the world around oneself) and the deconstruction of oneself. As he put it, deconstructing oneself meant self-acceptance as one is, letting go of all paradigms, concepts, and preconceptions (Ciro). A few participants partly attributed this process of discovery and liberation in that particular historical period to substances like LSD, marijuana, and mandrax.

As the desbunde movement gained momentum in the late 1960s onwards, another term—entendido—was coined to indicate a new social identity that gained prominence among homosexuals of an urban middle-class in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Peter Fry (1982: 93-95) has noted that entendido pointed towards a symmetry and equality between homosexual men as opposed to the long-held understanding that sustained a hierarchical distinction and stigma based on sexual roles, that is, the penetrating versus penetrated partner. Redrawing the accepted contours of sexual and gender roles— and
even the popularity of the term ‘androgyne’—were not an exclusively Brazilian phenomenon in the early 70s. The international glitter/glam rock movement, and superstars like David Bowie, already touched on some of these concerns and aesthetics. In dialogue with international discourses but with its own national influences, the desbunde movement in Brazil had as its key incubators, alongside Veloso and Gal Costa, the rock singer Ney Matogrosso, and the theatre/dance group Dzi Croquette (Silvério Trevisan 2000: 284-291; Green 1999: 256-259). Famous for his falsetto, provocative outfits, and sexually ambiguous behaviour, Matogrosso became a national sensation in 1973 as the vocalist of the rock group Secos & Molhados (a name suggestive of the underground culture of S&M). Between 1973 and 1974, some newspapers published short glossaries on the then fashionable term ‘androgy nous,’ including both Croquettes and Matogrosso as the main exemplars challenging ‘appropriate’ male behaviour and roles. The Dzi Croquettes were of utmost importance in carving the space to question sexual/gender morality and in the experimenting with drugs, the body, and pleasure (Silvério Trevisan 2000: 288). The social and cultural impact of the group was particularly striking “in the absence of a gay movement and with few other vehicles to express this viewpoint” (Green 1999: 258). In the sections below, I zoom in on the Dzi Croquettes so as to give the reader a fuller picture of their oeuvre and of their performances’ sociopolitical reverberations.

4.2. Life and Oeuvre Trajectory

Copacabana had been for some time one of Rio’s main bohemian hotspots. Hosting a variety of bars and clubs, it was frequented by the dictatorship’s least favourite characters, such as musicians, artists, homosexuals, prostitutes, and intellectuals. Amidst the boom in spaces of public sociality for homosexuals in the urban centres, Galeria Alaska was (in)famous for being a relatively safe space in Rio’s wealthy Zona Sul where queers gathered to dance, drink, have fun, and cruise for sex. On the evening of 8th August 1972, Bayard Tonelli made his way to the venue, where he had arranged to meet his new boyfriend and some friends to do what they did almost every evening: party. However, without the technology to call or text to say he was going to be quite late, he arrived at Galeria Alaska and found no one.
The image above shows the entrance to Galeria Alaska, a boulevard with a series of facilities such as a movie theatre, bars, and a nightclub underneath a residential building in Copacabana. Source: https://copacabana.com/cinemas

Crestfallen and about to go back home, by chance Bayard bumped into two recent acquaintances, Wagner Ribeiro and Reginaldo de Poly, who invited him for a drink (Bayard). As they drank beers and shared meat croquettes at a bar, the group spoke about similar frustrations and the desire to make a living out of something meaningful, to find meaning in life. Wagner shared a lifelong dream of his. He had been seeking to produce an all-male cabaret-inspired show in downtown Rio but struggled to find enough people keen to join in due to fears of stigmatisation and harassment (Dzi Croquettes 2009). Wagner already had some experience with writing and performing. With friends and acquaintances, over the course of a decade Wagner would playfully read out, perform, and develop humorous sketches and musical bits in the living room at the ‘Mars Embassy’, as he jokingly called his home in Rio de Janeiro’s hilly, leafy, and artistic Santa Teresa (Lobert 2010: 19-21).

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8 Citation of participants in my oral history project will be done with parentheses. I will not follow the English standard of referring to their surnames, but first names as generally preferred in Brazil. Surnames are used here (and more generally) when first names coincide, such as the Croquettes Gaya and Tovar.
Wagner’s ideas and aspirations were passionately received. Brainstorming excitedly, Bayard mentioned the San Francisco performance group *The Cockettes*, whom he had read about in a magazine. Wagner, looking at the meaty balls they snacked on, went: “so we will be the *Dzi Croquettes!*” (Bayard). In a tropicalist move of giving a Brazilian twist to foreign elements, ‘croquette’ implied carnality and was used in some circles as a slang term for penis (Silvério Trevisan 1994: 288). Such carnality of the ‘croquette’ also implied the physicality of the human body, as we are all made of ‘meat,’ and, as such, all equal (Dzi Croquettes 2009). ‘Dzi’ was a playful reformulation of the English article ‘the’ and also drew from some Asian cultures where ‘Dzi’ is associated with holy ancient stone beads used for mantra recitation (Bayard). With great excitement, they started to spread the word among friends and the local press. More importantly, they needed more people willing to embark on that journey. The main recruitment criteria for the formation of the group/family was friendship (Lobert 2010: 19). The encounters among the thirteen men that went to become the Dzi Croquettes took place mainly in Rio de Janeiro, on the dance floor of nightclubs and parties, in hippie markets, dance lessons, theatre schools, as well as through mutual friends and lovers. The final cast included members from various geographical, racial, and social backgrounds, ages ranging from 18 to 40 years old, from a runaway and a bank clerk to sons of wealthy and military families. It is hard to keep a linear track of the Dzi Croquettes’ formation because it changed over time. The thirteen Dzi Croquettes mentioned herein belong to the group’s ‘golden era’ formation, which symbolically starts with the watershed encounter between the Dzi mother and father, Wagner Ribeiro and Lennie Dale. The other members were to become the Dzi aunts, nieces, and daughters.
Lennie Dale was a well-known and respected figure at Rio's *Beco das Garrafas*: a lively dead-end alley in Copacabana packed with musicians and clubs, regarded by some as the birthplace of the *bossa nova* genre. Lennie was an Italian American dancer, choreographer, actor, and singer. Originally from New York City, he started dancing at the age of 7, when he starred in the TV show “Star Lime Kids”. During the period he performed on Broadway, Lennie garnered considerable renown as much as reproof for his erratic, rebellious behaviour. He eventually settled in Brazil for several years after receiving an invitation to work in and falling in love with Rio de Janeiro. Before that, however, he had spent some time in Europe, where he was invited to help assist the choreography of the 1963 film *Cleopatra*, with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.
Lennie went on to become the Dzi Croquettes’ choreographer, artistic director, and ‘father.’ His name and fame played a crucial role in ensuring the Croquettes publicity and even a future (Lobert 2010: 23). To many, joining the Dzi Croquettes was a breakthrough moment in their lives. Even for Lennie Dale, who already had an international reputation prior to the Croquettes, the life/work experience together with the Dzi would turn out to be the pinnacle of his career. Years later, Lennie reflected on the experience: “after the separation, for about five years I was attached to the love I felt for that family, I couldn’t free myself. It was a feeling of nostalgia, as though I looked for the same feeling elsewhere, which was pretty hard as things don’t repeat themselves” (Brito & Barcelos 2013: 36). For Paulete, one of the youngest Dzi, it was pretty much his first go at work and life beyond the grips of his family: “I was very young, I was only 18. It was the first time I reached the conclusion I could leave my [family’s] home and that the life I had sort of imagined as ideal, in my dreams, actually existed” (Brito & Barcelos 2013: 41).

4.2.1. From Nightclub to Theatre

With Lennie on board, in December 1972 the Dzi Croquettes started a four-month run at one of Ipanema’s most exclusive nightclubs, Mr. Pujol. These early performances were generally well received by the local press and critics as well as by the wealthy clientele. The newspaper *Correio da Manhã* published on 3 December 1972 a landmark review: the first to use an epithet for which the Dzi eventually became a byword. After rejecting the term ‘homosexuals’ and unsure whether to call them *atores* (actors) or *atrizes* (actresses), Orlando Senna concluded that ‘androgynous’ was the term that got “closest to classification (should anyone need one)”. According to one magazine review, Lennie Dale donned the show with an “extraordinarily fantastic ambience” and the Croquettes (referring to them uncertainly using both masculine and feminine gendered pronouns) were beyond the imaginable, a “mix of ridiculous, surrealism, nostalgia and hype.”

There is a charming anecdote about a hunky maître binge-drinking to the point of collapsing to suppress his sadness in seeing the Dzi eventually leave the nightclub *Mr.*

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Pujol (Lidoka 2012: 48). In line with broader tropicalist concerns at the time, the overarching trope of this first version of the Dzi performances (publicised as Dzi Croquettes L’Internationale) was the concept of ‘underground’ (Lobert 2010: 255-256). The concept for the Dzi performances, which in the first few months was rather incipient and unfinished, started to take shape with these performances and the addition of further members without, however, reaching a stable or fixed format.

In March 1973, the group moved to São Paulo in search of better pay and work opportunities. Although brief, the three weeks of Dzi Croquettes L’Internationale at the nightclub Ton-Ton Macoute in downtown São Paulo were rather fortunate. On one hand, despite it being their first work opportunity in São Paulo, the group managed to cause a frisson among the local youth and press—to the point where chief police officers, curiously enough a constant presence in the Dzi audience alongside their extramarital lovers, started to complain about the media coverage (Bayard). On the other hand, during Ton-Ton the Croquettes received what was possibly the most important and prescient review of their performances. On 17 May that year, the eminent theatre critic Sábato Magaldi published a stellar review rating the Dzi among the best in the theatrical avant-garde, even though the group had only performed at nightclubs and never at a theatre venue. According to the critic, the Dzi made “no claims to homosexual citizenship” and were not concerned with the “illusion of femininity.” Despite the Dzi slogan ‘equal like you,’ Magaldi observed that “the group does not appeal to the audience’s comprehension at any level” and famously stated—an excerpt that the Dzi later repeated in short newspaper ads—that “an intellect like that of Jean Genet is necessary to apprehend the richness of this world, [which] makes us ashamed of the prosaicness of our normality.”

Towards the end of the review, the critic stated that the show “should be performed at a theatre venue to reach greater publics.”

After such praise and given Magaldi’s calibre, the group secured a six-month run at São Paulo’s traditional Teatro Treze de Maio, consistently packing the 600-seat-venue to its

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As Lobert notes, besides giving them (a momentary) financial independence, “it was the first time, locally, that a group of men suspiciously ‘travestidos’, that is, wearing outfits conventionally attributed to the female gender, performed at theatre venue economically reserved to bourgeois strata with intellectual concerns, instead of second-class theatre venues or nightclubs” (2010: 27-28). During this moment of transitions (from one city to another, from nightclub to theatre), the group developed and began presenting the second version of their performances: Andróginos: gente computada igual a você (Androgynes: people computed just like you). On 21 June 1973, on the occasion of their premiere, Diário da Noite wrote that they were one of the most important things to have appeared in São Paulo, seeing evidence for this in the great public enthusiasm and mass attendance.

The Dzi sojourn at Treze de Maio until the end of 1973 turned the venue into a lively centre of convergence of diverse people, who went there to see not only the performances but the occasional exhibitions, conversation, dance lessons, and artistic works organised by the Dzi (Tovar). This six-month period was a real landmark in the group’s trajectory. They attracted greater public interest and a more diverse crowd, which marked the beginning of the popularisation of the Dzi performances and, eventually, their ‘way of being’. This was manifest during their run at Treze de Maio through the impromptu expansion of the Dzi Croquettes family, which welcomed a ‘godmother’, Vilma, and an all-female counterpart, the Dzi Croquetas.12

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12 The letter ‘a’ in Portuguese denotes the feminine grammatical gender.
4.2.2. The Dzi Family Expands

A pretty central figure in the documentary for her role in the Dzi Croquettes family, Vilma (also referred to as ‘Nega’ Vilma\(^\text{13}\)) is barely mentioned in Lobert’s book/ethnography. Vilma and Lennie Dale met in the late 1960s at a Rio nightclub. Vilma had also been briefly introduced to another Dzi, Ciro Barcelos, years prior to the group’s formation. After a few years as acquaintances, a lifelong and close friendship developed between Vilma and Lennie. Vilma witnessed the inception of the Croquettes since its early days and helped a concerned Lennie to accept the amateurism of the other performers, presciently conjecturing that the Dzi could be the most remarkable work of his lifetime.

\(^{13}\) I am using scare quotes here to denote the way that some participants and the literature, such as the 2009 documentary, call her. Black women used to be (and still are in some quarters) called ‘nega,’ a vexed term defended by some for its alleged fondness and rebuked by others for its claimed racist undertone. The term is also used, not less controversially, as a general synonym of ‘girlfriend’ or ‘woman’.
As she recounted to me during our interview, she was then in her early 20s trying to make a living as a model:

Wherever I went, if there was someone who, how can I put it? [Someone] Who worked in the fashion or beauty industry, I would get an invitation for photos [modelling], for a runway. At that time there was also the... nowadays racism exists. There is racism, I have no doubt. I believe, by the way, that it is a cancer that will never be eradicated. It will get more veiled, but not eradicated. So, in my youth, in the 1960s to the 1970s, it was quite complicated. But still, I managed to break through some barriers. I worked with important figures...

During the Croquettes’ run at *Teatro Treze de Maio*, Vilma received a phone call from the Dzi father inviting her to visit São Paulo and stay at the house the Dzi were sharing. Upon arrival, Vilma found herself in the midst of a turbulent issue that seemed to threaten the very continuity of the Croquettes. Lennie Dale was not convinced about moving forward and all tried but failed to persuade him otherwise. Vilma managed to mediate the situation and calm the father down. The next day, noticing the general disorder of the place, from food that had gone to waste to unfamiliar faces that seemed to have a free way into the house, Vilma started tidying things up. A powerful chemistry and an intimate relationship developed between Vilma and the Croquettes, who asked her to come work with and join the Dzi family.

Vilma is depicted in the documentary as the group’s housekeeper, but in reality her position was more of a wild card. In our conversation, to explain her role Vilma made often reference to ‘order’ and ‘mess’: the mess that she was supposed to turn into order included family fights and domestic chores, but also offering emotional/mental support and advice to Croquettes—particularly Lennie, as very few people had any authority over him like Vilma. Therefore, she had an invaluable role in the family’s passionate and dramatic fights, or when it was necessary to motivate Lennie to perform a particular evening and not let his insecurity and inner demons get in the way. Vilma would also occasionally work on the sewing machine and make sure to fetch whoever had a late
night and was found missing the following morning from their daily, rigorous rehearsals. When the group moved to Europe, she was also the only woman and non-performer accompanying the group, at their own request and expense. Vilma, however, was not the only woman invited to join the Dzi family. As the group rose to fame and popularity, they curiously started to gather an entourage of young and female enthusiasts who started following them everywhere: from rehearsals and the backstage to after parties and their shared house. The Dzi mother, Wagner, and other Croquettes began to develop close relationships and fall in love with these women, to the point where they 'adopted' and created a separate show: the Dzi Croquetas, a milestone both in the expansion of the Dzi family and in the consolidation of the Dzi movement.

Not much exists on the Croquettas aside from a few minutes of recollections in the 2009 documentary, a cursory description in Lobert, and two of the most important texts on the Dzi Croquettes: a blog page\(^{14}\) created by Os Albertos and a rarely-cited memoir on the “troop of young women [who] ventures into the Dzi Croquettes countercultural movement” (Lidoka 2012). With an even scarcer literature than their male peers, it is hard to precise or track the formation of the Croquettas. Enthralled by the idea of creating an all-female version of the Dzi Croquettes, Wagner went so far as to sell his two cars to finance the production of the Dzi Croquetas and was unbothered by the women’s lack of stage experience. The criteria for Wagner’s random invitations was “the attraction that we felt for the Dzi movement” (Lidoka 2012: 65). Besides enthusiasts from their audience, Wagner also extended an invitation to recent acquaintances, such as ‘Nega’ Helô, a Black and illiterate waiter from a greasy spoon they used to lunch at, and old ones, like his hometown fellow ‘Nega’ Malu. The majority of the Croquettes became involved in the horizontal and internal production for the Croquettas’ show, As Fadas do Apocalispse (The Apocalypse Fairies). With a total of about 20 Croquettas, the final cast resembled a ‘fruit salad’ mixing four relatively experienced actors with a mother and her two-year-old toddler plus “ballerinas, university students, dishwashers, saleswomen, anthropologists, psychologists, managers, [and] wealthy ladies” (Lidoka 2012: 68). We shall turn to the Dzi Croquettas in greater depth in the next chapter.

\(^{14}\) Dzi Croquettas blog: https://fadasdoapocalypse.blogspot.com/
4.2.3. Exile

After their highly praised run at Treze de Maio, the Croquettes’ steam and success did not subside. On the contrary, their subsequent run at Rio’s Teatro da Praia kept drawing the attention of stars and ordinary people alike. Yet, their meteoric success was met by a series of unexpected and earthshattering events. In the first half of 1974, at the pinnacle of their success in the Brazilian territory and with increasing appearances in the press, the Dzi Croquettes got censored and were forbidden to perform for a month under the accusation of subverting traditional mores (Lobert 2010: 122). At the same time, as the local press widely reported, they almost lost their father. Lennie got run over by a bus in downtown Rio de Janeiro and miraculously survived, according to doctors, only because of his athletic physique. Dale had an incredibly quick recovery and after a month was back on stage. As he recovered in hospital, the group managed to once again obtain the regime’s permission to resume their performances by adding a few centimetres to their outfits and refraining from using language deemed inappropriate. Yet, by the time the whole group got to perform together again, everyone felt discouraged. The impending threat of censorship and Dale’s accident had significantly compounded the group’s financial crisis. The only way forward, everyone agreed, was to leave Brazil and relocate to Europe. This relocation was assisted by a great friend of Dale and godmother to the group: Hollywood star Liza Minelli, who was an enthusiastic admirer and supporter of the Croquettes. Following a short sojourn in Portugal grappling with the recent coup of the Carnation Revolution, the Dzi eventually moved to Paris with the help of Minelli and the French photographer Patrice Calmettes. It was in the French capital that the Dzi would find their ‘home’ across the Atlantic and spend most of their time.

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That same year, due to the classificatory reductionism they perceived on the part of the press and public, the Dzi lost some interest in the artistic appeal of androgyny, which remained in their performances but no longer as a central trope. As its popularity increased in the first half of the 1970s, the appeal and novelty of ‘androgynous’ dwindled. Many other theatre groups, artists, and media vehicles started adopting the term and it eventually became a rather trivial synonym for homosexual (Lobert 2010: 241-242). Therefore, crossing the Atlantic and performing to new audiences was the opportunity to rework the show. If the trope of androgyny became more secondary, the group’s Brazilianness came to the fore in the third version of their shows, now publicised to the French audience as Dzi Croquettes: Troupe Brésilienne. The Croquettes stayed at Théâtre Charles de Rochefort from December 1974 to April 1975 (Lobert 2010: 30). However, the lack of prior planning and advertising as well as the cultural inclinations of a foreign audience meant that the Dzi were not very well received initially.

The winds changed rather favourably after a friendly intervention and public praise from Liza Minelli, who was performing Cabaret in the French capital. On 13 January 1975,
the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* noted that Paris ‘bowed’ to Minelli, who had asked the Croquettes to prepare an exclusive midnight performance for special guests invited by Minelli herself. Minelli, who had just debuted at a five-thousand-seat theatre, invited the whole audience to join the Croquettes later that evening in a venue for 450 people. In an Instagram live conversation on 27 May 2020\(^\text{17}\) two surviving members of the Dzi Croquettes, Claudio Tovar and Ciro Barcelos, recalled this exclusive performance in greater detail. Huge international stars popped by to check out the group Minelli was raving about, and the traffic outside the venue came to a halt. “The first to arrive was Josephine Baker”, Tovar recalled. All Dzi scrambled from backstage to see Josephine Baker, who was already sat and justified her early arrival due to a sore foot. The calibre of Baker’s stardom was matched by others in the audience: Mick Jagger, Jeanne Moreau, Rudolf Nureyev, Omar Sharif, and Valentino. A month later, *Folha de São Paulo* reported on the Croquettes’ acclaim in the City of Light: “After an enormous and ongoing success, an almost unrestricted critical praise and the enthusiastic (if unexpected) support from artists of the like of Minelli,” the paper noted that the Dzi already had a Parisian entourage, “which they entertain with folklore music, exotic dishes, and stuff from South America.”\(^\text{18}\)

Appearance in the local press became increasingly abundant, and in a single month the group/family had already used over 100 kilograms of confetti in their shows. It was also in the French capital that the great Josephine Baker died while performing on the stage of the *Bobino*, one of the hottest spots in the Parisian night scene. Incredibly, Baker had personally requested the management of the *Bobino* that, if she ever needed replacement, the Dzi Croquettes should be the ones (Dzi Croquettes 2009: 01:19:55). And her wish was fulfilled. The Croquettes assumed the spotlight at the *Bobino* for a couple of months in what was possibly the highest point of their European tour. After invitations from Japan, Belgium, and Canada, the Croquettes eventually agreed with the German broadcast NDR on the production of a documentary over a fortnight at *Théâtre Hébertot* (Lobert 2010: 31). At 11:20p.m. on the evening of 31 December 1976, the Dzi

\(^\text{17}\) https://www.instagram.com/tv/CAtsVzDHt8B/
\(^\text{18}\) *Folha de São Paulo*, 24 February 1975.
performance—promoted by the German magazine Der Spiegel\(^1\) as a “traditionally Parisian transvestite show… whose European tour in 1975 was a sensational success”—was broadcast in Germany to celebrate the new year.

4.2.4. **Saudades de Casa** (Homesick)

In December 1975, another whirlwind marked the history of the group. Despite the success and acclaim they received overseas, the group could not help but feel nostalgia for Brazil. The Dzi’s (not so unanimous) repatriation followed an invitation by a wealthy landowner to perform at a summer festival in the northeastern state of Bahia. As they were rehearsing for their comeback and adjusting details, a seemingly ordinary disagreement emerged over the scenery. This time, Lennie Dale was unimpressed and quite vocal about a ladder that Claudio Tovar had constructed. As their debut neared (only to be censored three times in a row) and the time to reconceptualise or even rebuild the scenery proved unfeasible, the Dzi father adamantly announced—along with Ciro, Lotinha, and Benê—the startling decision to part ways with the group/family in January 1976 (Lobert 2010: 32-33). The internal crisis sparked by these departures was compounded by long-term financial struggle and the audience’s not-so-positive surprise in seeing the new formation. Losing four members, including their father and creative director, symbolically marked the endpoint of their golden era.

The remaining Dzi carried on with new plays and formations for another few years, such as *Romance* (1976), *Les Speakerines*, and *TV Croquettes* (1980) (Martins Freitas 2016). However, they failed to generate as great a spark and momentum as they had earlier that decade and increasingly faded into the shadows of national ‘oblivion’ until the late 2000s, when Tatiana Issa and Raphael Alvarez’s homonymous documentary was released. The documentary provides some details on the breakup and more recent information on the group. In 1991, after 15 years away from the Croquettes, Lennie Dale made an emotional resquest. Battling HIV, the estranged Dzi father voiced an urge: for everyone to get together on stage and perform one last time. Over the course of the

\(^1\)https://www.spiegel.de/politik/diese-woche-im-fernsehen-a-f51f11ee-0002-0001-0000-000041066722
1980s and early 1990s, four Croquettes died from HIV/AIDS complications: Lennie Dale, Paulete, Eloy, and Gaya. Roberto de Rodrigues suffered a stroke. Another three were brutally murdered. Reginaldo was murdered inside his home in Paris and found the next day mysteriously clad in religious garments. Lotinha had his home broken into and was tied up and asphyxiated by burglars. Wagner Ribeiro, the Dzi mother and guru, was murdered at the farm where he lived with his French boyfriend, right underneath the tree where he used to say he would like to be buried (Dzi Croquettes 2009). It is quite remarkable and tragic that three Dzi Croquettes suffered such vicious deaths when they were overtly against the use of violence (by the military dictatorship or by opposing armed groups) and instead favoured political organising in/through the arts. Besides the 2009 documentary, there is not much information available on their deaths on the Internet or whether the murderers were eventually identified and held accountable.

Despite their much-celebrated irreverence, originality, and social impact in the 1970s, it was not until the 2009 documentary that the group secured a place in the country's history and memory. Indeed, a central trope in, and motivation for the production of, the documentary was redemption: denouncing the erasure of the Dzi Croquettes in the national memory and claiming its belated place (Martins Freitas 2016: 15). The documentary has ‘rescued’ the Dzi from the margins of national history and introduced the group to younger generations, having received several awards since then. It has also paved the way for an incipient but growing body of scholarship, in Brazil and abroad.

4.3. The Dzi Performances

Thus far I have examined the context of which the Croquettes were product and producers as well as the directions they took, from their emergence in nightclubs to high-end theatrical venues in Brazil and Europe, and finally their demise. In this section, I describe that which the Croquettes were most celebrated for: their shocking, sexy, and hilarious performances. This description, however, is at best partial. While some original
scripts have been kept by public archives in Brazil\textsuperscript{20} and serve as a rough roadmap of the Dzi performances, they fail to capture important nuances in textual improvisation and in visual exuberance. The performances’ visual appeal and improvisation were two fundamental pillars of their shows, and the group would constantly bounce ideas off each other and fans and test them on the spot. Performances, thus, varied greatly from fixed scripts and were modified according to daily affairs, feedback from the public, and even their mood at the moment of performing (Lobert 2010: 89-91). Therefore, offering a fully exhaustive description of their performances is not exactly feasible. Elusive to definite classifications, their influences ranged from vaudeville and cabaret to nonsense comedy and Brazilian carnival, \textit{tropicalismo}, umbanda, and candomblé.\textsuperscript{21} The Dzi caused some uproar for their extravagant and gender-blurring outfits, but also for the lack thereof: wearing c-strings and flashing butts on stage publicly invoked a sense of liberation and eroticism quite unimaginable for the time. Their performances had a general pattern of oscillations: between strength and grace,\textsuperscript{22} chaos and order, profusion and minimalism, professionalism and amateurism.

Wagner Ribeiro was officially considered and paid as the author of the Dzi Croquettes, but in reality, authorship was a little more complex. The creation, production, and management of the shows were horizontal: from scripts, costumes, set, make-up, choreography to administrative errands and negotiations. The internal division of labour hinged on individual contribution and input according to each’s experiences, skills, and personal tastes. In this sense, each member’s contribution was equally valued and valuable to the success the group achieved. Through make-up, outfit, and textual improvisation, each Croquette had great leeway to express their inventiveness and idiosyncrasy. Gaya, for instance, would help Wagner write the scripts; Roberto helped with some of the writing too, but was mainly in charge, with Tovar, of the drawing,

\textsuperscript{20} Such as in the \textit{Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais} (SBAT) (Brazilian Association of Playwrights) as well as in the \textit{Arquivo Nacional} (National Archives).

\textsuperscript{21} Umbanda and Candomblé are syncretic Brazilian religions incorporating elements from Catholic, Indigenous, and African traditions. While umbanda is said to have emerged in the early 20th century, candomblé dates back to Brazilian slavery, influenced mainly by West African ethnic groups such as the yorubás, the ewe, the fon, and the bantus. (Capone 2010)

\textsuperscript{22} As one of their most-remembered lines goes: “with the force of the male and the grace of the female”. 
scenography, and costumes; whereas Bayard and Reginaldo were responsible for the day-to-day administration. The overall direction was Lennie’s (Brito & Barcelos 2003: 41). If they claimed to have no leaders, one could see a de facto leadership of two members—Wagner and Lennie—due to their age, experience, and central roles in the family.

Among the familial responsibilities they shared, the most straining was learning the choreography meticulously taught by the father in lengthy daily rehearsals. A recurring point in the Dzi Croquettes literature is that Lennie Dale brought ‘professionalism’ to the group. Not many Dzi Croquettes had formal or vast experience with performing, singing, and dancing. Yet, with time and effort, their skills came close to par with the bad boy of Broadway himself. “He [Lennie Dale] was a star and made us international”, said the Dzi Bayard in our interview. “If it wasn’t for Lennie, maybe we would be national or local. He made us international based on Wagner’s philosophy and on individual talents and efforts”. This inch-perfect choreography was intertwined with a much looser text, partially improvised on the spot in a flexible sequence of scenes. Creative fuel for their performances came from the mutual interplay and feedback between their on-stage performances and off-stage lives, which was a central feature of their performances. They added, modified, or excluded sections of their shows based on the feedback received, on their current location as well as on quotidian events. This open acknowledgment of, indeed necessary and ongoing input from, their off-stage lives questioned an easy distinction between fiction and ‘real’ life. The malleability of performances allowed for a patchwork effect—one of the Croquettes’ most fascinating features—as they incorporated and parodied bits of the world around them.

The overarching commonality of their performances was a multi-layered ambiguity, perhaps most visible in the group’s aesthetics: their ensemble of ‘clashing’ elements such as hairy torsos and beards covered in make-up and lingerie, or a ballet tutu paired with military boots. Ambiguity was also produced, on one hand, through gesture, as in a dancing movement resembling a military salute that turned out to be a sassy throw of a purse or a virile shake of hips and bums (Lobert 2010: 50); on the other, through voice,
by alternating high and low pitch that frequently mismatched spectators’ gender expectations about a given character. A non-linear series of sketches combined with a humorous, nonsensical, and improvised delivery of lines betrayed the group’s commitment not to impart a pedagogic take-home-with-you message to the public, but to invite them to an open-ended and subjective process of reflection and resignification. Suggestively, “The audience wants to have fun” and “They don’t seem to understand much” was how the group most frequently voiced their perception of the audience’s response to and investment in their shows (Lobert 2010: 170). The latter perception was not condescending to the audience, but an acknowledgment of the Dzi’s nonsensical excess of senses. There was no single, clear, or coherent sense to be derived by audience members. Such a multiplicity of meanings took place between performances on different evenings, which varied more or less significantly due to improvisation and public feedback, but also in a single evening (Lobert 2010: 118-120) based on daily affair or performers’ mood. Performers would also often swap roles, so that a given sketch could be and was performed by different members over time.

Their excess of symbols, utterances, and gestures failed to cohere in a political or cultural message, preventing an easy organisation or stabilisation of their performances. While some saw in this a refusal from the group to engage with politics, as we will see in the next section, that was likely a shrewd strategy the Croquettes adopted to avoid the fate of other cultural workers who explicitly voiced a political message. Such excess, according to Jan Hutta (2016:149), “made intelligibility collapse, producing a stream of non-sense,” which invited spectators to experience “a radical multiplication of senses” (Hutta 2016: 149). This non-sense gave way to an open-ended chain of signification, where spectators would attempt to decipher the scenes according to their own ‘baggage,’ background, and familiarity with the Dzi language and inside jokes (Lobert 2010: 118-120). In this light, the Dzi Croquettes’ performances could still be framed as pedagogic, albeit unorthodoxically, in the sense that they provoked exploratory, rather than pre-given and teleological, reflections on spectators while exposing the limits of language and reason.
Having outlined the key structure of their performances, let us now consider the substance thereof. I stated above the limitation of scripts in helping us grasp the intricacies of their performances. However, one script I found during my archival research stands out for offering rare information about the early days of the Dzi Croquettes. The script in question\textsuperscript{23} concerns their early performances at Mr. Pujol, of which little is known. This script suggests that, initially, the plot of their performances revolved primarily around the Dzi family, portrayed on stage as an all-female family except for the father. According to such script, their early performances resembled Samuel Beckett’s \textit{Waiting for Godot}, except that instead of Godot the whole family eagerly awaits and prepares for the arrival of the grandmother/mother-in-law. From the outset, it is clear that the mother and father have a conflictual relationship. The mother tells the audience how difficult it was to raise her daughters after the father abandoned them. However, he is somehow still present in their lives. The father enters the stage shouting all sorts of orders like a “proper” macho. Rather than submitting, the mother instantly rebukes his demeanour and says she is not his maid. The quarrel evolves rapidly as the father furiously grabs and shakes the mother to and fro. Before the situation gets out of control, the daughters intervene and corner the father, who breaks down in tears and walks away as the women cheer their victory. It is possible to discern here a humorous critique of gender roles/norms that remained in their later performances. While (first-hand or otherwise) events of domestic abuse and physical violence against women were probably usual for spectators, the gag here comes from the scene’s unexpected and humorous outcome that hints at notions of feminist solidarity.

The performance is rendered comic, partly, because the daughters seem at times to be very young and silly; at others, relatively grown-up and mature. While the mother prides herself on the liberal education her daughters received, at others this is a cause for intergenerational conflict. The common hierarchy between mother and daughters is replaced by a humorous horizontality, so that if the mother seems to exert authority over

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais} (SBAT) (Brazilian Association of Playwrights). File: “dzi família croquete de wagner ribeiro vc.7123 cx.246 ou bn.13.977”
her offspring, the roles change abruptly and the daughters appear to be the ones in control. For instance, when the daughters are told off for using swear words or for their unusual group of friends, they also take up the protective/parental role by giving advice to and reprimanding the mother. In one of the script’s funniest scenes, after the arrival of the grandmother, the matriarch expresses her concern over the people with whom her daughter (the mother) is hanging out. Warning her daughter not to hang out with *mariquinhas* (faggots), the daughter/mother replies to the matriarch: “They are not faggots mum, they even play football.” As any queer person who grew up in Brazil knows, football remains the national symbol of pride and traditional masculinity. The grandmother, unconvinced by her daughter’s remark, concludes with a quip: “It is precisely those whom we need to watch over.”

Their later performances continued to deploy comedy and parody to undermine and critique social mores. Unlike the performance above, over time they loosened their focus on the family and introduced other non-familial themes and characters. We now turn to the second, golden-era version of their performances. The account below is based primarily on Rosemary Lobert’s ocular description of the Dzi performance on the evening of 23 May 1973 at *Teatro Treze de Maio* (Lobert 2010: 47-66). I do not intend to provide a linear or thoroughly descriptive account; instead, I analyse some sketches selected for their political and symbolic importance as well as beauty and impact on the memory of spectators. The show began with a dim light and a single, half-concealed Dzi member wearing a blue satin bonnet, a brown skirt, and a massive cardboard eyelash on the chin. His garments and glittered makeup humorously contrasted with his hairy torso and deep tone of voice uttering the famous opening words:24

*Neither gentlemen nor ladies
People from there, people from here
We aren’t men, we aren’t women either
We’re people […] people computed equal to/ just like you*

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24 Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this text from Portuguese to English are mine.
You want a flower, we have it...
You want a fight, we also have it
There are only two things we don’t have
We have no destiny and no sex

Hey you, how is your head?
Now come on over and get a new mind
Because you are about to see
A really wonderful and really ’crazy’ family

Climaxing with a frenetic flashing of lights and vibrant music, the stage was suddenly invaded by thirteen flamboyantly adorned bodies singing and twirling around, a joyful circus of underdogs. Massive eyelashes, tonnes of glitter, and psychedelic make-up covered their face; their toned hairy bodies clad in an unconventionally wide range of ‘mismatched’ garments and accessories: from lingerie, a fancy lame dress, high heels, and extravagant hats to football socks suspended by garter belts, a tail coat, buttoned-up shirt, and heavy-duty boots (Lobert 2010: 48-50). Their usual introduction to the public in the scene Abertura (Opening) consisted in a chaotic and exuberant parade of weird and sexy characters, as one would find in a typical carnival gathering in Brazil.

In another scene, The Ballerinas, one performer played a childish ballerina who kept mumbling incomprehensible made-up German and got reprimanded by the teacher after doing the Nazi salute. Here, nazism stands for a particular version of fascist masculinism that was in vogue under the Brazilian dictatorship. Yet, it was the character’s tutu, heavy make-up, and childish behaviour that stole the scene and called into question, even ridiculed, this particular ideal/conflation of masculinity and belligerence. Yet, their performances were not bounded by critique. Besides parody and mockery, another performative/political strategy pursued by the group is, as Jan Hutta calls it, paradoxical affirmation: “an invocation of, opening up to and assertion of heterogeneous, often incommensurate, expressions” (Hutta 2016: 147). Hutta argues

26 I will follow Lobert’s titles of the sketches.
that the term usefully reworks and brings nuance to a concept introduced in Chapter Two: ‘disidentification,’ as put forth by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) to capture a strategy deployed by minoritarian cultural workers who challenge and expand the majoritarian cultural logic from within, with and against itself.

Instances of the Dzi minoritarian affiliations and paradoxical affirmations are found, for instance, in the scenes following and preceding The Ballerinas. In the following scene, a single performer plays the role of a whore, who chooses and sensuously invites a male spectator to act as a proper macho and seduce her. After some audience encouragement, as witnessed by Lobert, a shy spectator goes on the stage and unsuccessfully chats her up. The surprising ending comes in her playful dismissal of the spectator as uma santa (the female noun of ‘a saint’) (Lobert 2010: 55-56). Through improvisation and humour, the protagonist is not the guy who succeeds in wooing her, but the prostitute mocking his failure to be a good macho and revealing that she was the one in charge, momentarily inverting/mocking notions of female subordination and sexual respectability. In the preceding scene, three performers—one of them Black—dance to James Brown donning fabulous, glittering dresses revealing hairy torsos and butts; faces with a carnivalesque make-up and curly wigs of three different colours: red, black, and white. The scene was sexy, sweaty, upbeat. At the same time that it alluded to the North American Black Power movement, the colours represented the three largest racial groups in Brazil. The critiques of the violence of white supremacy and of the Brazilian myths of racial democracy and peaceful coexisting were beyond the scope of the scene above, as they were in the one added during their European Tour, titled Ye-Me-Lê. In it, topless and wearing skirts reminiscent of religious rituals, the performers evoke through music and dance the syncretism of Afro-Brazilian traditions.

At the time that these scenes were beautifully performed by the Croquettes, Black Brazilians and Afro-Brazilian traditions were (and to a large extent still are) subject to major criminalisation, stigma, and persecution from the police and society. As Jan Hutta reads these scenes, they affirmed the positive value of racial diversity while suggesting the Croquettes’ “minoritarian affiliations along lines of class, gender, sexuality and race,
as well as an engagement with fragmented projects of modernization, liberation and singularization” (Hutta 2016: 149). While I agree with this reading, I would caution against a romantic view of positive affirmation, particularly with respect to the scene Ye-Me-Lê, since this affirmation of Afro-Brazilian elements most likely unbeknown to a European audience is not easily distinguishable from a self-promotion strategy as an ‘exotic’ troupe from Brazil. Beyond market co-optation, caution is needed so that positive affirmation does not slip into cultural appropriation.

Some other scenes are remembered and celebrated for their technical quality and emotional impact. In one, with a rendition of Jacques Brel’s Ne me Quitte Pas, the Dzi Paulete impersonates Edith Piaf donning a long lace gown that halfway through the number reveals a hilariously oversized pair of boots. This scene is mentioned in the documentary for its impact on the French audience hearing Paulete’s laudable pitch and delivery as well as seeing a Black man ‘in drag’ impersonating Piaf (Dzi Croquettes 2009: 1:21:25-1:22:26). In another, two actors take up the stage dancing bolero, cheek to cheek, awing the audience with the moving portrayal of the intimacy and desire between two men (Dzi Croquettes 2009: 15:37-18:11).

Yet, what is held as the evening’s climax began with the scene As Borboletas/Andróginos (The Butterflies/Androgynous). It is worth quoting at length Lobert’s description (Lobert 2010: 62-4). With Richard Strauss’ Also Sprach Zarathustra in the background, one actor recited in a low-pitched tone as the butterflies/performers flapped their wings sensuously and showed with ease the dance skills arduously perfected at the Dzi daily rehearsals:

> And even if you don’t like it, our planet, our cocoon is right at this moment going through a great transformation: we men, we women are understanding each other, thank God. Both forms Animus and Anima are getting equal. We have all, of course, read Carl Gustav Jung… oh dear, fly to the air, fly, let’s release the butterfly, let’s fly with them, let’s seek the sky, happiness, fly, butterflies, fly, fly. (...)
So begins the new rebirth
And with it a new being
With all the force of the male and the grace of the female
It is easy to live with and understand it
I just don’t know how to explain it
And do so with a scream:
Ahhhhh……………. It’s the Androgynous being! (Lobert 2010: 63)

Source: São Paulo State Archives.

On stage appear three fit bodies donning layers of lace, a boxing glove strewn with glitter in one hand, and a satin glove dotted with shining rings and bracelets in the other. Engaging in a violent yet sensual fight, their dance oscillates between virile and delicate. The climax birthing this new being “with all the force of the male and the grace of the female”—one of the most famous Dzi mottos—is “possibly [the] most remarkable
choreography in the spectator’s memory for its beauty and clear expression, with contrasting feminine and masculine gestures” (Lobert 2010: 63). The figure of the butterfly here is not accidental: it symbolises transformation, liberation from the cocoon, its flapping wings as it reaches towards the skies evoking freedom and even an encounter with the divine. This is a moment of synthesis, the deliverance of a prophecy, a tear in the fabric of the present through which spectators could peek at a future androgynous utopia, materialised in front of their eyes but not quite there yet. Against the backdrop of Strauss’ piece, inspired by Nietzsche’s homonymous book, the übermensch is transmuted into the androgyne, a (future) goal for humanity. The scene ended shortly after the birth of the androgyne, with actors quickly dispersing and uttering a series of nonsensical references to nature, as though to counterbalance the seriousness of the climax and circumvent easy conclusions about what message (if any) the show sought to impart.

In this way, as illustrated by the scenes above, the Dzi performances worked with(in) and against hegemonic cultural elements, particularly using parody and mockery. Moreover, they also affirmed minoritarians elements posited as unworthy of affirmation or value: for instance, the underground, the androgyne, and an effeminate, racialised version of Brazilianness, the general themes of the first, second, and third versions of their show (Lobert 2010: 255-256). Such versions are divided in this way simply for analytical purposes; in reality it was more of a continuum, and elements of all three appeared throughout the Croquettes’ oeuvre, except with different highlights and formats. While refusing coherence and, to some extent, legibility, this Dzi patchwork of (counter)hegemonic cultural elements produced, as it were, a parody of the centre and an ode to the margins, a celebration of projects of liberation and modernisation that sought to challenge the mechanisms of power sustaining the distinction between centre and margin.

4.4. The Dzi Philosophy of Life

Following the general structure and substance of the Dzi performances on stage, this section looks at the other side of the coin: their off-stage ideological posture that bonded
and served as a tacit vow for the Dzi family, a foundational principle that remained an ethos even if not always fully realised in practice. The Dzi ‘philosophy of life’ included the commitment to *assumir o barato na totalidade*\(^\text{27}\) (to take charge of the project in its entirety), on stage—its conception, design, performance, selection of members—and off stage—sharing all labour, leisure, money, and domestic chores. Practically, this entailed the collective pursuit of certain goals: making and sharing a living, learning to be professional, living together, taking on responsibilities, and owning their sexuality (Lobert 2010: 95-96). To approach thorny issues, the family adopted female pronouns and a humorous, complimentary intonation. Day in and day out, they ended up developing a particular Dzi vernacular and comportment with an exaggerated, effusive warmth (Lobert 2010: 97-105).

Despite coming from multiple backgrounds, in the very opening words of their *Andróginos* show they began by refusing differentiation based on gender (the famous Dzi motto “neither gentlemen nor ladies) and on social/geographical background (“people from here, people from there”). This famous motto sought to evade gender binaries through a negative stance, that is, by saying they were not either of those two things (which perhaps also inadvertently reinforced the two categories). Yet, it is not entirely clear to what extent the Dzi negation of binaries (such as “neither gentlemen nor ladies”) or “merging” thereof (such as “with the force of the male and the grace of the female”) work to actually challenge or synthesise binaries or (also) end up repeating them. In Section 4.5.1 below and in Chapter Five I examine the efforts and contradictions in the Dzi Croquettes’ disidentificatory approach to gender binarism.

Despite their otherworldly make-up, costumes, and multi-layered ambiguity—including but not limited to androgyny—they asserted a commonality not only between Dzi members on stage, but members of the audience and beyond: “we’re people… people computed just like/equal to you.” Asserting that we are all people despite our differences

\(^{27}\) I assume the word *barato* here refers to the Dzi life and theatre project, but it can also be an adjective to describe something interesting or entertaining, or even the state of being high caused by some drugs.
could appear to echo, on one hand, humanist appeals to assimilation and, on the other, the liberal discourse of ‘blindness’, often used as a shield against accusation or acknowledgment of prejudice as well as to dismiss claims from people or groups appealing to particularity or difference as a political strategy. However, this Dzi invocation of humanism and difference/equality sought to destabilise the homogeneity of conventionally accepted roles and socially enforced behaviour. Difference, here, is not a deviance or departure from the common or the normal, but a commonality bonding us all *qua* “people computed.” It is possible to draw a connection between this Dzi ‘refusal’ of differentiation (not of difference) and Joan Scott’s proposed move in critical feminist politics of deconstructing liberalism’s “equality-versus-difference” dichotomy and dilemma. This move entails refusing difference “not in the name of an equality that implies sameness or identity, but rather… in the name of an equality that rests on differences…that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition” (Scott 1988: 48). Deconstructing this dilemma debunks the assumption of sameness as a precondition for equality, an unsound liberal assumption since “power is constructed on and so must be challenged from the ground of difference” (Ibid.)

In the same opening scene, the assertion “there are only two things we don’t have: sex and destiny” finds probable inspiration in Simone de Beauvoir’s famous words that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. Not the realm of nature/anatomy, but society destines one to become a woman. The Croquettes’ no sex and no destiny, then, may be seen as a negation of both the natural and the social as fully determining and defining forces. While the group resisted focusing on their pre-Dzi backgrounds in conversations with fans and the press, the heterogeneity and multiplicity of identities and life trajectories were not disavowed but welcomed and used as a fuel for the group’s creativity and self-expression. The development and expression of individual subjectivities and skills relied on a dialectical process of mutual learning with/from others, which to the group was simply *learning to be people* (*aprendendo a ser gente*), one of the group’s overt ‘principles’ (Lobert 2010: 96). The gerund of the verb suggests an open-endedness, unlike the self-made and sovereign subject who needs nothing
more than his own will and determination to—eventually but surely—achieve mastery over himself.

The Dzi, instead, posited subjectivity as always and already unfinished, always and already changing, a process that radically depended on and avowed (an openness) to others. Learning to be people, or ‘becoming-people’ as Jan Hutta translates it, was “universalizing and singularly situated at the same time”, because “rather than proposing a generic model for everyone to follow, it was the experimental tracing and developments of new expressive capacities and interconnections” (Hutta 2016: 146). This self-expression and learning with/from others was not constricted to the Dzi performers. As the group’s performances and way of being infected the public, spectators derived from Dzi performances a “universal language of success” (Lobert 2010: 224), which they adopted into their lives as a source of strength and resilience to navigate challenging and frustrating circumstances. The contagious Dzi ‘philosophy of life’ that spread across the social landscape could be summarised as freedom to be and do as one pleases, or “a restaging of ‘where there is a will, there is a way’” (Lobert 2010: 226). The experiences and transformations that my oral history participants went through in/as the aftermath of the Dzi performances are the subject of the upcoming chapter. Before that, to conclude this one, let us analyse the impact of the Dzi performances on the symbolic, sociopolitical landscape through the concept of disidentification.

4.5. Dzidentifications

We have seen how the Dzi performances drew from both dominant and minoritarian cultural elements, locally and internationally, which they then juxtaposed, parodied, or affirmed in unexpected, hilarious, sometimes moving ways. In this concluding section, I analyse how the Dzi Croquettes’ disidentificatory performances worked with/on/against not only majoritarian cultural elements (Muñoz 1999) but also with/against seemingly opposite dichotomies. While the sections above zoomed in on the Dzi Croquettes and their performances/philosophy of life, this section looks at the broader social, political, and symbolic landscape to investigate the reverberations of the Dzi performances.
Disidentification, a concept/political strategy outlined in Section 2.3, was of particular help to the Croquettes at a time when the military junta and censorship officers clamped down on open and vocal forms of counteridentification.

Thus, in the section to come, I argue and explain how the Dzi Croquettes’ performances disidentified with/against a set of seemingly opposite binaries, reformulating them as part of a spectrum and indeed constitutive of each other. They did not overcome or transcend these categories as much as operated through what we may call grammatical interventions, which are themselves one of the purposes and effects of political struggles. These grammatical interventions sought to articulate new possible meanings for political terms/binaries without necessarily rejecting the terms per se. That is, while they professed the birth of a new androgynous being, they still promoted this being as a mix of the grace of the female and the force of the male, which may seem quite binary still. Yet, rather than a priori rejecting the categories of men or women, they sought to infuse them with new meanings and advance them as mutually constitutive rather than opposite or exclusive. These disidentifications worked to denaturalise social categories and symbols, exposing their contingency to reformulation and possibilities of being/meaning otherwise. Of course, this is not a one-off work that the Dzi or any other performer/activist could ever achieve alone and for good. Drawing parallels with the following sections, I shall return to this point in Chapter Six where I propose that we understand the Croquettes as sites of “epistemic friction” and of “chained action” (Medina 2013). For now, I shall dwell on three binaries that the Dzi performances challenged/reformulated: male x female; public (political) x private (personal); and family x kinship.

4.5.1. The Gender/Sexual Binaries

The transgression most frequently associated with the Croquettes is the mix-up of elements conventionally deemed either male or female, turning these so-called oppositional and natural truths into a more fluid continuum. It matters that the Croquettes did not try to emulate femininity as, to use a more contemporary term, the
“fishy” queens from Rupaul’s Drag Race, the famous reality TV competition seeking the most talented drag queens in the United States. There were already shows across São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro where male-assigned performers would go on stage as “real” women. The Croquettes clearly did not belong to this segment. They did not aim to represent the “opposite side” of the gender binary but to stay rather messily in the middle. As seen in the previous section, they achieved this messy in-betweeness through their aesthetics, bodily movement, intonation, and character. They visually and vocally mismatched gendered elements, defiantly boasting their toned torsos covered in sweat and hair next to make-up, skirts, and high heels.

One aspect that cannot be overlooked in this discussion is the intergenerational gap between ‘then’, when the group existed and thrived, and ‘now’, when the Dzi began to attract the interest of younger generations (from the early 2010s onwards). The Croquettes have been hailed by the media and enthusiasts as one of the pioneering forces of the Brazilian gay movement that emerged in the late 1970s. However, contrary to the common assumption and celebration that all or most Croquettes were/are ‘gay’, as became clear in my oral history interviews, the Dzi Croquettes were somewhat at odds with the term. In my conversation with Ciro Barcelos, he said that “although many people currently hail us as the first to raise the gay power flag, we did not raise this flag. On the contrary, everyone was bisexual. We dated women and men… It was freedom of expression in all senses. We considered ourselves more androgynous than gay. The term ‘gay’ did not even exist at the time.” Bayard Tonelli shared a similar view, although instead of bisexuality he referred to the hippie movement and the posterior arrival of the term in their lexicon:

I am from the Peace and Love movement, we are anterior to the gay movement...So when the gay movement started, I must admit I found it a bit conservative. It was only later that I came to understand its politics... [Why conservative?] Because I thought that being androgynous and sexually liberated was much more modern and freer than being gay and being inside a ghetto. If we
look at it, the gay movement is somewhat of an existential ghetto, which now I understand and defend.

Interestingly, the Croquettes played throughout their performances with terms nowadays most commonly associated with gender. That is, “neither gentlemen, nor ladies” but somewhere in-between, beyond, and/or both (under the Dzi slogan “with the force of the female and the grace of the female”). Younger readers might find it baffling that a group of homo- and bisexual men played with a gendered as opposed to a sexual grammar. A hot topic of debate among radical feminists in the 1980s (Rubin 2011), the ‘split’ (as well as overlaps and tensions) between sexual and gender identity is posterior to the Dzi rise and demise. Recognising this intergenerational nuance is important if we want to avoid a single-issue reading of the Croquettes. Furthermore, notwithstanding the beauty and power of their on-stage ‘genderless’ utopia, the Croquettes were an avowedly all-male group for commercial reasons. Even with the adoption and emergence of the Dzi Croquettas, they did not merge their shows but kept two separate ones: one for the men and another for the women. When asked about the reasons for this, the Dzi Tovar shared with me some motivations for Lennie Dale’s hesitation to help direct the Croquettas’ project:

Lennie said, ‘I can’t, I have only just finished creating and putting together an all-male show where I had to invent so much, many ways to develop this androgyny, now I am not doing the androgyny of the women because I don’t have the mind for that.

The above mention of ‘androgyny of the women’ may seem oxymoronic in light of the Dzi androgyny motto “neither ladies, nor gentlemen,” since the Dzi androgyny professed to be a combination, denial, and transcendence of the gender binary. However, rather than encompassing current understandings and identities of trans or non-binary people, the Dzi Croquettes’ androgyny seems more a hybrid of male homo- and bisexuality inspired by the free love movement. Dale’s stated incapacity to create a show for the Croquettas may also be seen, at least partly and I believe more productively, as an
acknowledgment of his social positioning and thus limitations to capture the universe of a ‘female androgyny’ from his lived and embodied experience. My interest here is not in establishing a/the meaning of androgyny for the Dzi or, equally as interesting, for the broader public. Rather, one powerful effect of the Dzi performances I am seeking to unveil here is precisely that of raising new questions, igniting a search for new/other meanings. To illustrate this point let me turn to an anecdote from the oral history interviews, dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

The Croquettes had left Paris and just arrived in Brazil in early 1976, as the Dzi Bayard shared with me. At the invitation of a wealthy farmer, they were hosted in a small town of 30,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Salvador, Bahia. Strolling around one afternoon, Bayard noticed a thrift shop with a peculiar strategy to promote their special offers. As he neared the shopfront, he spotted the handmade promotion poster announcing: ‘Androgynous’ Special Offers.’ There did not seem to be anything particularly androgynous about the clothes, so Bayard assumed the owner must have thought it was a way of making the shop look cool and trendy. The press had widely covered the Croquettes’ return to Brazil and no doubt the local population would have been somewhat aware of their presence, especially after their success in Paris. In this way, as they travelled around, as the media reported on them, the Dzi Croquettes carried more than just their suitcases or wigs to that small town: they also ‘carried’ the word androgynous.

The power and beauty of this anecdote lie precisely in this commuting of potentially new terms to unexpected, unlikely locations and the consequent questions and reflections that might emerge. As we laughed in appreciation of the shop owner’s business approach, I thought of José Esteban Muñoz’s posthumous book *The Sense of Brown* and, in particular, of his account of Nao Bustamante’s hoax performance in 1992 on the Joan Rivers Show. Bustamante impersonates “Rosa”, an unapologetically kinky Latina who is not afraid to share ribald anecdotes of her (fictional) sex encounters. One such encounter, as Rosa put it, was “with a ‘multigendered ambisexual’ at a public aquarium” (Muñoz et al 2020: 49). Again, as with the travelling of androgynous, Rosa’s utterance
of those words on national television was a collective invitation to pose the questions: “what does that mean?” or “what could that mean?”. When Brazil was ruled by a patriarchal, fascist dictatorship, the Croquettes performed and ventilated alternative ontologies against the notion of rugged individualism, of the impenetrable male body. We can read the Dzi as raising powerful yet subtle collective questions such as “what does androgynous mean?” or even “what is/does it mean to be a man” and “what is/does it mean to be a woman?” Being an all-male group, we may read the Dzi performances as working within/against a normative ideal of masculinity, as disidentifying with social norms and mores on proper masculinity.

In this section, I have sought to foreground the historical and political contingency of political/identitarian grammar, a contingency that the Dzi Croquettes’ performances exposed, played with, and subverted. Let us now turn to the contingency of the term ‘political’ and how the Dzi performances sought to expand it by challenging conventional boundaries between the public and private realms.

### 4.5.2. The Public (Political) and Private (Personal) Divide

In an interview for the traditional newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, published on 2 August 1974, the Dzi mother curiously complained about the media’s ill-informed and annoying labelling of the Dzi Croquettes as representatives of the Brazilian gay power. Refusing to elect one group or community ‘above’ the other differences in the Dzi family such as race, age, social background, and idiosyncrasy, Wagner Ribeiro explained that “The Dzi Croquettes are not representatives of the gay power, neither of androgyny, nor men or women, neither whites nor blacks, but of all. We either represent everyone or no one at all”. While they did not see themselves as politically representing any single group, there is not always a neat convergence between authorial intentions and the multiple meanings derived from the performance’s public reception. More simply put, there is perhaps an inevitable gap between, on one hand, what they sought or thought to represent and communicate to the public and, on the other, how their performances travelled and were received. The point here is not to establish the (in)accuracy of calling
them representatives of the gay movement, but to note the coexistence of many possible, at *prima facie* even contradictory, views on the matter.

The group’s rejection concerned the representation of a particular group, not politics itself. All four surviving members I spoke to viewed the Croquettes’ performances and movement as political, even if not overtly to an orthodox gaze. For Bayard, the Dzi had a “philosophical pretension because, when the group started, we thought we were going to change the world. We thought we were in the avant-garde rescuing ancient values of androgyny, liberatory ways of being that were not normal for that time.” While the group did not have a patent political stance, according to Tovar, “we were political in our attitude, I believe. There was a dictatorship and we were aware of it, but we never went ‘down with the dictatorship!’ There was no need to say that. It was risky”, he commented, and asked “why act like that if we can do something much more dangerous and wonderful like what we were doing? It already was a political attitude, this *desbunde*, this *deboche* (mockery)… we were revolutionary in our way of doing” (Tovar). Ciro shared a similar view: “Politics was already intrinsic to our way of being, this *desbunde* we are talking about. That was very political already (Ciro). Benê Lacerda, in hindsight, wished having the ‘head’ he has today: “I know it [the Dzi] was a very important thing. Maybe I knew a bit more than my colleagues. Some had no idea of its political importance. We were censored and persecuted because there was a political importance, obviously… we were changing the ‘head’ of a generation, so many people” (Benê). As seen in Section 4.1 above, the Brazilian Left was then roughly divided into some actors claiming to be doing radical politics and others deemed to be engaged in a hedonist, bourgeois trend deflecting from ‘real’ politics. Matters regarding gendered and sexuality were privatised—that is, rendered as natural traits, at best, or ‘illness’, at worst, that concerned none but the individual—both by this dominant Left strand as well as the Right aligned with the fascist junta.

Here we can establish a link with some of the disidentificatory performances analysed by Muñoz with regard to the Right’s removal of debates about queerness and HIV/AIDS from the public agenda, such as the performances by Pedro Zamora and Félix
González-Torres. Like the Dzi Croquettes, these performances “thematized and theatricalized their illness as public spectacles” (Muñoz 1999: 151) by achieving “a tactical misrecognition of dominant publicity’s public/private binary” (169). Likewise, the Croquettes turned their ‘illnesses’ into public art and challenged dominant notions of private/public, which is in and of itself political since this challenge seeks to inaugurate new points/concerns on the public debate agenda whilst bringing into relief the exclusionary operations that sustain the private/public divide. It worked to the Croquettes’ favour that many in the political spectrum did not think they were engaged in politics because it did not conform to more legible forms. This allowed the Dzi to, as it were, do politics on the margins of the political, and fly under the censorship radar for some time. Just a couple of years later, the publication of the first volume of Michel Foucault’s highly influential ‘The History of Sexuality’ (Foucault 1978) challenged, via academia—as did the Croquettes, via performance and affective, embodied knowledge—the relegation of gender and sexuality to a private, individual, a-/pre-political realm by claiming them as sites and effects of power, not (simply) nature. To avoid restrictions, the Croquettes watered down aspects of the show when performing to censorship officials to obtain the state’s permission: less swearing and sexiness; more frivolity and childish nonsense. On a daily basis, to a general audience, the Croquettes used the textual artifices discussed in Section 4.3 above: ambiguity, innuendos, as well as the excess and destabilisation of meanings and symbols. These manoeuvres allowed one to read sociopolitical commentary between the lines without it ever being explicitly voiced.

At a time when queer people were viewed as an enemy of the state, the Croquettes’ performances disidentified with social/moral values and rejected the privatisation of our gendered/sexual identities. While they did not adopt or privilege any particular identitarian term, that the matters portrayed/performed on stage were public and political became manifest, on one hand, in the resonance and allure of their performances, which reverberated across the social landscape and attracted a Dzi sequitur; and on the other, in the junta’s fear and censure thereof. I will further develop this Dzi blurring/challenge to the divide between private condition and public matter in
the next two chapters. Before that, however, let us analyse one—if not the most—central word in the Dzi Croquettes history and philosophy of life.

4.5.3. Family and Kinship

The social form of the family has been a key site of struggle for both LGBT movements and conservative, religious groups. While the former generally decries the supremacy of the heterosexual nuclear family as its sole legitimate/legitimised form, the latter propagates a moral panic against its purported degeneration by mobilising the always-endangered figure of the child. Notwithstanding the ostracisation and stigma that queer people have historically faced even within the household, the notion of family has not been abandoned altogether. On the contrary, queer activists and cultural workers—such as the Dzi Croquettes in Brazil and the houses of New York City’s ballroom culture famously portrayed in Jennifer Livingston’s 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*—evince the collective, historical struggle to recycle and dispute the orthodox notion of family by reinvesting it with a queer ethos, even in the face (or perhaps partly because) of estrangement. Let us not underestimate the power of thirteen queer men calling themselves family, being called likewise by the press, especially in the early 1970s under a military dictatorship. With this gesture, they publicised not only the solidarity and shelter queer people often find in each other when confronted with familial and social prejudice. By appropriating the term, the Dzi Croquettes raised for consideration questions such as “are they/could they be a family?”, “what is a family?”, or “Is kinship always already heterosexual?”

The latter was the question that Judith Butler’s famous article posed three decades after the emergence of the Dzi Croquettes, examining the equal marriage struggle in the United States at the turn of the millennium (Butler 2002). It seems as though advancing multiple possible meanings of family remains controversial up to these days, even in places where legislation has (somewhat) expanded it, never mind five decades ago. Instead of a heterosexual couple bonded by the sacred vow of marriage, the Dzi family comprised thirteen men bonded by a ‘philosophy of life’ that entailed shared work,
shelter, and care. Untethered from shared biology or straight marriage, kinship thus opened up to alternative forms and bonds. Thus, the Dzi family offered glimpses of a utopia where kinship was not reduced to monogamous heterosexuality or to reproductive duties, where queer objects were fostered and celebrated. Unlike the nuclear family under the constant threat of queer desire, illegitimate offspring or extramarital affairs, the Dzi family was penetrable and malleable. Its expansive ethos was evident in the expansion of the Dzi family (as per Section 4.2.2) and in the Dzi movement more broadly.

The above queer ethos the Dzi sought to invest/open up in the notion of family was made possible by their strategy of simultaneously rejecting and upholding the family, that is, by disidentifying with the nuclear, heterosexual couple and smudging the hierarchical lines between family and kinship. Defending the notion that the family can and does take multiple forms has been a central concern of much LGBT politics in the past decades. Yet, unlike the marriage equality debates, the familial expansion envisioned/enacted by the Croquettes’ performances and off-stage lives was not confined to state-sanctioned forms that were analogous to, but nevertheless kept the supremacy/centrality of, the monogamous marriage between two individuals. In a way, we may see a certain resemblance between this Dzi appropriation and expansion of family and a Foucauldian approach to sexual identity and rights, which, rather than reducing them to nature, encourages that we think of both as means to “reconfigure the institutional and social possibilities for the recognition of different (possibly as-yet uncontemplated) types of relationship” (Golder 2015: 107). The types of relationships that the Dzi performances imagined and enacted, as I hope to make clear in this thesis, were not solely affective or sexual relationships but encompassed broader relationships to others, to oneself, and to the social world.

As stated earlier in this chapter, my interest in the Dzi Croquettes is significantly informed by the social contagion of the Dzi way of being across spectators and fans, who found in their performances more than entertainment or fun but also a source of
empowerment, an invitation to transgress and create new forms of being, doing, and thinking. It is on this Dzi public contagion that the remainder of this chapter dwells.

4.6. From nightclub/theatre to the streets

“The joy that existed between us, the love that we felt for each other and for our work passed overwhelmingly onto the public,” observed the Dzi Gaya (Brito & Barcelos 2003: 22). Such was the extent of the phenomenon whereby spectators were magnetised by the Dzi performances that even a neologism was coined to refer to those who started to behave, dress, and talk with a Dzi flair: tiete. The term was invented by Duse Nacaratti, a sort of Dzi godmother, and in its original sense was both appreciative and derogatory—if supportive and generous, tietes could also prove to be intrusive and inconvenient (Lobert 2010: 171-178). However, the contemporary usage of the term—according to two of the country’s most reputable dictionaries, Aurélio and Houaiss—has turned it into a generic synonym for admirer or fan. Popularised by the Dzi Croquettes, in 1981 the neologism went nationwide after the illustrious Gilberto Gil released the song Tietagem, which began: “Do you know what a tiete is? Tiete is a sort of admirer wanting a little bit of your love, wanting to be close, wanting your warmth”. Many tietes managed to penetrate the Dzi Croquettes’ lives off stage to a greater or lesser extent, becoming more or less close to the Dzi family and assuming a higher or lower rank in the hierarchy of tietes. The provision of feedback and ideas plus the donation of outfits were frequent means by which tietes managed to get closer to the Croquettes and primary examples of the public influence—although by no means authority—on the group/family (Lobert 2010: 161). The types of relationships forged ranged from friendship and mentorship to sexual and/or material interest on either side.

The Dzi Croquettes’ porous borders offered spectators a sense of collective participation in the performances, allowing the infiltration of “concerns of all kinds (psychic, sociocultural, and political) of an audience that in a certain way identified with the symbolic universe of the performance” (Lobert 2020: 168). Based on interviews with approximately 50 Dzi followers, reportedly a majority of middle-class women from São
Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Lobert notes that “curious as it may seem, rather than directly talking about the Dzi or the play, the informants invariably referred to themselves” when talking about their identification with the group (2010: 221). The reasons given for this are the collective catharsis and identification with the Dzi way of being, which caused tietes to adopt and rework the Dzi ‘philosophy of life’ into their personal lives. Lobert reports that virtually all of her participants were called their whole lives the epithet *muito esquisito* (very ‘awkward’ or ‘queer’) in light of the divergence between their behaviours and the wider familial or social world.

Taking forward tietes’ self-reference when talking about the “apotheosis of the performance,” one of Lobert’s participants said that the Dzi “are people who talk about my demons (*grilos*) and my deities (*divindades*)” and another that “I saw things that resonated with me” (Lobert 2010: 224). The majority demonstrated a desire to pursue artistic interests, predominantly dance, and a dissatisfaction with their professional choices, which they felt had been impositions from their family and society. Lobert underscores the conventionality of middle-class values at the time, which regarded artistic and creative work as marginal and, as one tiete ironically put it, reserved for *viados* (faggots) and *putas* (whores) (Lobert 2010: 229). However, rather than fully adopting a Dzi way of being off stage, tietes were often confronted with material hindrances. Lobert dedicates a brief paragraph to analysing tietes’ “difficulties in reproducing the Dzi Croquettes system,” which she attributes to social and economic conditions but does not examine further (2010: 230-231).

Lobert summarises her participants’ impressions of the Dzi performances with two brilliant metaphors, which this thesis adopts and develops (as per the upcoming Chapter Five). The first, magnetism, summarises the responses of tietes who felt a deep emotional impact such as attraction and amazement; the second, disorientation, referred to those who were not sure what to comment or were unconvinced by the Dzi hype (Lobert 2010: 215). As important as her contributions have been, Lobert’s description and analysis of her findings—based on interviews with the considerable number of 50 people—feel rather underdeveloped. Aside from a relatively brief mention,
there is no information on the methodology and methods of sampling and analysis or what the general purposes of the interviews were. The 2009 documentary, in turn, similarly praises the Dzi influence on the social landscape but does not examine or describe it rigorously other than stating that the group changed the way others dressed, spoke, and even loved. While in this chapter I have relied on but also built upon these two sources to give the reader a sense of where/how the Croquettes emerged, what their performances were like, and what their performances did in the symbolic, political, and social spheres, in the next I focus on the Dzi Croquettes as a social/aesthetic movement by documenting and examining—through a foray into queer oral history—the narratives, experiences, and impressions of as well as on those who participated in the Dzi movement.
CHAPTER FIVE

Only photograph found during my archival research showing the Dzi audience. The crowd seems quite diverse in terms of age range, gender, and countenance. Some elder and fancier looking people sit adjacent to youngsters. The place is crowded: some are standing leaning against the wall whilst others are even blocking the exit area ('saída'). Long hair seems to be perhaps the most common feature, though not surprising given the influence of the hippie movement. Their facial expressions vary from a few open smiles to some blank yet attentive gazes and a person standing crossing their arms looking far from amused. This picture was taken at Teatro Treze de Maio in São Paulo, 1973, hence this is a snapshot of a 360° arena stage/audience. Source: São Paulo State Archives.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE DZI MOVEMENT

[Benê Lacerda]: We were in São Paulo for about a year. Then we went to Rio…
[Ciro Barcelos]: In Rio’s Teatro da Praia it ‘exploded’. There was all this devotion…
[Benê Lacerda]: People broke into the theatre [gesturing continuous banging on a door], because there were 600 people inside and 1,200 outside…
[Ciro Barcelos]: It took a while for the military junta to realise the danger in that…

Taken from the 2009 documentary, the excerpt above is striking for several reasons. Firstly, it assists us to imagine the frenzy, excitement, perhaps even desperation surrounding the venue that evening. Secondly, for Barcelos’ juxtaposition of ‘devotion’ with ‘danger,’ which unveils an antagonistic naming of the same phenomenon: to some, joy, to others, threat and indeed motive for censorship, which came not long after the episode above. Thirdly, it offers a rare numerical reference. I found only one other entry during my archival research citing numbers that may help us grasp the extent of the Dzi explosion: in their first year alone, the Croquettes had performed 400 shows to an audience of 90,000 spectators.29 Peter Fry and Edward MacRae argue that, despite the group’s lack of overt political intent, they “ended up being the focus of something that had the characteristics of a mass movement. Well, a micro mass, at least. The people who followed the Dzi Croquettes… were strongly attracted by the contestatory aspects of both their performances and way of being” (Fry & MacRae 1985: 19). My key motivation to generate primary data through archival and oral history was primarily based on the desire to better document and understand the Dzi movement. The two metaphors of ‘magnetism’ and ‘disorientation,’ drawn from Lobert (2010), served as general guides for my oral history interviews to frame, on one hand, the affective impact often associated with the group’s performances and, on the other, their aftermaths.

The concept of magnetism invoked herein echoes Lobert’s, yet our approaches to disorientation differ somewhat. Her usage of disorientation, which I argue is not incorrect but incomplete, appears to refer mainly and quite literally to tietes’

28 Dzi Croquettes 2009: 1:04:00-1:04:25
29 Diário de Notícias, Sérgio Cabral, 22 June 1974
bewilderment or failure to arrive at a ‘final’ meaning or rational conclusion about the Dzi performances. My notion of disorientation confirms but extends this literal sense and is used herein more figuratively: besides bewilderment, disorientation here seeks to capture the Dzi performances’ worldmaking powers, their subjective and phenomenological impacts. Moreover, Lobert implies that her participants would ‘either’ experience great attraction ‘or’ disorientation, whereas for mine the relationship between these metaphors was not of opposition but more frequently of mutuality. Chapter Two started to develop the theoretical lens underpinning my approach to queer performance, including the concept of (dis)orientation, and I shall continue to elaborate it below and in the next chapter, with/after the presentation and analysis of the oral history interviews.

To examine the Dzi movement, I review the existing literature and present/analyse both my archival findings and the primary data generated with/by participants of this movement, with whom I spoke as an endeavour to better understand the oft-celebrated but less often examined behavioural and existential revolution attributed to the Dzi performances. The primary data presented and examined below may be read in conjunction with Annex I, which provides the reader with a list of participants/performers in the Dzi Croquettes group and in my oral history interviews. Therefore, this chapter seeks to elaborate a cartography of the political, affective, aesthetic, and subjective reverberations of the Dzi performances that gave rise to the Dzi movement. These reverberations, as this chapter hints at and Chapter Six develops further, allow us to grasp the potentials of the Dzi/queer performances to articulate alternative epistemologies and ontologies that both challenge the neoliberal-legal limitations critiqued in Chapter Two and invite us to consider the meanings and potentials of ‘centring’ other, extralegal sites and knowledges. To this end, I have divided the data generated into four thematic sections. Section 3.2 has already provided the rationale and methods used to arrive at this division but let us recapitulate briefly.

Section 5.1 zooms in on the audience, a common theme in participants’ narratives. I begin by focusing on the social composition of the Dzi audience to understand the
economies of circulation/consumption of the Dzi performances, proceeding to inspect the mutual interactions and exchanges between stage and audience. Next, as an offspring from the Dzi audience and another unanimous reference in the interviews, Section 5.2 focuses on the Dzi Croquettaas to provide a short description of their performances and life trajectory before presenting some diverging and revealing views participants offered to explain why the all-male and all-female groups had such starkly different receptions by the public. The last two sections build on the guiding metaphors of magnetism and disorientation. In the third, I develop the notion of magnetism by examining what pulled, what moved participants towards the Croquettes (a turning towards that I call identification, following the terminology most participants used without prompting). Here I examine the Dzi magnetism as part of multifaceted processes of identification ‘with’ the Croquettes/others/oneself. Lastly, the fourth section elaborates on the ‘Dziorienting’ power of their performances by dwelling on two of the words most associated with the Croquettes and evoked by all participants: liberation/freedom and transgression. Disorientation here is examined as both a loss and a gain, an opening of new horizons and perspectives that implies the loss or reformulation of values and beliefs about oneself, others, and the social world. However, as the fourth and last thematic section contends, how these moments are experienced and navigated depends on the material and psychic conditions available to individuals as well as on their backgrounds.

It is impossible to establish a direct and causal nexus between the Dzi performances and the transformations experienced by participants. Against a Dzi exceptionalism, it is useful to approach their performances as drawing from and contributing to a broader zeitgeist that brought to debate questions of freedom, liberation, and transgression of normative roles, particularly but not restricted to sexual and gender mores. These complex and far-reaching ripple-out effects of the Dzi performances were made possible by their worldmaking powers, which I outline in this chapter and proceed, in the next, to juxtapose with the worldmaking powers of the mainstream rhetoric of LGBT rights.
5.1. ‘The Show Begins in the Audience’

More than one participant noted that the Dzi show began in the audience—and so did the movement as we shall see. As the primary site of reception and ‘victims’ of the infectious Dzi way of being, it is imperative to understand the audience’s composition and dynamics if we are to analyse the Dzi performances’ seepage into and impact on the social landscape, which is one primary interest of this chapter and thesis more generally: queer performances’ power to bring new worlds into being, to offer utopian glimpses that critique current arrangements by enacting and imagining new modes of relating to oneself and others. This section starts by, on one hand, unpacking the audience’s social profile to investigate the economies of reception/consumption as well as (re)production and circulation of their performances. This discussion is relevant for an understanding of the reaches (and limits) of the Dzi phenomenon, of those with greater or fewer means, both material and cultural, of attending the Croquettes’ shows. The analysis of, as this thesis sets out to do, the Dzi performances’ labouring and creative powers, particularly their impressions on and ‘infection’ of other bodies, relies to a certain extent on those bodies being present in the same space, since hardly any recorded footage is/was available to the wider public at the time and now. Access to such spaces was not universal or unrestricted but dependent upon the payment of an entrance fee, which for some might have been cheap but for others prohibitive. Put otherwise, to scrutinise performances’ worldmaking and affective powers we should not disregard the material conditions that at once enabled and limited their social impact. The section then proceeds to investigate the continuum between stage and audience, a continuum that sheds light on the Dzi style spillover: from the stage onto spectators, from the theatre venue onto ‘real life’. That is, the Dzi style, which I dwell on in the second half of the section, became increasingly visible in the audience and demonstrated that spectators and enthusiasts spontaneously adopted and reworked a Dzi style into their personal lives, forming a Dzi entourage beyond the spatial or temporal confines of a given performance.
More often than not, discussions of the Dzi audience generally make reference to the influential and wealthy, ranging from socialites to intellectuals and opinion-makers of the likes of Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa, two behemoths of the Brazilian popular music and icons of the desbunde movement. With the help of Liza Minnelli during their Parisian run, as seen in the previous chapter, the Croquettes performed even to internationally famous rock stars and filmmakers. In my archival findings and interviews with participants, there was a constant reference to the high-society parties to which the Croquettes (and consequently their entourage) were invited and attended in scandalous outfits. While some saw in it a relationship of patronage and even generosity (with the donation of luxurious outfits to the group), one participant remarked that at times it resembled “an exotic animal making a performance to please the millionaires. And the artists do so because somehow they take advantage of it.” Way back in their early days at Mr. Pujol, a high-end nightclub in trendy Ipanema, spectators came virtually only from the upper class. In our lively conversation where the Dzi Bayard so generously and volubly spoke for almost four hours while I almost apologetically fit in some occasional questions and follow-ups, he shared his view on why the Croquettes were not censored at the outset:

People did not believe that we had managed to debut, but we did because our premiere was for the elite. When we debuted for the elite, for millionaires, inside a nightclub, we did not bother.\textsuperscript{30} We started to bother when we moved to the theatre. And we really bothered when we went from one city to another and arrived in Rio de Janeiro with a group of people, when the followers emerged, when they (the junta) saw that people imitated and wanted to be like us, that people wanted to break away from the family, from religion, traditions, search for new loves… (Bayard)

Their theatrical runs, starting at \textit{Treze de Maio}, began to attract a more diverse set of spectators. There appears to be a general agreement that the transition to theatre made

\textsuperscript{30} Bayard did not complement the verb with an explicit object, but from context I understood it to be the military junta.
the Dzi more popular and accessible. Bayard offered me one explanation for such: “At the theatre, the audience was larger and more middle class. It was more accessible, tickets didn’t cost as much, there were discounted tickets, and some people paid half price. So, people could pay it more easily.” The discounted tickets referred to were guaranteed by law and entitled certain people, such as students and the elder, to half price tickets. The first participant I spoke to was the Dzi Tovar, whose tranquil and friendly manner from the outset helped me keep my nerve and not get too star-struck. With decades of experience in theatre, dance, costume and set design, and widespread renown therefor, he too pointed to the same moment of transition and diversification: “(After Pujol), we went to Ton-Ton in São Paulo, same thing, a nightclub for the elite. Only afterwards, at Treze de Maio, it became more open. Then there were artists, the middle class, eccentric people… Everyone mixed up”. In a conversation with a newspaper on 8 March 1974, the year following their theatre debut, the Dzi mother, Wagner, stated that: “Our audience is varied. It is not possible to classify it in a standard type because all ages and social strata vary. We get applause from both the elder, the grey-haired lady and the 17-year-old-teenager. And this encourages us to keep going.”

Aside from the transition to theatre, for the Dzi Ciro, the youngest Dzi who has been active in preserving throughout the decades the memory of the Dzi Croquettes, the fame and popularity of Lennie Dale helped the group to reach wider audiences:

The Dzi enjoyed a certain popularity, there were families from Rio’s North Zone that came to watch us. Lennie Dale already had this, he was a popular artist. I will never forget the first time that we crossed Avenida Presidente Vargas with a samba school, as Dzi Croquettes, and the audience kept shouting ‘Lennie! Lennie!’ And I am talking about povão. Lennie really contributed to that. So, the Dzi audience was mixed, there were intellectuals, opinion-makers of all areas, theatre, music, film, and there was also that couple that came from, I don’t know, Nova Iguaçu [a commute of approximately 50km] to watch the Dzi. (Ciro)

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31 Diário de Pernambuco, Hilda M. Costa, 8 March 1974.
32 The regular folks of society.
Rosemary Lobert’s ethnography resonates with the views above that “there is invariably an equivalence regarding sex, the social background of tietes was hardly measurable. It was a set of sufficiently homogeneous individuals, encompassing several social classes, ages, and occupations” (Lobert 2010: 183). The audience shared a few commonalities: the bulk of it comprised artists or art enthusiasts in general as well as young people in their late teens and early 20s, although there were those in their 30s and even some older ones, including members of a same family and unaccompanied elders (ibid.) Yet, the extent of this diversification remains controversial. Class is the main point of contention. If the views above seemed to be unanimous, conversely, there were also suggestions that the performances still remained somewhat restricted to the middle and upper classes. For instance, “if I said that our audience was from the working class I’d be lying,” the Dzi Benê told me. He was the last and most ‘secluded’ Dzi with whom I spoke, in that unlike the other three Benê has chosen a more reserved life away from the spotlight (though he was by no means coy and shared frank remarks about his youth, the experience with the Croquettes as well as the past and current political conjuncture in Brazil). Likewise, For Alberto, the Dzi “were not consumed by the working class strictly speaking. I think that they were consumed by maluquetes, this group of young people wandering about town, starting their lives, trying to do things.” Neither suggest that the working classes were barred from their audience, rather that they did not consume the Croquettes as much.

Besides the relative diversification of the audience (the extent of which remains debatable), the changeover to theatre inaugurated another phenomenon: the growing contagion of the Dzi way of being. Rosemary Lobert observes that it was during this period, “through a replica of the outfits” that the [Dzi] manifesto/style was “popularised…immediately onto the streets” (2010: 182). During a given performance, she writes from first-hand experience, the easiest way to recognise a tiete in the audience was to spot those most effusively displaying an enthusiasm and familiarity with the developments on stage, or those singing along to every line and laughing harder and louder than everyone else, or finally whoever had an akin style and make-up.
A review of one of their very last performances in Brazil prior to exile in Europe suggests that this phenomenon did not die out. The Dzi show, the review stated, “begins in the audience, something unbelievable. You could swear it is a dream. The [audience’s] outfits follow no rule... shorts, patchwork skirts, bellies showing, boots above the knees, purses resembling duffel bags, a noisy environment, people of all ages and sexes.” Even scalpers hustling outside the venue were said to boast glitter and make-up to match the ambiance (Brito & Barcelos 2013: 4).

Asked to share their memories and impressions about their first Dzi performance, one participant who chose to remain anonymous interestingly started not with the show itself, but shifted the gaze “outside Treze de Maio, [where] people already were an installation, an installation of freedom (...) In each Dzi show, the show started in the audience.” Possibly due to a more capacious venue, better press coverage, meteoric public fame, and more accessible tickets, their theatre debut and eulogised six-month run at Treze de Maio is held here as the symbolic start of both the Dzi movement and, for the junta, the Dzi danger. From the vantage point of the stage, the Dzi Ciro too noticed the development of an aesthetic and existential contagion:

All the young people, actors, started dressing like us, the Dzi Croquettes. There was a period in Teatro Treze de Maio, in São Paulo, when one show happened on stage and another show in the audience. People looked stunning and wore incredible outfits and accessories. They started to wear makeup. (Ciro)

While the terms “Dzi style” and “Dzi way of being” appeared abundantly in participants’ narratives, there is no way of providing an exhaustive description thereof. That said, besides the newspaper description above, a composite illustration of the Dzi style offered by participants would comprise a colourful and random mix of carnival costumes, old Hollywood glamour, fancy second-hand findings from thrift shops, and campy high-low fashion (luxurious pieces matched with “rags”). Make-up, glitter, and feathers were

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33 Diário de Pernambuco, 19 July 1974.
indispensable. While for some adopting this Dzi style might have been a fun opportunity to play dress up to performances, as we will see below, for others this was not a costume put on for specific hours or occasions but a daily style of expressing their (new) persona. Yet, adopting a Dziesque fashion style was not the sole evidence that what began on stage was growing into a movement. Alberto, as he told me over a phone call, was introduced to the Croquettes by peers in the cast of Hair. Having first met the Croquettes as a fellow actor rather than (only) as a fan, a friendship quickly ensued. Besides fashion, for Alberto

One thing that changed in everyone was language. Everyone was using slang and words... They (the Dzi) popularised lots of slang, like tiete, for instance. There were several terms that they popularised, that they used in the show and people started to use too. I used all of them. This tribe that I was part of... who was not part of their group but whom they represented, all these people started talking like them. I think that this aspect of language was very strong.

Like ‘tiete’, the Dzi vernacular followed no literal sense and was fully comprehensible only to those with insider knowledge. Despite having followed the group for three years, Lobert herself acknowledges the limitations in providing a thorough and clear analysis of the Dzi vernacular, which “would require special treatment for the density of its vocabulary” (2010: 104). Expressions like comer no centro or fechar, literally translated, respectively, as ‘to eat in the centre’ or ‘to close,’ seem to match a contemporary usage of ‘slay’ (as in Beyoncé’s hit song ‘Formation’) as well as another contemporary expression, lacrar, widely used by queer Brazilians in a similar way and whose origin could be somewhat related to the Dzi vernacular. Like ‘slay,’ lacrar is popularly used by queer Brazilians to express (self-)approval, pride, and encouragement about a particular situation. Chamar um Zé was used as a rough synonym for organising and fixing things. Such was their popularity at the time that, in 1978, the Brazilian broadcasting behemoth, Rede Globo, included (and thus further disseminated) the Dzi slang in the soap opera Dancing Days and the series Ciranda, Cirandinha (Lobert 2010: 104). More than one participant, however, put emphasis on the fact that the Dzi were not always the origin of
such slang, but at times simply the means by which terms already in circulation went widespread. Similarly, if the Dzi style was unquestionably avant-garde and provocative, it was not exceptional: the genre was part of a broader zeitgeist that, for instance, found resonance in the glam rock movement. In this sense, the Dzi may be partly perceived, in the words of Regina M., as local representatives of an international movement:

Actually, the movement that the Dzi Croquettes bring about was already in the world. It was the Beautiful People in the United States, which came after the sexual revolution and after the hippie movement. It was a movement going on there and in Europe. The glitter, the butterfly, and the androgyny were themes and aesthetics that already were (in circulation)… The Dzi Croquettes did not invent it, they represented here this countercultural movement.

To understand the growing social contagion of the Dzi style, slang, and way of being, we may read their performances ritualistically. “We would watch it like a ritual that you go to repeatedly (…) The tietes that frequented Treze de Maio, for example, which was when I participated (in the Dzi movement), would show up every day. That’s what happened to me. I started going every day. Or at least, I think, every weekend” were the words of Regina M., who has passionately dedicated her life, career, and political activism to performance, dance, and the hope for a social revolution. During her youth back in the 1970s, using the back seat of her white beetle as a makeshift wardrobe, Regina and her friend Célia, whom I also interviewed and also went to become Dzi Croquettas, would drive down every week to the capital to watch the Croquettes. Dario, instead, needed no car. Living just around the corner from Treze de Maio, after work in the evenings he would “sometimes go home, grab a bite, and walk to the theatre almost every day.” We arranged a phone call at ten o’clock on a Saturday evening, his only slot available. Dario’s eloquence and sharp memory betrayed a background of decades working as a journalist and editor-in-chief of an important periodic focused on the arts, cinema, theatre, lifestyle, and music in the early 1970s.
As a frequent spectator, Dario “started to notice that some people came back, I saw them one day and the next day too... Some went alone, some with others. So, an entourage started to form.” This religious attendance did not escape Lobert’s eyes. The majority of spectators she interviewed for her ethnographic research highlighted having watched the Dzi performance as many times as possible, with such repetitive attendance being a new experience in their lives. Presumably an extreme case, two tietes and their mother estimated having attended the performance 150 times over the course of six months (Lobert 2010: 190-191). In that historical and social conjunction, according to the Hair performer Alberto, the Dzi represented “some fresh air that came from some place and no one knew what that was, so people went back to see. And they went back, and went back, and went back. And the best thing was that you could get close to them and be friends with them. They were very accessible and acquired great power in the city because of their shows”. Here Alberto confirms the phenomenon of ritualistic repetition and introduces a new element to the picture.

We have already seen that tietes could derive a sense of participation in the show through the provision of clothes and feedback as well as an improvised address, joke, or even invitation from performers to join in a particular scene. Once the show ended, however, tietes could also extend this participation in the Dzi Croquettes family/movement by approaching them as they exited the venue, perhaps eliciting an invitation to a restaurant and after-party or becoming frequent guests to their home. If part of the Dzi appeal stemmed from and depended on this blurring of boundaries between performers and spectators, the group also eventually found the need to reinforce the boundaries that set them apart from a broader audience. “You are not part of the Croquette family, you are not, you are tietes!” one anonymous participant got told during a two-day sojourn as a guest at the Croquettes house. Despite their warmth and welcoming personality, the Croquettes feared that gossip could prematurely disseminate the group’s future projects and ideas; and the time and energy necessary for the group’s maintenance proved scarcer with the growing micro mass of followers around them (Lobert 2010: 177-178). Another more practical motivation was the high
cost of feeding and sheltering the floating population in their shared home, which sometimes amounted to breakfast for 40 people, as the Dzi Bayard told me.

Crucial for the internal balance (and boundary) of the Croquettes, as seen in the preceding chapter, Vilma also started to mediate the group’s external relationship with têtes. When explaining her multiple roles to me, the sentences abutting Vilma’s reference to ‘order’ were rather telling: “So I ended up staying with them and putting things in order. Someone would show up without having anything to do there [at their home], I would not let them in... And they started to thank me for this because they didn’t manage to do it.” Vilma, however, could only give so much order to the entourage that continued to grow and infiltrate the Croquettes. Indeed, Lidoka’s (2012) memoir observes the frequent conflicts over daily affairs between Vilma and the Dzi Croquettas, the main offspring of the Croquettes’ audience and the subject matter on which Section 5.2 dwells.

5.2. The Dzi Croquettas

When I first began the oral history interviews and spoke to the Dzi Croquettas, their snowballing suggestions pointed immediately to the Croquettas, introduced in Section 4.2.2. Here I return to the Croquettas based primarily on the thematic commonalities of the recollections of my participants and also those of Lidoka, a Dzi Croquetta who published a memoir on the group a few years before passing away (Lidoka 2012). I begin with the expansion of the Dzi family and trace the Croquettas’ trajectory thereafter as well as the hindrances that tested their stamina and willpower. The section concludes with an examination of participants’ explanations for their insipid reviews and shortage of opportunities. The Croquettas anecdote I heard most often in the interviews was possibly that of Helô, a semiliterate Black waitress in her late teens who served at a cheap greasy spoon the Croquettes lunched at religiously. A friendship developed promptly among them. The invitation from Wagner, the Dzi mother, to perform as a Dzi Croquetta led her, beyond going on stage for the first time in her life, to also meet her future husband, a wealthy German aristocrat. All versions of this anecdote concluded
with vague and old news about her leading a life of opulence and speaking/writing better in German than in Portuguese.

The highlight of this anecdote for me lay not in what I sometimes perceived as its implicitly celebrated class and cultural ascension. Rather, I rejoiced at imagining the disruption caused by the unusual presence of Helô and other Croquettas on a theatre stage. Despite their undisputed commercial failure, I consider the Dzi Croquettas’ emergence remarkable and thus focus thereon because, on the one hand, it marks the expansion of the Croquettes family and ‘way of being’ into a broader social movement, perhaps unexpectedly out of the cross-identification (Muñoz 1999) of young women from disparate walks of life with the all-male group. On the other hand, Croquettas were at once affected (by the all-male performances) and affecting (others through their own performance). The underlying curiosity I had in mind before carrying out the oral history project was whether being a female group ‘affected’ their reception negatively.

From a contemporary view, it is probably not a long stretch to assume that an all-female performing group would have faced greater stigma and barriers, or that the relative freedom and enthusiasm enjoyed by the Dzi Croquettes was partly related to their overall middle-class and male privilege. The point here is not to ascertain the extent to which Croquettas’ commercial failure was a direct effect of machismo, but to observe that performances’ worldmaking powers are not independent of but contingent on social, material, and historical conditions, including gender of course. Likewise, the powers of performance are not separate from the bodies (and embodiments) of performers and spectators, bodies that are always and already situated in a given time and space. As Section 4.6 stated, theatre and performances at the time were conventionally thought of as a vocation for “faggots and whores” only. Therefore, performing was arguably a transgression itself, a transgression that could be redoubled by the actual content/force of the performance or of the performing bodies.

The previous chapter touched on the pre-Dzi gatherings at Wagner’s living room where, over a decade, he and friends would improvise scenes, make others burst into laughter,
and eventually hone their writing and performing skills. To my elation, Regina C. told me that she occasionally attended these gatherings. Contrary to my prior belief that a more or less discernible Dzi seed was already present in these living room stagings, Regina C. told me that the only similarity between the earlier texts and the actual show was their hilarious nonsense. Despite being nationally famous as an actress, singer, and dancer—particularly with *As Frenéticas*, an all-female 1980s band and offspring of the Dzi movement—Regina C. promptly agreed to a phone call. In the late 1960s, Regina C. had recently arrived in Rio after finishing her degree in journalism at the University of Brasília, where she befriended an architecture student/future Dzi Croquette, Claudio Tovar. After moving to Rio, in a short time Regina C. managed to secure roles in respected musicals, including *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In 1973 came an invitation from the Croquettes to join the cast of an upcoming project, a children’s play based on an adaptation of Robin Hood starred by Lennie Dale and including two women: Regina and Duse Nacaratti, the coiner of “tiete”. Yet,

At the bus station, we (Duse and I) already noticed that the guys were changing the course of things, that there would no longer be Robin Hood, that there were some women who became their fans and went to their show every day and Wagner wanted to give them an opportunity. The Robin Hood project where Lennie would play Robin Hood, the starring role in the musical, was stunted to become the Dzi Croquettas. (Regina C.)

The casting for the Croquettas ended up as a random selection of about twenty women among their female entourage. As stated in Section 4.2.2, the selection criteria for the Croquettas’ cast was the admiration and attraction those women felt for the Dzi Croquettes, not their acting experience or dancing skills. Regina M. and Célia, the white beetle duo bonded by their shared passion for the Dzi, prepared a scene for the Croquettas casting that Regina described as “completely nuts” and “scatological even.” In her words: “We really wanted to impress and say ‘Look… for us there is no limit, for us there is no rule, for us there is nothing. We just want to be happy, we just want joy, just this freedom to transgress (*contrariar*), really, all prevailing values and norms. It was
a thing that awoke this possibility to search.” (Regina M.) The Croquetas’ premiere was set to occur only a few months after the men themselves premiered at Treze de Maio in 1973. The overwhelming majority of Croquetas had never set foot on stage before and could not count on Lennie Dale’s expertise to provide some much-needed discipline and artistic unity, as Lennie did not extend his artistic direction to the new group. Despite the show being clearly under rehearsed, Wagner refused to postpone it once more, almost blindly believing in the Croquetas’ success. Let us turn to virtually the only source in the literature describing As Fadas do Apocalipse; this account is based on Lidoka’s description of the Croquetas’ debut on 10 December 1973 at Teatro Ruth Escobar, in São Paulo.

The protagonist, the veteran Duse Nacaratti, opens the show playing a fussy art critic about to review the upcoming performance. Twenty Carmen Mirandas behind the opening curtains flock to the stage dancing to a potpourri of Dorival Caymmi’s O que é que a Baiana Tem and Ary Barroso’s Aquarela do Brasil. Despite the visually stunning ensemble, a closer inspection gave out the “Tower of Babel” happening on stage as Croquetas confusedly collided with each other. Backstage, taking longer than expected to change outfits, some Croquetas missed their cue while others had to improvisedly step in. Amidst the chaos and desperation, Lidoka narrates some beautiful and tender moments, such as the scene with three fat ballerinas on point and three Croquetas impersonating Charles Chaplin, or the eye-catching Dionysian orgy staging a battle between good and evil. With the backdrop of the Rolling Stone’s Sympathy for the Devil, the scene sensuously starts with the evil Croquetas wearing little apart from glitter. A sudden blackout and the music shifts to Moody Blues’ Procession. After a moment of darkness, the good Croquetas appear holding dim candle lights revealing their faces concealed by long lilac capes. The confrontation climaxes with the appearance of a topless Jesus Christ (played by Lu Grimaldi) coming down a staircase in a g-string and glittered nipples, accompanied by two Black angels in white feather wings (Helô and Malu), to the dismay and amusement of the audience. After a stream of fastidious comments, at the end of the show the art critic played by Nacaratti admits to her envy and desire to join the Croquetas, who jollily welcome the reviewer as a new member as
the curtains close. According to Lidoka’s recollections on the Croquetas’ debut, noticing the bemused and blasé mood in the audience, the Dzi mother, Wagner Ribeiro, went on stage to apologise for the underwhelming performance (Lidoka 2012: 83-98).

The aftermath of their disappointing debut was compounded by a series of setbacks. First, as always, the problem of money, even if Wagner had sold his two vehicles to finance the Dzi Croquetas. The money was enough for the considerably little time that the Croquetas had to rehearse and hone their dancing, acting, and singing skills. Yet, not long after the Croquetas’ debut, the Croquettes were censored and left for Europe. Although money was a real issue for both groups, the Croquettes managed to help the women pay ahead a few months’ rent before departing. Still, within a couple of months, the Croquetas had no money left to pay electricity or rent. Their survival depended on family and friends’ donations of food and basic items. Although dispirited, the Croquetas did not let commercial failure or financial struggles thwart them. However, neither did they manage to overturn this first impression with the scattered performances they secured over the following months. Their meagre work opportunities were not just infrequent but often misleading regarding their sexual nature, as considered in Section 5.4 below. In a bid to boost public visibility and income, the Croquetas resorted to “urban interventions” by dressing to the nines and going out to entertain crowds in strategic spots (Lidoka 2012: 100). They counted on the generosity of strangers for a simple meal or lifts to get around, lacking the money therefor. However, urban interventions and donations did not suffice. A series of disheartening misfortunes occurred: after losing their first home, the Croquetas were thrown out of the warehouse a rich acquaintance had offered because of neighbours’ complaints about a raucous fundraising party. At the only pension happy to offer cheap accommodation to a bunch of women and a toddler, a creepy midnight intrusion of a Satanist into their room forced the remaining women to accept lodging in the city’s outskirts, only to become homeless once again after a burglary and theft reportedly planned by a neighbour displeased by the Croquetas’ laughter and joints far into the night (Lidoka 2012).
Croquettas’ personal investment in the project/family and endurance in such trying times diverged and for the most part dwindled, leading more members to part ways and increasingly fewer to remain. In the meantime, the Croquettes had only just returned from Europe and lost almost half of its members in no time. Four members, including Lennie Dale, left the family in January 1976. One Croquette was in jail after being caught with marijuana and another was suffering from kidney stones. The Dzi mother sought recourse in Regina M., Olivinha, and Lidoka, the three remaining Croquettas, to fill in for the absent members. Interestingly, this moment marks the (partial) joining of the two groups and sharing of the same stage. As Lidoka recalls in her memoir, the three Croquettas were immediately ready to join in since they knew the Croquettes’ performances by heart (2012: 162). Rosemary Lobert seemed less certain about the Croquettas’ technical parity. As Lobert observes, this “substantial change” barely changed “the content and the symbolism of the show,” which went on for two months before ending on 31 March 1976 (Lobert 2010: 213). For Regina M., as she recounted to me, with the joining of the two groups she was able to “finally realise my dream to not only participate in the Croquettes’ performance but to play Carmem Miranda sliding down from the moon. The end!”

Among my participants, the regular explanation for the Croquettas’ commercial foundering lay in their lack of professionalism and artistic direction from Lennie Dale, hence technical disparity with their male counterparts. This was confirmed, for instance, by Célia, the (future) Croquetta who hopped on Regina M.’s white beetle and drove from Campinas, on the outskirts of São Paulo, to Treze de Maio. Her brother Alberto had given me her contact in our interview the week before. The phone call with Célia lasted for an hour. The first twenty minutes were rather challenging due to intermittent signal, but luckily the rest of the interview went smoothly. For Célia, “the Dzi Croquettes were a success (emphasis) because of Lennie Dale… They were a bunch of lunatics like us, but they had Lennie, an American from Broadway with an artistic vision.” Notwithstanding, she defends the Croquettas as “revolutionary” because of its “deboche (mockery) and irreverence. It went against everything of that time. It was something completely new and unexpected because we mixed the artistic with the existential.
What we did on stage we did out of it, in life, we lived together…” In the same vein, for Regina C.,

It was visually stunning, it was wonderful, but the show had no coherence… It was a mistake. It was a mistake from a professional aspect, in the sense that it did not succeed, but it was a great ‘goal’ from a human aspect, in terms of living together (vivência), learning about life… (Living with) People I had just met, one crazier than the other. Each with their own problems, their own ways of seeing life, their own needs. And people who were not from theatre, so I learnt to share, to compromise, to listen to an opinion different from mine, to deal with (conviver) and accept this opinion as well as fight for my own. It had a positive balance in my formation as a person, a professional, a woman, because it was not easy.

The conjectures of two other Croquettas, Lu Grimaldi and Regina M., overlap with the opinions above but add further reasons to the picture. Grimaldi and I had an extremely pleasant and unexpected video call on a Thursday afternoon. I had contacted her a couple of months earlier, but she was juggling a busy schedule finishing recording another soap opera. We had already spoken informally before the interview a few times, so during the interview I felt very at ease and apparently so did she, as she made some rather honest remarks. For Grimaldi, what explains the Croquettas’ poor reception is that

Our show did not have this theme of androgyny, of homosexuality. It was another proposal, more vaudeville, playful, a satire of everything (…) Whatever the theme, it had to be a unity among all minds. What bonded us what our love for the Croquettes, but our minds were not at the same frequency. So, I think it was due to this lack of preparation, of unity, of thought. (Lu Grimaldi)

Regina M. too referred to a lack of cohesion both technical and existential. However, she does not attribute such a lack solely to Lennie’s distance-taking or to the absence of
an androgynous motif, but to the gendered implications arising from a broader patriarchal society:

I think there was a difference of grit, of the male homosexual fraternity. And the women were there more because of a passion for those men… Because of this and because of the female experience… I think we are overcoming this now, but back then women competed for men. In a patriarchal society, we compete amongst ourselves for men. So, there was a rivalry instead of the fraternity that they (the Croquettes) had among themselves, among us there was a rivalry. I think this is one explanation for the failure.

Regina M. suggested other possible motivations during our conversation. Explaining why there was never a conversation between Croquettes and Croquetas about creating one show for both groups, Regina M. opined:

I think that our show did not have the same strength as theirs in this sense, from a queer, mocking (*debochada*) and contesting perspective (...) The Dzi Croquettes had Wagner Ribeiro and Lennie Dale who were the leaders. The Dzi Croquetas were a group with no rule, no leadership, it was sheer anarchy. That’s why I think we were even more countercultural than the Dzi Croquettes, because we were an anarchic group of crazy women. Crazy women up for anything. As women, huh? Because it was still better to be gay and (a male) artist than women who were neither… I do not regret having lived this, a failure, an experience of competition, because at the same time we were also ‘sisters’ (*cúmplices*). I once compared the experience to a situation of incarcerated women who have to live next to each other because there is no way out. We had no way out. To leave was to give up on the dream, some left, but for those who stayed, like me, there was no way out. We had to endure that. The hunger, the rivalry, the chaos, everything. It was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. I even get emotional… (cries for a few seconds)
The nature of the reasons offered above for the Croquettas’ poor reception ranged from disparate technical leadership/skills, thematic/existential (dis)unity and what was referred to as “the female experience.” From Regina M.’s account above, we can extend the issues related to gender as only external to the group (as in potential social stigma for performing) to also include the group’s internal dynamics, that is, a general lack of “sisterhood” and rivalry. I was not aware prior to the archival research and oral history interviews that there was such a thematic difference between the all-male and all-female groups. One participant offered a sweeping generalisation that Croquettas were heterosexual, and because heterosexuality was (hailed as) the norm, there was supposedly no existential issue that resonated with and attracted a broader public. Yet, from the account of Croquettas above, for them there was clearly an existential aspect to all this. Even assuming that all Croquettas were straight, there were other ways they ‘deviated’ from gendered and racialised norms, so heterosexuality in itself could not eliminate existential issues or the public reverberation thereof.

I too teared up with Regina M., moved by the magnitude and generosity of the moment and enamoured by her joie de vivre, openness, and rebel spirit. As Lobert noted was unanimous among her participants, for mine too, there was something radically personal, beyond sheer admiration, about their participation and investment in the Dzi movement. In the rest of this chapter, I chart these affective and subjective investments, even transformations, brought about or facilitated by the subject matter of the two coming sections: the magnetic and disorienting forces of the Dzi performances, respectively. Building and theorising on the accounts of my participants in what follows, Chapter Six will answer this thesis’ remaining overarching research questions, that is, on queer performances’ potentials to expose and complement the ontopolitical pitfalls identified and critiqued in Section 2.2 as well as on the meanings and repercussions of legal decentring from our political praxis and arsenal. The goal is less to redeem or reform the law but to decentre it from our political imaginaries and arsenals by foregrounding the alternative paths towards social change opened up by extralegal sites and knowledges such as the Dzi/queer performances.
5.3. Magnetic Identification: The Desire to be \textit{Igual} (Alike/Same/Equal)

The two sections above have touched on the phenomenon whereby people identified with and sought to be \textit{iguais} the Croquettes. I have kept the term in the original Portuguese as used by most participants because, as I sought to translate it into English, I suddenly found myself in the midst of historical academic/political debates whose relevance persists to these days. The word “igual” in Portuguese may be translated to English as “alike”, “same” or “equal”. I am not interested in ascertaining which, if any, best suits the original intention of my participants. Rather, the (mis)translation more productively points us to the proximity, even inadvertent conflation, between sameness and equality in political and legal struggles. Joan Scott’s famous warning against the liberal conflation of sameness and equality remains rather contemporary, as this conflation “denies the way in which difference has long figured in political notions of equality and it suggests that sameness is the only ground on which equality can be claimed” (1988: 44). To support this move, Scott rebuts the antithetical binary between equality and difference so that one does not eliminate or preclude the other. Equality, in this scenario, does not need to forego difference but difference is actually foundational thereto. As I seek to defend in this thesis, the Dzi performances/movement enacted a version of equality that denied sameness and foregrounded the centrality of difference, an enactment that has not lost its political relevance after almost half a century.

Magnetism (coupled as it is here with ‘identification’) implies a certain coming towards, a seduction, be part of their/that “world”, to (want to) be “like” the Croquettes. As participants’ accounts will make clear in what follows, such “likeness” with the Croquettes’ world was already perceived (with participants’ self-perception as “insiders” to the Dzi world) and/or desired (with participants’ sense of being “outsiders”). Yet, some participants like Regina M. expressed a sense of being both insider and outsider. This “likeness”, however, was not about homogeneity but rather involved
the hybrid work of identity-making [which] is never about pure resemblance of one to another. It involves a dynamic process of perpetual resurfacing: the parts of me that involve ‘impressions’ of you can never be reduced to the ‘you-ness’ of ‘you’, but they are ‘more’ than just me. The creation of the subject hence depends upon the impressions of others, and these ‘impressions’ cannot be conflated with the character of ‘others’. The others exist within me and apart from me at the same time. Taking you in will not necessarily be ‘becoming like you’, or ‘making you like me’, as other others have also impressed upon me, shaping my surfaces in this way and that. (Ahmed 2004: 160)

My intention here is to clarify the meanings and relationships between magnetism and identification as used below. It is useful to think of identification with as opposed to identification as the Dzi Croquettes, since the former preposition allows greater space for difference and alterity within the process of identification. Identification seems to be part of a broader category/process of magnetism, that is, I suggest that identification occurred in/through/because of the magnetic force of the Dzi performances, a force that did not necessarily or always led to spectators’ desire for or self-perception of “likeness”. It may be tempting to conflate the two categories since all of my participants mentioned the word identification when talking about the Dzi seduction and allure. However, this unanimous reference is possibly a (biased) effect of my snowballing method. Put otherwise, we can read magnetism as a more affective, “instant,” and even broader response to the Dzi performances, whereas identification includes a smaller subset of people whose identification with (and disorientation by) the Dzi performers/performances (and others in the audience, as Section 5.3.2 below foregrounds) was based on a sense of personal similarity and/or difference (as the upcoming sub-section 5.3.1 will expound).

In this Section 5.3, I approach the Dzi performances as a temporal and spatial coming together of bodies with the ability to affect and be affected; and seek to unpack the transformative effects of these magnetic, seducing encounters. Participants’ narratives will evince that this affective ability, however, is not temporally or spatially confined to
the particular time or place where the performance occurs but extends before, during, and after performances. That said, the data introduced in this section stems from my attempt to elicit accounts of the seduction that pulled spectators towards the Croquettes as well as the affective aftermath of their performances. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I investigate the affective reverberations of performances in spectators’ subjectivity, how these performances spoke on a ‘deep’ level to participants’ existential or personal issues and even, at times, worked as catalysts for personal (and social) change. Affect here is not treated as something that emanates from the Dzi performers/performances and unidirectionally affects spectators. Rather, I will examine how affect circulates multidirectionally among the audience as well as from spectators to performers. That said, three are my main tasks below: to describe and analyse participants’ magnetic identification with the Croquettes (qua performers and performance), their identification with/to others, and finally with/to oneself. These tasks pave the conceptual ground for the discussion elaborated in the next chapter’s Section 6.3 on the Dzi/queer performances’ potential to challenge the liberal-legal myth of the self-sufficient, atomised individual critiqued in Section 2.2, to whom inequality and injustice, eviscerated of their structural and historical roots, become individual failures or responsibilities. These tasks also speak to Chapter Six’s theorisation of the Dzi/queer performances as sites/means of (re)fashioning “competing” political identities, vocabularies, and ontologies that friction against those (re)produced in/by the law.

5.3.1. Identification Between Performers and Spectators

To understand the oft-mentioned Dzi magnetism, I prompted participants to narrate in as much detail as possible what was so fascinating about the Dzi. What did it feel like, what did they feel like and experience, watching them perform? What feelings, sounds, memories, smells impressed them and came to their mind after so many years? Equally importantly, why did these performances resonate so intensely with others? What was so alluring about these performances that made one want to go back day after day, and indeed become part of a growing movement? Mentioned virtually by all participants, whether Dzi Croquettes, Croquettas, close friends, or more distant fans, was a process
of passionate identification with the Dzi Croquettes. A cousin concept, that of disidentification after J.E. Muñoz, appeared in Chapter Two to capture the strategies employed by cultural performers working on/in/against hegemonic ideology by, as it were, a series of misturnings to the interpellatory call. Chapter Four’s Section 4.5 on “Dzidentifications” set out to apply this concept to the Dzi performances and investigate their effects on dichotomous categories of the social and the political. In this sub-section, after participants’ almost unanimous reference, we will examine the process of spectators’ identification with the disidentificatory performances/performers from when they first encountered the Dzi and what ensued therefrom.

Identification was not homogenous among participants. Nuances appeared depending on the perceived nearness or distance participants felt regarding the Croquettes world, that is, according to their perceived likeness or lack thereof. To begin explaining this point, let us consider the case of four participants: the white beetle duo/Dzi Croquetas, Regina M. and Célia, the Hair performer Alberto, and George. They were all part of a larger group of friends who, prior to the Croquettes’ emergence, already experimented with dressing up and performing in Campinas, in the State of São Paulo. Nowadays a performance scholar and performer herself, Regina M. cleverly noted that “this term (performance) did not exist at the time, but what we did was performance. We performed through our bodies a desire for freedom in opposition to established norms. So, the boys could use platform shoes and wigs and we (women) could wear the weirdest clothes… Our way of dressing was very hippie, as was our way of behaving.” All four made reference to this group as the town’s outcasts due to their irreverent revelry and gender-defiant outfits as they strolled around the town as though it was carnival all year round. The first to encounter the Dzi was Alberto, who was then living in São Paulo and accepted his Hair peers’ invitation to watch the Dzi midnight show at the nightclub Ton-Ton. As he remembers it,

I went to see their show and it drove me nuts. They were a wonderful thing. They combined everything there. There was an aesthetics that I liked very much. I have always been very interested in aesthetics and all the movements. There
was this aesthetics that I loved, their talent was incredible and there was this sexuality… I went back to Campinas and told my friends, ‘You have to see it, an insane thing going on, it’s revolutionary. You have to go see it, it’s fundamental!’ And when the Dzi Croquettes arrived in São Paulo, it really was a bomb in the city, in this underground cluster.

Asked to develop what caught his eye about the Dzi aesthetics, Alberto replied:

In a way, I already wore those outfits. When they emerged, I had been wearing these kinds of outfits for 4 or 5 years… They added glitter, actually. Tonnes of it. The background of each—I got to meet many, I was very close to them—the background of each [Croquette] was very similar to mine. With the exception that they came from Rio de Janeiro, another from Brasília, another from Minas Gerais, another from Bebedouro, in São Paulo’s countryside.

Presumably, his introduction to the Croquettes and eventually their friendship were facilitated by the fact that they came from similar backgrounds. Alberto was another young actor who, like the Croquettes, identified with the hippie movement and experimented with their gender/sexuality on and off stage. However, Alberto noted that, when speaking to other Dzi enthusiasts he met at the time, for some meeting the Dzi was “like discovering America.” Through Alberto, the other three friends then became Dzi addicts. Regina M.’s first impressions sitting there and seeing/feeling the Croquettes, echoing Alberto, was that

It was such an impact, because it was everything. It was an identification. ‘This is what we do, this is what we like, this is what makes us happy…’ [When asked to develop this identification] So it was an identification because we already did what they did, this behavioural irreverence, this affirmation of identity, at least that of my friends. Célia and I still had not defined any question regarding gender at the time, but our friends were homosexuals… So, this irreverence in relation to behaviour, in relation to freedom. (Regina M.)
Célia’s identification follows the ‘similarity’ pattern found in Muller and Alberto: “It was more than identification, but of course it had a huge impact because it was a confirmation that what we did was right. We lived in a town on the outskirts. And then you meet people who are having success on stage, so this was a confirmation that what we were doing was legal (cool).” For Célia, this confirmation is not directly related to her sexuality but to a more general sense of being a social misfit. She goes further to elaborate on what we may call, for these three participants so far, identification via similarity-in-difference.

It is very funny, one thing I see nowadays. Back then we sought originality, today people seek to be iguais (identical). You see, for instance, some gay guys today, they are all wearing the same clothes, the same bear, the same haircut, you know? So, people today seek to be not different. And then, that moment was exactly the opposite, we sought originality, the coolest outfit, we would go to thrift shops and sew at home, embroider, millions of shenanigans to create our own identity, you know? So that is very interesting, that is why we became so interested in the Dzi Croquettes… because we all sought to be original, and original character, an original garment. That was the great fascination that they exerted upon us. It was this identification (…) We immediately became friends because they did on stage what we did in Campinas…

Célia’s observation echoes a point seen above and in Section 4.4 on the liberal conflation of equality with sameness, indirectly reflecting on this conflation’s collusion with disciplinary and normalising powers. As Célia’s view allows us to argue, this common ground and identification with the Croquettes resulted not despite but precisely because of their idiosyncrasies and differences. Conversely, the fourth and last member of this performing troupe George never made a living out of performing and, unlike his three friends who became very close with the Croquettes, the closest he ever got to the family was attending a party at their house once. Working as a hairdresser from an early age, he had barely come of age when he got involved in the hippie and then the Dzi
movement. He brings his young age and formation to explain that his involvement was more instinctive and emotional than rational:

I was very young, I did not have an intellectual interest at the age of 18. I had no formation. I never had a formation. I only got secondary education. So, there I was among people who were intellectually powerful. It was hard to follow. I was always listening. It was something new for me, it was all very fascinating (George)

Recollecting about his impressions of the Croquettes at the first Treze de Maio show that he attended, George described that

The first impression was [that of] an absolute tiete. Because it was an entirely new world. Imagine seeing those guys with those butterfly wings… dancing only in a g-string, those sculpted bodies, it was wild! It became a hotspot, every Friday we would get ready to see the Dzi Croquettes' show at Treze de Maio. This happened, I think, for three, four months.

George’s account differs from those of his friends in that his identification comes not via similarity/likeness but a perceived difference, which expands the picture of identification. For George, the Dzi represented “an entirely new world” as opposed to a “similar” world as it did for Alberto, Célia, and Regina M. However, even a perceived resemblance between stage and one’s personal life did not trivialise the impact of the Dzi performances. Regina M. makes this point explicitly. If, as she said, the Dzi did on stage what she and her friends already did on the streets, what about them was so life-changing for her then? Her answer to me was that “the [Dzi] mockery, the transgression, the rebellion, I was already a bit familiar with those. But the power of their performance, the power of art, that was definitive. I get goosebumps, I get emotional every time I hear the show soundtrack, something happens in all my cells, all my nerves, my emotions”.
So far, I have dwelled on the four friends from the Campinas troupe to investigate the process of identification via similarity and/or difference. To conclude this sub-section, below I present the accounts of three Dzi Croquettes on spectators’ fascination and identification with the group/family/movement. Unlike the participants above, the Dzi Croquettes turned their gaze mostly to the after-show, as their interactions with (and perceptions of) the broader audience would take place in parties and gatherings after their performances.

The Dzi Bayard told me that, when the group/family ended, what impressed him most was how important the Croquettes were in peoples’ lives. He admitted a certain bemusement at first when people said that they too had been Dzi Croquettes after hanging out with them, visiting their home or sharing the same bed. Nowadays, however, he understands it better “because identification was so strong that people felt and needed to be like us. So, to be a Dzi Croquette is not only to be on stage but to have identified with and lived that…” Bayard’s remarks seem to perfectly fit the story of another Dzi, Claudio Tovar. Tovar differed from any other participant in that he started as an audience member and went to become a Dzi Croquette himself, so his is somewhat of a dual perspective. On an Instagram live with the Dzi Ciro Barcelos (27 May 2020), Tovar recalled that first watching the Croquettes made him feel *siderado* (paralysed, astonished) with ‘the new possibility ahead of me.’ I used this term as a hook in our interview and asked him to explain it further, to which he replied:

Ah, it was fascinating, man, I am telling you how I got in, I was attracted in the same way. Imagine what happened with other people too, it was fantastic, the whole thing was wonderful. The number of transformations that we saw in those people (...) Imagine those who saw it for the first time! The fascination it created. How would you not want to see it again and get close to that being, who, when the whole thing is over, takes the clothes off and is wearing jeans and a cheap t-shirt, you know? It’s a guy like any other. That fantasy ends, and you see that person right there. Absolutely like a normal person… Maybe not, but it is very fascinating to see that guy, that artist.
As a spectator, Tovar located his own—and as a Dzi performer eventually, the public’s—fascination and identification with the Dzi as arising from the contrast between “another world” and “this world”, that is, performance and reality, their on-stage otherworldly fascination juxtaposed with off-stage jeans-and-cheap-tee normalcy. Rather than creating a rift between the just-seen performance and ‘outside reality,’ this juxtaposition seemed to have an opposite effect. Without a fourth wall from the outset, the contrast revealed a continuum between performance and reality, exposing thus the latter’s contingency rather than necessity. After ‘that fantasy ends,’ such a contrast also worked to simultaneously demystify and make the Croquettes relatable, ‘a guy like any other.’ What came to the fore during and after the Dzi shows, therefore, were the infiltrations from real world into performance and from performance into the real world. The novelty of performance was not constricted to, but leaked out from, the stage onto its aftermath and thus stimulated in spectators a (utopic) sense of possibility and novelty.

Let us take forward the analysis of this post-performance scenario with another jeans reference by Ciro Barcelos:

We never put ourselves on a pedestal of stardom. And everybody had access to us. It was something of that generation too… We left the venue and we went out with everyone, we all went to eat together, the so-called tietes, our friends, everyone went together (…) Even later on in France, even after international success, we were always very open. We were very simple. At the same time that we had someone like Liza Minnelli giving us a standing ovation, we left the venue with our jeans, with our way of being. And that’s indeed what we wanted the most, to go home to hang out, chat, and laugh together.

Ciro’s account illuminates the importance of post-performance gatherings in the public access to the group and in the mutual identification that occurred between performers and spectators. Indeed, as seen in Section 5.2 above, the Dzi Croquettas emerged not just out of young women’s identification with the Croquettes, but equally out of their identification with Croquettas. Yet, identification in/as the aftermath of the Dzi
performances was not constricted to performers-spectators. Spectators also identified “horizontally” with/to other spectators as well as “internally” with/to oneself. Let us now turn to these other modes/directions of identification.

5.3.2. Identification with/to Others and Oneself

The two prepositions above signal that identification was not only with but also to others and oneself, as we shall see below before concluding this section and moving on to look at the disorientating impact of the Croquettes’ performances. It should be clear thus far that underlying the adoption/contagion of the Dzi style and outfits were broader political and existential questions, not merely a fashion trend confined to performances’ temporal and spatial limits. Nobody made this clearer than Regina M., who emphasised that unorthodox ensembles were not just dress-up play but in fact part of her everyday life:

For me, these were ‘personas’ that we took on. They were not just costumes because we wore that at home, in the streets. We really incorporated that. There were lots of references to Carmen Miranda, a very important reference for drag queens, for queer non-binarism, this open field for you to incorporate the persona that you choose to present yourself to others and, in the end, to your own self.

Regina’s account expands the picture of identification as a means of presenting/identifying oneself to others and even to oneself. The moments leading up to the Dzi performances, the duration thereof, and its aftermath were the key sites facilitating such identification between and among the general audience itself. The next chapter will theorise these points in relation to this thesis’ remaining overarching research questions, as I consider the potentials (and limitations) of the Dzi/queer performances in relation to the liberal rhetoric of LGBT rights. For now, let us continue the analysis of this identification with others/oneself based on the encounter between Lidoka and Lu Grimaldi as well as the recollections of Dario.
The fourth and last Dzi Croquetta with whom I spoke, Lu Grimaldi recounted how she met her best friend and writer of the Dzi Croquettes’ memoir, Lidoka. Unlike the majority of the participants, Grimaldi’s first encounter with the Croquettes was not as a spectator. Rather, Grimaldi was then the host of a TV programme where the Croquettes were scheduled to appear to promote their upcoming show at Treze de Maio. “When I saw those 13 men in costumes walking into the studio, it was a hallucination,” she told me, adding: “I had not yet seen their performance, I went to watch it and became one of those people who were always there.” Following up on what caused her to ‘hallucinate,’ Grimaldi explained that the occasion was “very impactful… what they proposed, their visuals, the anarchy they made walking into the studio. It was so contagious, joyful, and we did not see that in people. People were more reserved.” Thereafter, Grimaldi made her way to the show and was further impacted by the experience:

I remember one thing I said to myself was, ‘This is what I am going to do with my life, this is what I want.’ On that day [of her first Dzi performance] I met Lidoka and we became very close. We hugged each other and cried, she said ‘I want this’… And it was such a thing, I remember one scene, I remember Lennie Dale saying (mimics an American accent in Portuguese): ‘Close the doors, hold your heads.’ He said it right at the beginning. I remember the light he emanated, that g-string, the spotlight above him, he was sparkling, the glitter, oh my goodness! We did not have any of these references… We [Lidoka and her] were watching the performance sitting next to each other and we were like ‘Are you also feeling this way? I am also feeling this way!’ So, we bonded and became bosom pals. She would sleep over at mine and I at hers. We went to the show every day, we went to dance lessons with them. That’s how we started and the others [Croquettes] arrived… We spent the whole day doing lessons with them, watched the show in the evening and then went out with them. Our life became following the Croquettes.
Curiously, both Lidoka and Grimaldi’s identification with the Dzi performance served as a catalyst for a mutual identification and lifelong relationship between them, who did not know each other prior to sitting next to each other in the Dzi audience. Likewise, Dario’s recollections also suggested that this impromptu audience bonding was not an isolated event. The journalist likened the Dzi following to a religion because of the ritual involved before, during, and after performances. He explained that on weekends as the show ended, the revelry began:

We started to hang out outside the venue and want to meet people. There were people selling beers, so we began practically to have post-performance parties on Fridays and Saturdays. People would meet each other and fall in love. Identify with each other. See themselves in each other. And hence began the consolidation of a transformation and awareness in the gay movement of São Paulo.

The narratives above show that the Dzi performances (including the audience) served as key sites of identification and bonding before, during, and after the Dzi performances. Interestingly, Dario follows the sentences on identification and seeing one in each other with another on transformation. He invoked a divine and revelatory quality to their shows: “All of a sudden, things got shaken up and I saw some truths. Because what was said on stage was not a script. The attitudes were not fiction, they were part of life…” Ironically, Dario almost missed the Dzi show. He was hosting a friend who one day came home from a Dzi show all dazzled and glittered, raving about it. Dario passed on the passionate recommendation due to preconceived ideas about the show. Soon thereafter, however, the Dzi premiered at *Teatro Treze de Maio* and Dario, as editor-in-chief of an important newspaper, had no choice but to go:

So, I went to see the show and I felt doped (*chapado*), I said (tone of amazement), ‘Fuck, what is this? What on earth is this, this force, this beauty?’ There was something about them that really impressed me and may be defined in one sentence, which is the main slogan of the Dzi Croquettes: ‘the force of
the male and the grace of the female’... very telegraphic, nine words. You impart an entire behavioural concept from A to Z, to lay to rest any doubts. So, this made me really doped and I saw there a cultural, philosophical, sexual, and behavioural revolution. And with all the humour, beauty, magnitude, honesty... I was so doped that at the end of it I could not stand up. 'My gosh, what is this? What force is this? What wonder is this? I had never seen anything like that before, I had little reference because people were just starting to talk about androgyny at the time.

Here Dario recalls the sensation of the floor falling out from under him. A typical way of putting it in Brazil is *perder o chão*, to lose the ground. For Dario, in his words, “Suddenly, everything wobbled (*balançou*). It was such a positive thing that (changes tone to put strong emphasis) it changed, it changed my life, it changed it! It saved me 15 years of therapy. How did it save. In the head of a whole generation that watched them. How did it change my life!” It is to this force of the Dzi performances to shake things up and make one lose one’s ground that we turn now.

**5.4. ‘Dziorientation’: The Desire for and Cost of Freedom**

“To disorient, to set free. Above all, it was very important as a process of liberation, of unchaining from old paradigms.” (Ciro)

Above I treated ‘magnetic identification’ as not just an effect but an affect of the Dzi performances. Similarly, here I treat disorientation as another affect produced and circulated in/as the aftermath of the Dzi performances. This and the previous section have been separated for the purposes of clarity and to avoid too lengthy a section, but there seems to be a continuity between the magnetic identification that seduced viewers and a disorientation or transformation, both at the level of the individual and the social. As we saw in Section 2.3 with Sara Ahmed’s engagement with the concept of (dis)orientation, these moments are packed with potential because disorientation involves not only the ‘failure’ of bodies (let us call this the first angle) but moreover, and
what we may call the second angle of the concept, “disorientation in how objects are gathered to create a ground, or to clear a space on the ground (the field)” (2006: 160).

The last thematic division of the oral history interviews is presented in this section, which builds on the concept of disorientation as an affect generated in/by the Dzi performances. This endeavour dialogues with the overall interest of this thesis to examine the Dzi/queer performances’ ability to envision and ignite self/social critique and change—a point that Chapter Six returns to and builds on. For the participants of this project, disorientation (first angle) was for the most part linked to their failure to align with the societal orientation and mores towards sexuality and gender. Yet, there was also disorientation (second angle) lived as both loss and ‘gain’ of new worlds, directions, self-confidence, and ultimately freedom. The overall purpose of this section is to expound on both angles of disorientation in/as the aftermath of the Dzi performances, continuing to chart the affective, subjective, and political impressions thereof. Less theoretically and more pragmatically, the first sub-section below offers an analysis of the Dzi performances’ influence on participants’ sense of increased freedom and agentic possibilities expressed through the trope of “opening up”. The second sub-section proceeds to challenge a romantic view of disorientation as always and already a moment of gain or hope. Here I look at what losses this search/enactment of freedom entailed for participants. Through this juxtaposition of ‘gain’ and ‘loss’ I hope to demonstrate the contingency and open-endedness of (em)power(ment) and freedom. Finally, the third sub-section concludes by reading the Dzi Croquettes’ performances as ‘bridges’ or ‘catalysts’ for participants’ painful and empowering process of dis-/reorientation. I conclude by presenting and reflecting on participants’ hindsight views of the ‘afterlife’ of the Dzi movement, that is, what ground(s) they ‘cleared’ for the subsequent generations and political groups.

Although ‘liberation’ and ‘freedom’ seemed interchangeable for participants, I will use the former only when translating the word choice of a given participant. In my own text, I will refrain from using it due to its connotations of removal or transcendence from power, as though one were finally liberated to express one’s ‘true’ essence. The term ‘freedom,’
I believe, better captures the coterminous struggle where one’s agency emerges at the moment of resistance against power from within, not from underneath or outside it. This choice is inspired by a Foucauldian notion of power and freedom, where one’s agency and freedom—be it “the possibility of movement, contestation, and resistance”—are both “the beginning and end of power, its enabling condition and limit—its inescapable contingency” (Golder 2015: 111). In Brazil there is a beautiful play with the words “Eu (r)esisto” uttered by diverse political movements and activists that means simultaneously “I exist” and “I resist”. Existence and resistance are thus rendered concurrent: one resists because one exists, but one exists only because one also resists. Existence and resistance are turned into a chant of pride and defiance, as though one shall carry on living and resisting.

5.4.1. Infectious Freedom, New Horizons

Section 5.3. above dwelled on what it meant for participants to want to be igual/like the Croquettes and concluded by acknowledging the continuum between the Dzi magnetism and disorientation, a concept that this sub-section seeks to relate with the notion of freedom. Nowhere is this continuum clearer than in the account of George. He sheds light on a key aspect of the process of following or wanting to be like the Croquettes: not just visual or aesthetic but a resemblance of the “freedom of life and thought” that he saw embodied and performed on stage:

I think that the Croquettes were the total definition of my life. There onwards I understood myself in life… So, then we started to live this freedom. We were a bit repressed, but after the Croquettes we really got loose. We were totally comfortable, then there was a change coming because it was 1976, 1977, there was a greater opening (referring to the dictatorship), but the vision, the reference that I thought of for my life, was the vision of the Croquettes. They were mirrors for me. Not that I wanted to be an artist, you know? But I think that the freedom of life, of thought. That was it (…) So when you see the Dzi Croquettes, that changes something in your head. You go and watch their show, you are inside this place where you want some freedom. You have a ‘freedom’
(participant’s scare quotes) and then, suddenly, for instance, you see absolute freedom, *absolutely loose* and open to the world. (my emphasis)

To ‘get loose’ as mentioned above was originally put as *soltar as frangas*, a Brazilian idiom that literally means ‘to release the chicks.’ A quick online survey reveals its most common meanings: to become disinhibited, to behave in an effeminate way, and to give away one’s homosexuality. It is used sometimes in a derogative sense to ‘mock’ someone’s particular gesture or a movement as not masculine/heterosexual enough. The same idiom was used by my anonymous participant, to whom the experience of participating in the Dzi movement was “almost like a post-doctorate of opening up (*abertura*) our feelings, (of) what we want to be”. In their words:

I got really crazy at the time and at each performance there was this kind of emotion that appeared to you. And it created a power of absolute looseness. You had *more power to stand your own ground* (*impor-se*), to position yourself before the new world, a new concept, a nicer comportment of acceptance. It was very strong, not just for me but I think for a whole generation that followed it (…) It was such an incredible passion (to get made up), but it was a movement. They managed to pass it on to people, who started doing it in their cities, getting loose, releasing their demons, provoking. (Anonymous) (my emphasis)

To get loose, thus, implies a heightened sense of freedom and liberation from inhibitions. According to my anonymous participant, this sense of gain in/as the aftermath of the Dzi performances reflected a greater power to stand one’s ground, an empowerment that infected others who then took that ‘infection’ to their cities and towns. The Dzi Ciro too speculated that what was so contagious about the Dzi was its “libertarian proposal”. Likewise, explaining what she found so captivating about their performances, Lu Grimaldi replied incisively: “Freedom! A freedom that I did not know. Freedom in its visual and aesthetic proposal… and always making a satire for transgression really.”
The trope of *abertura* (opening up) and the verb *abrir* (open) appeared often in the narratives of several participants. The Dzi Tovar, explaining his fascination as a spectator that led him to go back stage and convince the Dzi Croquettes to let him join in, recalled: “I saw the entire world open up to, right in front of me. A thousand details, a thousand paths, a thousand possibilities, a thousand aesthetics. There was a whole world to be explored,” adding later on in our interview: “Such was the contradiction of it (the performance) that I lost all paradigms. I did not know anymore what that was.” To lose all paradigms might have been an exaggeration, but what Tovar probably meant (or a more productive way of reading this loss of paradigms) is that the Dzi performances shook up his ideological ground, that he was led to call into question some “truths” about himself and his surroundings.

Not only did their performances imagine and enact freedom that one did not know, but often their disorienting force helped increase participants’ sense of freedom and agentic possibilities. This dynamic was captured by the recurrent trope of opening (up), which was used to refer to both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ freedom. The above participant recalls experiencing greater power to position themselves ‘before the new world,’ the preposition suggesting a relationship of ‘exteriority’. Asked to develop what she meant by the Dzi Croquettes movement having opened up “horizons” in her life, Regina M. Turned ‘inwards’ and elaborated that

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First, it was the experience of radical transformation. Of learning about limits that you did not know about yourself. Of resistance, faith, willpower, of becoming unknown to yourself (*se desconhecer*), I think it is about turning yourself inside out, overcoming your own limits. You overcome that which you did not even imagine you could.
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My intention here is not to suggest that the subjectivity of individuals exists as an ‘interiority’ against or separated from an outside world, even if these senses of interiority and exteriority may feel quite real at times. Rather, I want to shed light precisely on the negotiations between the “interior” and “exterior” world, between an increased sense of
agency and freedom that only gets exercised and materialised in a world that mediates/is mediated by others. Here it cannot go unnoticed that Brazil remains one of the deadliest countries for LGBT and queer people (LaGata/Balzer & Berredo 2016), so I wondered in amazement how, almost half a century ago, my participants navigated public spaces, how they walked down the streets in such irreverent, gender-bending outfits. How did the Dzi Croquettas get about in their urban interventions or ask for lifts, as Lidoka (2012) writes? Or, as Alberto told me, how did men get around in make-up and lingerie back then when it is hardly imaginable almost 50 years later? How did one pursue whatever one believed and felt to be freedom at a time when the bulk of society and political institutions saw and treated that as a threat?

With these questions, I intend to caution against an easy view of “the supposedly liberating possibilities of queer ‘playful’, ‘fluid’ and transgressive practices and behaviours” as well as of one’s “ability to experience the variability of the self.” These, as Browne and Nash (2010: 6-7) remind us, “are tied up with material possibilities of everyday life” as well as with broader power relations “linked to economic, social, and historic contexts.” Against legislating disorientation as an a priori political strategy, Ahmed shrewdly observes that “what happens when we are ‘knocked off course’ depends on the psychic and social resources ‘behind’ us. Such moments can be a gift, or they might be the site of trauma, anxiety, or stress about the loss of an imagined future.” (2006: 19). That said, in the sub-section below I offer an account of the ‘costs’ of having/exercising a version of (sexual and gender) freedom that challenged conventional roles and norms.

5.4.2. Going Off-Piste: Hindrances and Resources

To navigate an environment of institutional, social, and familial hindrances, building alternative forms of support and kinship—a building that permeates the history of the Dzi Croquettas and of queer movements in general—was central to navigating one’s way and following desire lines under sociopolitical arrangements that attempted to close horizons for non-normative bodies and objects. Lidoka’s is the only piece in the Dzi
literature to consider in depth the costs of swimming against the current, particularly for a group of young women. Family estrangement, although to different extents, was not unusual in the Dzi movement. Lidoka, for instance, received a written ultimatum from her mother after telling her about Wagner’s invitation to join the Croquetas cast. The ultimatum stated that either she found a proper job at a bank, changed friends, and straightened her hair (her curls symbolising unruliness), or she found another roof above her head. And so she did, at the age of 23: Lidoka packed her things and set foot on the road (Lidoka 2012: 18).

In one of the most striking passages of the memoir, Lidoka recalls a series of episodes where some Dzi Croquetas were persecuted by pedestrians hurling insults and had to seek refuge in local shops, to be then escorted by the police back to their homes. Nightclubs were also frequent sites of harassment, be it for the insistent clients with unsolicited sexual advances or the managers with work proposals that slyly concealed the sexual nature thereof. “People did not understand the spirit of it,” she contended, explaining that “in that time, it was inconceivable to see a group of young and well-educated women spontaneously living out of an artistic project, expressing themselves with freedom. The logical and limited interpretation was that those ‘nutjobs’, outside any normal context, should also sell their bodies” (2012: 134). Far from degrading sex work, Lidoka states the obvious: the macho entitlement underlying the lack of consent and respect in gruelling and repeatedly unwelcome approaches. And it was the Croquetas who paid the price for quarrelling with predatory clients or refusing to do work that was not previously agreed.

In the Dzi literature and oral history interviews, gender appears as one differentiating element in the experience of freedom and transgression. This is hinted at by Dario, who recalled navigating public spaces without much difficulty aside from being stared at. Crossing downtown São Paulo in Dutch heels, brooches, and jewellery, as he described it, Dario conjectured that “I think I never suffered anything because I also had a masculine and virile comportment.” Whereas for the Croquetas, as Lu Grimaldi told me, for protection purposes they would only leave the house in groups of three or more. She
brought up two occasions to illustrate this decision, starting with a time when Croquettas had travelled to the southern city of Curitiba only to find out that the presumed nightclub owner was more like a pimp:

So, we got thrown out because the guy realised that we weren’t going to do any of those things he wanted. And then one day we were walking around downtown Curitiba, Olivinha (another Croquetta) was wearing this knitted striped jumpsuit that was pretty tight. We ended up having to flee and hide inside a pharmacy because people wanted to bash us… The same happened another time… I don’t remember if it was in Goiânia. It was at Palácio Esmeralda, I remember we were at a hotel and I went to the pharmacy too and I was wearing a skirt… I had to dash back as people followed me, I didn’t even manage to make it to the pharmacy and hid at the hotel… [what did they say?] They started to follow and shout at me, saying that I was a man dressed as a woman. (Lu Grimaldi)

Célia and Regina C. had no recollections of social hostility or persecution, only of turning heads and drawing onlookers’ attention for their extravagance. Whether during the Croquettas’ urban interventions or the daily habit of hitchhiking everywhere they went, Célia presumed that “maybe because of the fact that we were women, there was a more of an amiable approach.” Regina M., in turn, described as ‘aggressive’ the way some pedestrians reacted to and cursed them during the Croquettas’ urban interventions’. “However,” she added, “I remember that as being almost expected. Or desired even.”

The episodes of social persecution against the Croquettas described above invite us to consider some of the gendered tensions between the (sexual) freedom envisioned/enacted by the all-male Dzi Croquettes and all-female Dzi Croquettas. There was no shortage of references about how sexy or attractive the male performers were. Bayard confirmed this and told me that “everyone wanted to have sex with us… we could choose with whom we wanted to have sex.” The Dzi Croquettas, however, were
not just sexy but sexualised. The episodes above make manifest the male predatory ‘entitlement’ to the female body, which ‘denies’ women the possibility to consent to or reject a sexual advance. These tensions encourage, in fact call for, a notion of freedom and agency against the figure of the sovereign subject of liberalism, whose conflation of freedom with ‘individual choice’ disregards that the exercise/enactment of freedom is both enabled and constrained within a particular sociopolitical context, authorised and/or hindered by gendered, classed, racial, and sexual power relations. The term ‘hindered’ is used here to avoid a deterministic and totalitarian account of power that forecloses the possibility of agency and subversion.

If above I sought to account for a notion of freedom and transgression while avoiding the reductionist, acontextual conflation of freedom with sovereign, individual choice, I should note that the transgressive, infectious freedom enacted by the Dzi Croquettes was not constrained to former generations. As we will see in the following and final subsection, participants made often and overt references to the Croquettes’ political contributions that began in the 1970s but continue to echo in the present.

5.4.3. Catalysts, Bridges, Ways-Out

At the end of each interview, I asked participants why they thought the Dzi performances resonated with so many people back then, and why they continue to this day to draw the attention of younger researchers like myself. When talking about the Dzi disorientation and its infectious “unchaining from old paradigms”, the Dzi Ciro beautifully reflected on what he thinks the Croquettes represented to the broader public: “There is a very strong bridge there, which I think is what we meant (for people): a bridge. That generation made a crossing with us. They made a crossing.” For another Dzi, Bayard,

What did we mean for people? At a time of repression, the Dzi was the exit/way out. It was the opportunity for artistic expression and transgression of the prevailing norms of the time (...) It was a new way, a possibility, which was a bit
limited at the time. The whole thing was a bit limited. There was not much space, you know?

Both epithets, bridge and way out, suggest movement, going from one point to another, leaving somewhere to go elsewhere. Bridge, in particular, evokes assistance and facilitation of a journey that could have happened otherwise, albeit perhaps not as easily. In a similar vein, the Dzi Benê described the Croquettes as one, but not the sole, “catalyst” for the collective desbunde of the time. To Dario, the eloquent journalist, the “impression that I have of them [Croquettes]: people who provoked changes, because I had everything to be a conservative and square guy to this day.”

Besides the already examined sense of freedom/liberation, Dario adds two elements—profound justification and comprehension—in/as the aftermath of the Dzi performance. As he puts it: “They started to have an entourage, they influenced and liberated all those people in such a way, because I was liberated with that. I felt profoundly justified, profoundly understood.” According to him, “it was as though each person went through a beneficial change and then started to spread this spiritual glitter.” The notion of ‘justification’ appeared also in the account of another participant, Alberto, as seen in Section 5.3.1 above. For him, the angry stares from neighbours mattered less than “the bigger issues [that] were with my own self, of understanding myself in this universe and letting go.” Like Dario, Alberto offered a train of thought that, as he acknowledged, may sound awkward to younger generations but that made sense at the time:

If you thought that being gay was something negative in your life, you went to watch the Dzi Croquettes and thought ‘Damn, this is amazing, I am modern, not gay.’ So that provided a certain relief to those with this kind of issue, for example, they justified you being gay as you being modern. Saying that nowadays may sound weird, but it made a lot of sense at the time... They offered a mythical and modern way (...) In the sense of creating an opening, really, [for] people who had a square behaviour, to use the slang of the time... People who wore conventional clothes, a square haircut. I think that based on
this (Dzi) reference, they started to change all that. I think that a lot of people came out of the closet because of them... They gave a blow of relief to those who were very oppressed inside the closet. Suddenly you had a justification, something that justified positively your sexual orientation. 'I am not an aberration. I am not that which homophobes call me. I am not a faggot. I am modern. I am a person who has their space’. There was also the thing about freedom. 'I have my space and I can be who I want, wear what I want, have the haircut that I want.’ (Alberto)

Justification for these two participants was directly linked to them being gay, or, as Alberto remarked, ‘modern’, where modernity seemed to promise an ownership or entitlement to ‘space’. In the absence of a collective appropriation and resignification of the term, rather than reclaiming ‘faggot’ Alberto finds (self-)justification in modernity and its promises of individual freedom. Such justification was delivered via the Dzi performances and its target audience, as suggested above, were those who thought they were “an aberration”. It is not hard to imagine the collective allure of this justification to queer people fifty years ago in Brazil under a dictatorship.

Yet, as participants reflected on the ways that the Dzi Croquettes ‘cleared the ground’ for that generation, they also touched on contemporary debates and contributions of the group. Contrary to what younger generations might expect, when asked about why the Croquettes continue to fascinate the youth up to these days, my participants’ answers focused less on their contribution pertaining to sexuality and more, interestingly, on gender. “They [Dzi] opened the ‘fan’ [metaphor for options, possibilities] for all the segments that came after, genders and the opening of everything,” opined my anonymous participant, going on to add that “they were the genesis of a greater change, of acceptance of a gazillion (trocentos) genders, acceptance of the expression of art, acceptance of the freedom to be (liberdade de ser)… Then came trans, travesti, gay, more respect (…) They opened up these.” Célia, for instance, remarked that there were fewer ‘letters’ for gender and sexual identities at the time and that the boundaries between them were more fluid. To prove her point, she brought up her marriage to the
Croquette Roberto: “It was very interesting, because Roberto was gay, as were the others. But at that time these boundaries were subtler. I mean, him being gay did not prevent him from being with a woman. And for me, him being gay didn’t change anything.” Célia then shifts her analysis to the present: “Nowadays, the roles are more defined… there is a greater concern if one is straight, bi, this, that, there are a million nomenclatures, I find it all very funny. But at the time these limits were not considered much.” Célia brings an interesting and acute intergenerational observation about more or less fluid boundaries, back then and now, between gender and sexual identities. This fluidity reminds us of the historical shifts and contingency of such “boundaries”, which do not imply that gender and sexuality are entirely separable but rather overlapping, contrasting, and mutually influencing.

Likewise, Alberto observed that only recently have we [Brazilians in general] begun to have a public conversation about trans identities, and with the growing momentum of such discussions, people have been looking for references (among which are the Croquettes). For Dario, while it is easier for younger generations to search for references, back in the 1970s there was hardly any reference for the androgyny performed by the Croquettes. He stated that the Dzi went beyond the scarce androgynous examples from the UK or the US, as the group seemed to foreshadow issues that prove relevant to these days: “It was this concept that you can be whatever you want to be. There was not this binarism, but remember, this is a discussion from 1973, 40 or so years ago. So, what we see nowadays, the issues of homophobia, of trans people…So many letters that I no longer understand. But in reality, the principle was the same. We were all on the same boat” (Dario). To conclude, the point worth noting here is that the above accounts of Alberto, Célia, and my anonymous participant make manifest that the Dzi performances’ disorientation affected not just bodies (first angle), but moreover the social and political landscapes by clearing the ground and opening the ‘fan’ and new paths, possibilities for that and for the next generations (second angle of the concept of disorientation).
The upcoming Chapter Six returns to some crucial points introduced above to theorise on the queer performances’ potentials that may serve as antidotes and challenges to the ontopolitical pitfalls of the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric critiqued in Section 2.2. In what comes, we will dwell with greater attention on aforementioned tropes such as contagion, justification, and disorientation; on the multirectional fluxes of identification; and on the Dziorientation that fostered a sense of both empowerment and of self-/social estrangement. The following chapter brings the Dzi/queer performances in dialogue with Chapter Two’s genealogy and critique of the LGBT human rights rhetoric; a bringing together/juxtaposing whose aim is to address this thesis remaining overarching questions: What may be the implications and meanings of decentring the law from our queer political imaginaries and praxis? How do queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes help expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? And what potential alternatives for radical social change do they offer?
CHAPTER SIX: PERFORMING NEW WORLDS AND SELVES BESIDES/AGAINST THE LAW

The thesis thus far has addressed two topics that at prima facie might seem rather disconnected or distinct. In this chapter, drawing parallels with and building on the preceding ones, I shall make clear the motivations for—and the insights we can derive from—juxtaposing these two political sites/sights and strategies: the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights and queer performances such as the Dzi Croquettes. As part of my critique’s diagnostic/transformative endeavours, I have turned both towards and away from rights. In Chapter Two, the primary question guiding my investigation revolved around this rhetoric’s potentials and pitfalls for queer struggles for social change. The critique was not addressed at law in toto, that is, it challenged a particular version of LGBT (human) rights as well as the legal colonisation of our political imaginaries and repertoires to the detriment of other displaced, non-funded, even disavowed political sites and knowledges. In light of this legal(istic) colonisation, Chapter Two introduced two notions: the concept of decentring the neoliberal rhetoric of (LGBT) rights and the ‘foregrounding’ of extralegal sites and modes of queer politics—illustrated and examined in this thesis via the Dzi/queer performances.

The main endeavour of this final chapter, therefore, is to elaborate on these notions of decentring and foregrounding in order to answer this thesis’ remaining overarching questions. What follows is structured in three sections. The chapter begins by addressing the research question on the potentials, implications, and limitations of the concept of legal decentring, an effort that begins via a literature review and continues as I turn to the affective and worldmaking powers of queer performances in Section 6.2. This chapter somewhat mirrors the structure of this thesis in that it begins by examining (the decentring of) rights, moves on to develop the theoretical framework around queer/Dzi performances by theorising and drawing from Chapters Four and Five, and concludes by bringing both rights and queer performances in dialogue and tension with each other. The main purpose of this third and final section is to answer the final overarching research questions on the Dzi/queer performances’ potentials to expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the mainstream (LGBT) rights rhetoric as
well as gesture towards alternative paths for radical social change beyond/against neoliberal legalism. Here I argue how queer/Dzi performances may provide political actors with some antidotes and insights against the narrow and exclusionary workings of neoliberal-legalism, more specifically four ontopolitical limitations identified in Section 2.2: the displacement of extralegal political sites and knowledges; the narrowing down of fundamental vocabulary and of the workings of power/resistance; the concealment of historical, structural, and unevenly allocated (in)justice; and the disavowal of social relationality as fundamental rather than just or primarily ‘dangerous’ to our formation as subjects.

As I contend below, the rhetoric of rights and performances have more similarities than one might initially think. Yet, as I hope to make evident below, they also jar against each other in challenging and reinvigorating ways. Therefore, below I seek to examine the points of contact and divergence between the worldmaking powers of law and performance with the purpose of understanding how we may reconceptualise vocabularies, strategies, and sights fundamental for queer politics. I do not mean to imply that one diametrically complements the other for what it lacks, lest we arrive at an overly reparative and stable conclusion. Rather, I suggest that the legal and performative realms ultimately complement and challenge each other qua sites/strategies of resistance as well as of knowledge production for/of queer politics.

6.1. Decentring Rights

This thesis’ ‘centring’ of queer performances and juxtaposition with the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights is not to suggest that performances offer a perfect corrective or remedy to the ontopolitical pitfalls examined in the earlier critique of Chapter Two. While both the law and queer performances are under scrutiny here for their worldmaking potentials as strategies/sites for radical social change, it would be naive to assume that one would be so perfectly complementary and corrective so as to ‘remedy’ the other and bring closure to political struggles, as though social change, equality, or justice could/would be delivered at once and for all. As will become clear throughout this
chapter, the decentring of rights is not tantamount to its replacement by nor to the ‘elevation’ of queer performances as the sole/best means for social change. Rather, the point is precisely to question the assumption that any single strategy or site could or should occupy that mythical position and to introduce the notion as well as the potentials of kaleidoscopic, polymorphous political repertoires and imaginaries that would follow from legal decentring, without a priori or altogether eradicating the law.

The issue in need of diagnosis/transformation lies, therefore, in the legal colonisation of LGBT politics and its counterpart, in “seeing movements for political change in terms of rights’ claims, or centering them on the politics of rights…[which] threatens to limit our apprehension of new political events and narrow our political aspirations.” (Honig 2008: 98). As Section 2.2 demonstrated, the worldmaking power of (LGBT) rights has instead multiscalar effects, from the level of subjectivity and ontology to much broader questions and meanings about political vocabulary and sexual/gender identities. Rights may be indeed the “present limits to rethinking social and political arrangements, as Ben Golder (2015: 87) argues, since they allow us to think of some—and not other—forms of human flourishing and community. While earlier critics of rights tended to approach rights’ shortcomings from a perspective of negation and substitution, more contemporary ones arguably share the tendency to advocate not for their replacement but rather their “transformation, re-signification, or displacement, their supplementing, modification, or redeployment” (Golder 2015:158).

The international and multiscalar encroachment of the neoliberal-legal rationality makes it significantly more challenging and perhaps revelatory to consider a scenario where we may tactically, albeit temporarily, turn away from rights. Over 30 years ago, Carol Smart warned us in Feminism and the Power of Law that, despite its importance as a battlefield and lingua franca, we should consider “the importance of attempting to ‘de-centre’ law wherever this is possible… [since] it is important to think of non-legal strategies and to discourage a resort to law as if it holds the key to unlock women’s oppression” (1989: 5). Smart presciently added that she was not “suggesting we can simply abolish law, but we can resist the move towards more law and the creeping
hegemony of the legal order” (ibid.) Around the same time, other feminists were echoing and elaborating on Smart’s warning. In Rights of Passage: Struggles for Lesbian & Gay equality, Didi Herman defends legal decentring as a means to “challenge law’s over-inflated view of itself” (1994: 3), although with the nuance that such dislodgment should take place “not so much within social struggles (where I see rights demands as largely inevitable), but within academic analyses of social struggles” (1994: 9).

Elizabeth Kingdom, in What’s Wrong with Rights?, proposes that feminist campaigns for rights “must be off the traditional concept of transcending and inalienable rights and on the analysis of prevailing social and legal conditions” (1991: 45). In a concrete context of particular demands and power relations, Kingdom asserts that political actors qua tacticians should assess the extent to which they believe the power relations and legal order with which they engage are permeable to recoding and subversion—or not. According to her, this entails a collective act of calculation with no pre-given, universal formulae dictating when, where or whether to resort to rights, especially since political arenas vary across time and space (1991: 149). While the idea of political tacticians fruitfully offers an invitation for collective deliberation on power relations and the limits or potentials of the law in a given context, we may add two caveats to the idea. First, given rights’ hegemony and omnipresence, it would be inaccurate to say that we, as political actors, are ‘equally’ free or may as easily adopt or refuse rights, given that we do not always choose the language or grounds in which we lay our political claims or respond to threats (Kingdom 1991: 130). Second, we should not underestimate the complexity in assessing whether the legal order is open to the possibility of subversion or entrenchment of norms. As seen in Section 2.2, we can hardly master or secure determined outcomes when using rights since in that process we are also ‘used’ in ways that are obscured by the notion of a master instrumentalist.

Similar calls for the dethronement of the rights rhetoric as the great panacea have been made well into the twenty-first century. Ben Golder contends that rather than an end of political struggles or movements, we should approach rights as tactics. This tactical approach to rights advances them as “a medium, themselves contested and contestable,
for political contestation… a tool to prompt us to rethink our lives and how we are led to live them… a vehicle for a contrary imagining” (Golder 2015: 137). Likewise, Sharon Cowan (2016) proposes not getting rid of the law but at once inhabiting and challenging it, that is, exerting caution against its pernicious pitfalls but seeking to inhabit it differently, more radically, for its worldmaking powers. This position echoes and builds on insights from critical race, feminist, and trans scholars concerned with whether and how to turn to the law in our quest for social change and justice (Smart 1989; Williams 1991; Crenshaw et al 1995; Currah 2009). This double position of inhabiting and challenging resonates with the concept of ‘disidentification’ as examined herein in the context of queer performances. Both point to the possibility of reworking and challenging current arrangements from a position that is both within and outside/against it. This concomitant inhabiting of the law and rejection of its colonising and precluding powers means that we ought to reckon with and learn to navigate “the possibility of co-option while resisting capture: that we must be tentative in accessing the power and authority of the law and not lose sight of feminist values…and aims” (Cowan 2016: 121). This position within/without is also espoused by Dean Spade (2015), whose work was a linchpin to the critique elaborated in Chapter Two. He elaborates on a radical trans politics that rejects the mainstream gay and lesbian formal equality package without dismissing the complex imbrications between the law and the lives of trans and queer people. In a similar vein to the argument I am building throughout this thesis, Spade proposes two manoeuvres: retargeting and decentring.

The former advances that hitherto the mainstream US gay and lesbian model has failed to target the sites/ways that the law more generally, and more insidiously, impacts on the lives of society’s most marginalised communities at the criss-cross of multiple vectors of marginality and dispossession. The radical trans politics elaborated in his work depends on, and defends, a shift in our understandings of power and resistance away from the reductionist top-down, individual subtraction to more collective and ‘positive’ modes of population management and disciplining. With this shift, “different areas of law start to appear as the focal points of harm for vulnerable groups” (Spade 2015: 73). One proposed turn is towards administrative law and away from “individual
rights-focused law reform [which] operates as a cover for population-based practices of abandonment and imprisonment” (2015: 93). A closer look at administrative law brings into relief the insidious effects of apparently simple, even natural state operations such as the categorisation of citizens according to their gender. These operations are unveiled as key methods (and thus sites of interventions) of/against population-management modes of power. The legal (reform) strategy is not rejected but decentralised and only pursued after/if we “employ an especially cautious analysis” of whether they support and disguise systems of harm and maldistribution or indeed seek to ameliorate the life chances and material circumstances of those in greater need (ibid.).

The latter, the decentring of law, “suggests that laws are merely tactics, rather than that law is the most important form of power” (Spade 2015: 57). This acknowledgment opens space for alternative modes and forms of doing politics, helping us nurture a kaleidoscopic, multi-frontal political arsenal and imaginary. We should not lose sight of the fact that this decentring/opening up depends not simply or necessarily on “a retreat from the terrain of rights” but moreover on “an investment in other political struggles, and the reimagining of other possibilities and (possibly even) utopias” (Golder 2015: 161; my emphasis). The legal colonisation under critique here has not fully wiped out or displaced extralegal sites and modes of doing queer politics as much as underfunded, discounted or diminished their political values and potentials. This notion of decentring, therefore, suggests that we may need active commitment with and consideration of the potentials and pitfalls of alternative paths and knowledges beyond/against the law.

The reimagining of and investment in other utopias, and the utopic power of the imagination, are the subject matter of the upcoming section, which develops the theoretical framework introduced in Section 2.3 on the political and affective powers of (queer) performances. I will turn momentarily away from rights and back to queer performances to then bring them next to/against each other in Section 6.3 below. In this vein, the centring of performances in Section 6.2, and juxtaposition alongside/against the mainstream rhetoric of (LGBT) rights in Section 6.3 constitute an investigation into
what is at issue in the opening up of our imaginations/imaginaries and arsenal. My
general argument in Section 6.2 is that, instead of mere nostalgia or abstract longing,
the imaginative and utopian moments glimpsed in/through the performances of queer
cultural workers such as the Dzi Croquettes constitute “an exercise in perspective-
taking, a way of inhabiting spaces and relating to others that connects up with our actual
world” (Medina 2013: 255). Next, the third and final section considers which
perspectives we may derive from the Dzi performances that help us do and think queer
politics beyond/against the ontopolitical pitfalls of neoliberal legalism.

6.2. Utopian Imaginings: Queer Performance and Affect

In light of a context of restricted civil liberties and censorship, but also of liberationist
gender and sexuality movements, it is not surprising that freedom figured as a central
motif and propeller of the Dzi movement, nor that the Croquettes were eventually
deemed a threat. Key to understanding the Dzi force of dis-/re-orientation, and queer
performances’ ‘threatening’ powers more broadly, is Judith Butler’s theorisation of our
“being open to a history, registering an impression, or having something impressed
upon one’s understanding” (Butler 2015: 149). Participants almost unanimously referred
to the growing visibility and scale of the Dzi movement as the main reason for
censorship. Not coincidentally, the Croquettes were censored soon after the episode
where hundreds of people pounded on and burst through the doors of Teatro da Praia in
Rio de Janeiro. By censoring and prohibiting the Croquettes, the junta was not merely
“protecting” traditional values but engaged precisely, and more perniciously, in a
“regulation of the senses as a political matter” out of “fear that this body will feel
something about what those other bodies underwent, or that this body in its sensory
comportment outside itself, will not remain enclosed, monadic, and individual” (Butler
2015: 149).

This interspace and shuttling between oneself and others in/through performances like
the Dzi Croquettes is fundamental to understanding their performances’ affective
potentials. Rather than emanating from one subject towards another, affect is generated
in/by the very movements, exchanges, and impressions—in the ‘dance’ between
subjects and objects as they encounter each other and as such encounters unravel. The powers of dance and choreography, therefore, are as central to understanding the Dzi Croquettes movement as they are to grasping the worldmaking powers of queer performances more broadly. In the book *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, Susan Leigh Foster (2011) undertakes a genealogical investigation of the concepts of choreography, empathy, and kinesthesia throughout the past centuries to buttress her investigation of the purported immediate and unmediated link between dancers and spectators. Drawing from a range of disciplines as diverse as dance pedagogy, phenomenology, and neurobiology, Foster challenges an easy distinction between vicariousness and actual experience to show that this intersubjective, affective interspace is at the core of our constitution as subjects. The notions of empathy and kinesthesia rebut the figure of the detached, nonchalant art viewer to put into relief the ways in which one experiences “muscularly as well as psychically the dynamics of what was being witnessed” (Foster 2011: 177). However, this experience is not unmediated, since the meanings and impacts derived by/impressed on spectators are informed by their idiosyncrasies and backgrounds as well as by their milieu.

The above invites us to consider whether censorship’s primary concern was to “preserve” traditional values (which the Dzi were purportedly attacking) or rather to keep the growing and effervescent gathering of bodies in/as the Dzi aftermath ‘in their place’ and ‘within their boundaries’. The junta’s fears that exchanges between performers and spectators were not fully visible to the naked eye or apprehensible by the rational mind have been confirmed by studies and researches gathered under the disciplines of affect and performance theory (Diamond et al 2017; Ahmed 2004; Schechner 2005). The now widespread term “affective turn” has been used to signal a broader shift in the social sciences and the humanities from the mid-1990s onwards as a way of reckoning with the limitations of deconstruction and post-structuralism (Clough 2008). Despite this affective turn being quite recent, two of the most-cited quotations in affect theory come from the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza.
The first begins with the proposition that “L’affect (Spinoza’s affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act.” (Massumi 1987: xvi). The statement is twofold: it entails affect as a bodily capacity to affect and be affected as well as a transition that augments or diminishes that body’s state/ability to act. In the second, Spinoza states that “No one has yet determined what the body can do” (Spinoza 1959: 87, cited in Gregg & Seigworth 2010: 3). Although concise, much can be unpacked from these two quotes. They unveil that the capacity of a body is not determined by an individual but always enabled by and implicated in this body's broader field or context. Put otherwise, the capacity of a body is aided and affected, augmented or diminished, by other affecting/affected bodies and objects. Moreover, knowing what a body can do and what bodily affects can do are not ever fully knowable or pre-established, that is, the body’s (affective) capacity remains open to a futurity, a not-yet or an always-becoming.

Against “inside out” and “outside in” models that locate affect’s origin in self-bounded bodies, Sara Ahmed (2004) examines what she terms “affective economies,” whereby feelings reside not in a singularity but are “produced as effects of circulation,” hence foregrounding not just the subjectivity but the “sociality” of emotion (2004: 8). Those internal/external models falter, Ahmed argues, because the very notions of interior/exterior and bodily ego/surface on which they are based presuppose self-bounded subjects who emerge as an effect rather than the cause of this circulation. Subjects thus appear not as the destination or origin of affect but as “simply one nodal point” therein (Ahmed 2004: 46). Ultimately, what Ahmed is trying to address is the difficulty in achieving social transformation and in changing relations of power, a difficulty that she suggests is partially compounded by our affective, psychic, and material investment in norms. If subjects’ formation occurs in/through affective economies, and if affects are not reduced to psychological individual states but pertain to sociocultural practices, we can expand the tripartite Foucauldian models of power as juridical, disciplinary and “population-management” (following Spade 2015, as per Section 2.2) to include a fourth, affective mode of power. With power working
increasingly through affective channels, strategies of resistance and “alternative political action” need to reckon with and “learn to function... on that same level—meet affective modulation with affective modulation. That requires, in some ways, a performative, theatrical or aesthetic approach to politics” (Massumi 2015: 34). Such an affective resistance, Massumi contends,

is of the nature of a gesture. Resistance cannot be communicated or inculcated. It can only be gestured. The gesture is a call to attunement. It is an invitation to mutual inclusion in a collective movement. The only power it has is exemplary. It cannot impose itself. It can only catch on. Its power is to throw out the lure of its own amplification. Its power is of contagion. The gesture of resistance is a micro-gesture of offered contagion, oriented otherwise than towards the structures into which the gestures of microfascism occurring on the same level, in the same field, have the tendency to channel. (Massumi 2015: 105-106; italics in original)

Massumi’s call for this mode of performative resistance evinces that, besides cultural workers and social movements, state apparatuses too engage with the realm of performance to sustain ideological perspectives (wa Thiong’o 1997). Massumi’s reference to the contagious nature of gestured resistance resonates with the Dzi Croquettes’ contagious performances, with such performances enacting precisely the nature of gesture outlined above, that is, as an invitation for inclusion in a movement. A central part of my argument in this chapter, in this vein, is that the realm of (queer) performances represents one such a mode/instance of performative/affective resistance that queer politics may use to expose—a verb clarified shortly—and challenge the ideological workings of power.

Even seemingly ordinary events such as public demonstrations and gatherings have been shown to be highly performative. Consider for instance the ‘zap’, a form of direct action first associated with the American hippie movement and their free speech struggle. As Sara Warner (2012: xi) argues, a zap is a performative mode of protest that unveils the ruses of power through a combination of irony and satire with “physical
comedy, symbolic costumes, expressive gestures, and farcical timing in brief, improvised skits that are designed to shock and awe people, jolting them out of their complacency and fixed frames of reference”. This jolting out and unfixing were common themes in my oral history participants’ accounts, whose reflections on the impact/aftermath of the Dzi performances varied from loss of paradigms, unchaining, and opening up. Zaps such as the hippie’s direct actions or the Dzi Croquettes’ performances are paradigmatic of what Warner coins a “counterpolitics of gaiety”—strategies of protest and resistance dovetailing with play and performance to envision social change and counter the normalisation of queer lives (2012: xxii).

Here we may take forward some of queer performances’ potentials introduced in Chapter Two and better understand disidentificatory performances’ capacity to enact and envision agonistic, utopian counterpublics (Muñoz 1999). Contrary to much of his contemporaneous political writing, Muñoz argued in his earlier book Disidentification that, despite utopianism’s bad reputation, “disidentificatory performances and readings require an active kernel of utopian possibility” and therefore we “need to hold on to and even risk utopianism if we are to engage in the labor of making a queer world” (1999: 25; emphasis in original). Tellingly, his subsequent book was titled Cruising Utopia (Muñoz 2009). In it, he draws from and builds on Marxist literature on utopia to offer “a theory of queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present” whilst avoiding the traps of “the failures of imagination that I understand as antirelationality and antiutopianism in queer critique” (2009: 18). Muñoz acknowledges that his work is partly a rejoinder to strands of antirelational queer theory (Bersani 1995; Edelman 2004) critiqued for their romanticisation of negativity and singularity. He contends that the antirelationality thesis’ defence of ‘no future’ presumes a universal white and wealthy gay man, failing to “factor in the relational relevance of race or class” whilst giving up alternative articulations of futurity on behalf of those most marginalised (2009: 94).

Through a variety of performances, texts, and spaces such as the dance floor, Muñoz theorises on queer performances’ capacity to envisage, by means of their utopian and “anticipatory illumination” (2009: 3), what is not yet fully known or not yet here, but
which nevertheless may fundamentally challenge what we deem to know or what we envision as possible in the here and now. Utopian performatives have the potential to prompt the audience to experience a temporary state of *communitas*, a term made famous by anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) to describe the experience of participants in rituals or performances akin to “the dissolution of the boundaries shutting people off from each other” (Schechner 2005: 156), a quasi-transcendental belonging that, albeit temporary, transports and potentially transforms spectators/participants. This perspective reinforces how the audience actively participates in a performance and how the state of *communitas* crafted therein may surreptitiously extend into an aftermath that can and does model broader social interactions (Dolan 2005: 11).

Of course, not all forms of utopianism are equally or fully rooted in the present, neither are queer performances always utopian or envision less oppressive, violent, and exclusionary futurities. As transformative as queer performances and the affects generated thereby may be, there is no guarantee that they will only or always deliver glimpses of utopia with potential to fuel collective critique and action. To repeat a point made with Muñoz in Chapter Two, there is no immediate or natural nexus between performances and progressive agendas and, therefore, no *a priori* celebration of its powers. Likewise, the utopian futurities sustained by queer performances do not always “yield an actualized next or new that is somehow better than 'now'” (Gregg & Seigworth 2010: 9-10). Such a caveat/lack of guarantee may have reminded the reader of Chapter Two’s notes on the misconception about the nature of rights and about the (im)possibility of fully instrumentalising them towards knowable, pre-determined outcomes or agendas. Rather, the political value of rights claim(ing) lies in approaching and theorising them as performative utterances and practices whose outcomes we cannot fully control or predict beforehand.

This is the main reason why the term ‘potential’ has been used throughout this thesis in relation to both rights and performances, whose first point of contact is the mutual lack of an inherent progressive essence. By steering away from an essentialist account of performance and rights I seek to offer not a political blueprint for action but to
foreground that we may—and ought to—collectively nurture and reflect on the conditions and effects of such radical potentials. In the section below I examine more closely the worldmaking powers of rights and queer performance to answer the final overarching question of this thesis: How may queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes expose and complement the ontopolitical limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? And what potential alternatives for radical social change do they offer?

6.3. The Jarrings and Affinities of WorldMaking/WorldChanging Powers: Queer Performances and Rights

Before dwelling on the final research questions, reiterated above, let us first clarify two key verbs therein. What does it mean to say that queer/Dzi performances help expose and/or complement the limitations of the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights? There are two general definitions for the former (to expose): to reveal the true (reprehensible) nature of someone or something; and to uncover someone or something and thereby render them visible. Exposing thus entails both an uncovering and a rendering visible. To begin with the first, the cover that queer performances remove from the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights is that of (false) necessity. This means that they remove the mantle of panacea from the rhetoric of rights, which becomes one, rather than the, version of how queer politics may approach the law and vice-versa. Secondly, to say that queer/Dzi performances make the limitations of this particular neoliberal version visible means that its tacit pitfalls and ruses become more easily accessed and subject to conscious, collective deliberation and transformation.

As will become clear throughout this section, of particular help in answering the questions at hand and shedding further light on how queer performances like the Dzi Croquettes may offer alternative paths for social change and expose/challenge the rights rhetoric will be the concept of the “Four Pillars of Social Justice Infrastructure,” introduced in Section 2.2 and reviewed in what comes. Another three concepts by José Medina (2013) explained below will also assist us in this endeavour: those of “epistemic friction,” “kaleidoscopic consciousness,” and “chained action”. To refresh the reader’s
memory and lay the ground for the remainder of this chapter, let me briefly recapitulate the ontopolitical limitations of law identified in Chapter Two before I argue in what ways queer/Dzi performances may offer antidotes thereto as well as why these challenges/complements are vital to queer imaginaries and politics.

6.3.1. Critique and (Re)formulation of Social/Political Meanings

Section 2.2 started by asking what counts as violence or discrimination for the law to highlight that the meanings of these fundamental political terms are partly produced in/by the law, rather than merely incorporated thereto. Put otherwise, the meanings of these terms were not first found in the social world, since the law functions as a key site/means in the production of these meanings and, indeed, of the broader social world. (Human) rights are a lingua franca not just because they are ‘spoken’ by actors the world over, but more interestingly because they offer a language in which we can conduct a collective conversation about and formulation of the shared social world. As Didi Herman observes, the impacts of legal reforms are not constricted to the legal realm—they send to society the message that discriminatory behaviour and speech are no longer acceptable and promote feelings of self-worth and citizenship. Even when the passing or extension of rights are denied, the organisation and mobilisation of social movements may still have positive results. Despite its institutional outcomes, the rhetoric of rights works as a banner under which political movements, actors, and organisations may foster identification, alliances, and awareness of needs/demands (Herman 1994: 4). Both this excess and the worldmaking effects of the legal realm are clearly illustrated in the crucial role of constitutional texts in social, political, or historical ruptures such as Brazil’s transition from dictatorship to alleged democracy. As the name itself suggests, the greatest piece of law ushers in and constitutes new forms of relations and networks in all spheres of the social at the same time that it shifts the present/future orientation of the nation, that is, it represents a political orientation towards which common goods society will or ought to pursue.
While there is no dispute that the law can and does constitute new worlds, relations, and subjects, this enabling power also serves to constrain and narrow down. Wendy Brown contends that (human) rights’ roots in moral vocabularies “hardly guarantee local political deliberation about how we should live together; indeed, they may function precisely to limit or cancel such deliberation with transcendental moral claims” (Brown 2004: 458). From this lens, the political value of rights shifts from the means/ends instrumentalist model to one where the democratic potential of rights claims lies in the collective debates and alliances that take place before, during, and after the moment where particular rights are institutionally granted or denied (Zivi 2012). In Chapter Two, however, we saw that public debates are not merely simply converted but narrowed down into legal parameters and rationale. Brown and Halley (2002: 19) bring one insight of particular relevance here: that this legalistic approach to politics “can displace open-ended discursive contestations” because it borrows from (neo)liberal parameters when what might be necessary is a public debate and reflection about those paradigms in the first place.

Here we may establish a second point of contact between rights and queer/Dzi performances. Besides the lack of guaranteed political outcomes or progressive essence, and to state expressly a point that has permeated the chapters on the Dzi Croquettes group/movement, queer performances too function as a site/means for the collective, ongoing reflection on and formulation of crucial political lexicon and subjects. In the case of the Dzi performances, one could summarise their critical intervention as an (invitation for) engagement in the debate, and potentially reformulation of, questions such as: what is a (proper) man/woman? What is equality? Is equality the same as sameness? And what is freedom? These questions were raised in Sections 5.3 and 5.4 and reflected on by some participants, such as George in Section 5.4.1. Talking about the impact of the Dzi Croquettes on his youth and life, George said that the Dzi performances made him see “absolute freedom”, as opposed to the ‘freedom’ (making scare quotes with his fingers) he thought he had/knew before. George’s words resonate with a claim in Elin Diamond’s early and influential work, that (queer) performance “is precisely the site in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be
investigated…. [and in which] we have access to cultural meanings and critique” (Diamond 1996: 5). One aim of Chapter Five’s analysis of the fluxes of communication and identification between/among spectators and performers was to examine the Dzi performances as a “public arena for the collective exploration of ideological meaning” and of social symbols and conventions (Kershaw 1992: 16-17). Theatre and performance, Jill Dolan contends, shift our gazes in “constitutive ways” and provide a “public space for renewing our critical attention to the machinations of dominant ideology… a place to practice the hope in… the wishful aspect of utopia” (Dolan 2005: 141). Through what she calls the “radically humanist gesture of the utopian performative,” performances can gesture towards avenues for social change by enacting utopian ‘what ifs’ and nurturing hope (ibid.)

These utopian ‘what ifs’ are not just merely chimera confined to the spatial-temporal limits of the performance but, as argued above, have the potential to bring sociopolitical meanings into relief and under critique. To understand this potential, the concept of “kaleidoscopic consciousness” as used by José Medina (2013) is particularly useful. The concept is derived from another concept—“double consciousness”—which Medina traces from its first appearance in W.E.B. Du Bois’ “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in 1897 to more recent articulations by scholars like Frantz Fanon, Maria Lugones, Patricia Hill Collins, and Linda Alcoff (Medina 2013: 192-225). The term connotes a duality, a bifurcation of consciousness—potentially a lucidity—typical to oppressed subjects who have to negotiate different ways of being seen/seeing and who have internalised dominant perceptions but who may nevertheless take critical distance and challenge/subvert hegemonic ways of seeing. We may recall here the process of confirmation/justification in/through the Dzi performances that participants described in Section 5.3. Alberto, for instance, said that watching the Dzi performances “justified positively your sexual orientation. [As if] I am not an aberration… I am modern. I am a person who has their space”. He linked this justification with a sense of futurity/modernity accessed and enacted by the Dzi performances. We can understand this sense of confirmation/justification as an effect of the Dzi performances’ “epistemic
friction”, which helped to develop participants’ self- and social-consciousness beyond/against the normative ‘aberration’ discourse.

However, Medina contends that this critical and transformative potential of bifurcated consciousness does not depend only on a duality of perspectives. Firstly, there must be friction among them, and secondly, not just a double but a “kaleidoscopic consciousness”. As a remedy to social numbness and epistemic injustice—and we may add against the reification of binarism—Medina advocates for a plurality of epistemic viewpoints exerting friction against each other and nurturing kaleidoscopic consciousness in political subjects as well as social movements. This invites us to consider that part of our struggle towards social justice entails the expansion of social epistemes and sensibilities, two tasks that begin with friction “that can be both disruptive and reenergizing” (2013: 224). From this perspective, the shifting of sociopolitical paradigms occurs less in the pursuit of social consensus and more in the development of the kaleidoscopic friction/consciousness and in being attentive to operations of exclusion and displacement. Such an expanded social consciousness “promotes sensitivity and openness to diversity without reducing our normative engagements with differences to agonistic confrontations” (Medina 2013: 277).

One overall argument in this section, therefore, is that queer performances work precisely to foster such open-ended contestations by offering epistemic (counter)points to the legal-liberal rationality, representing one among other extralegal arenas that adjoin and counterpoint the law. This argument advances the notion of queer performances and the law as co-related ‘fronts’ in the battlefield of social justice, a correlation that is contingent and shifting but nevertheless a source of epistemic friction that may potentially lead subjects to develop critical consciousness and even self-/social lucidity. This lucidity, as the next sections will address, is “crucial for the identification of sites of resistance and for the echoing of insurrectionary acts” (Medina 2013: 247). As introduced in Chapter Two, Dean Spade (2015) uses the concept of the Four Pillars of Social Justice developed by the Miami Workers to analyse the role of diverse political strategies within broad-based democratic movements in advancing or hindering radical
justice. Of particular interest to the debate at hand is the Pillar of Consciousness, which comprises strategies that seek to change sociopolitical paradigms and public consciousness. I have thus argued that both the law and Dzi/queer performances have the potential and do often influence public consciousness, yet the question does not stop there. How they do so, in what directions, and with what meanings are also questions of the utmost importance. We may here read the Dzi/queer performances as working alongside/against the paradigms and meanings circulated in/by the neoliberal LGBT rights rhetoric, a juxtaposition that generates epistemic friction and nurtures kaleidoscopic consciousness, thereby reinvigorating the Pillar of Consciousness. Moreover, as we shall now see, tending to the friction between Dzi/queer performances and the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights may also support another pillar of social justice: the Pillar of Power.

6.3.2. (Em)power(ment) and Resistance

Another crucial pitfall of the rights rhetoric under critique is, as argued in Section 2.2, its misconstruction//reduction of the workings of power/resistance. This reductionism arises from the rather narrow understanding of power as top-down prohibition or as individual, intentional subtraction—what Alan D. Freeman (1978) named the “perpetrator perspective” in his analysis of the legitimisation of racial discrimination through antidiscrimination law. The main issue with this approach is that it fails to reckon with forms and sites of power that do not follow the negative model—that is, it overlooks ‘positive’ powers that discipline, manage, and affect subjects/populations in multiscalar and less tangible ways.

One consequence of this failure is that, in seeking social remedy and change through this mainstream legal approach, harms and needs are uprooted from their historical and structural origins and become individual, even moral issues as opposed to shared, political ones. This liberal abstraction passes over the broader conditions of disparity and injustice produced by these overlooked modes of power, disguised as matters of individual misfortune or ‘meritocracy’. Two crucial points follow from expanding our gaze
towards power beyond the juridical, individual model. Firstly, that social conditions emerge as the sedimentation of histories and practices as opposed to historical chance or individual fate. Secondly, attending to population-management, disciplinary, and affective modes of power opens up broader avenues of resistance, as multiple as the sites of power. Broadening the sites of resistance may be something that we *should*, rather than just can, do. As Medina (2013: 16) argues, “we need to look for possibilities of resistance in every discursive practice and every social location…in order to identify the wide spectrum of practices of resistance in which epistemic friction can be found.”

One subtext hereof that is possibly already clear is that I am treating/proposing the Dzi (and queer) performances more broadly as one forum where contagious possibilities for resistance are grasped and expanded by other ‘infected’ queers. Let us recall my anonymous participant who remarkably stated that the Dzi performances “gave you more power to stand your ground, to position yourself before the new world.” Conversely, Dario could not stand up from his seat once the Dzi show ended given his perplexity, not an augmentation but a temporary short-circuit of his affective capacities. A similar perplexity was experienced by the tiete/Dzi Tovar, whose fascination was so intense that he recalled losing all paradigms as if under the effects of drugs. Regardless of whether experienced as augmentation or diminution, of particular interest here is the theorisation of the ‘Dziorientation’ as catalysts of perplexity and agency. As elaborated in Section 6.2 above and illustrated by these three participants, the range of affects mobilised by (the Dzi and queer) performances entail a passage from one bodily state to another, a transition that augments or diminishes the capacity of that body to act. Indeed, perplexity is arguably one crucial factor in the augmentation of one’s capacity to act *and* be self-reflexive. We can become perplexed about ourselves and about our contexts through a process of self- and social-estrangement. These processes offer, but do not guarantee, us refreshing and disrupting opportunities to see things anew as we call them into question (Medina 2013: 18-20).

This process of estrangement, however, is not constricted to interrogations of the self but of others and one’s broader context too, given the inter-relations between
knowledge about oneself and knowledge about the social world. The Dzi Croquettes’ contagious performances and philosophy of life foregrounded the intersubjectivity and relationality in this process of estrangement by positing others as fundamental to the knowledge and constitution of oneself (through their principle of learning to be people, as argued in Section 4.4) as well as to the knowledge and constitution of one’s social world (through the process of collective identification and politicisation). If the separation and opposition between self and others were challenged, these did not collapse into sameness. Rather, difference was valued as a fuel for mutual learning and actualisation, and indeed the main grounds on which the Dzi enacted and envisioned equality. The process of estrangement was beautifully evoked by Regina M and the Dzi Benê in our conversation. Among the “horizons” that the Dzi movement opened up in her life, she explained that it was mainly a radical transformation and “learning about limits that you did not know about yourself. Of resistance, faith, willpower, of becoming unknown to yourself. I think it is about turning you inside out”. This relationality and estrangement were again evident, for instance, in the existential crisis that the Dzi Benê faced upon joining the group:

My grandfather was an artist and I had always wanted to pursue dance and theatre, but my family forbid it. So, the Dzi Croquettes was an incredible opportunity for self-liberation. The beginning was wonderful, but also very difficult. I had to go against everything I had learnt growing up, actually, everything that had been imposed on me. All of a sudden, I was dressing up as a woman! (Brito & Barcelos 2013: 11)

There are two points I want to highlight here by foregrounding the Dziorientations and the self- and social interrogations as/in the aftermath of the Dzi performances. Firstly, the Dzi/queer performances’ potential of producing and disseminating counterdisciplinary, embodied knowledge, which works as a complement/challenge to the mainstream rights model’s misconceptualisation and hence mistargeting of nonjuridical modes/operations of power. As manifested in the accounts of several participants, the Dzi performances often ignited a process of calling into question norms
almost invisible by their gradual inculcation and subtle discipline, norms that dictated what was and was not proper or acceptable. Secondly, this counterdisciplinary ‘rebellion’ that formed a pillar of the Dzi performances/movements catalysed agentic practices in spectators. I derive this argument from Sumi Madhok’s (2013) elastic theorisation of agency in order to account for practices of agency and resistance in oppressive contexts such as the Brazilian dictatorship. As Madhok argues, the liberal model of the unencumbered and detached (rights-bearing) subject whose agency is located in the free will or choice is inadequate to contexts of oppression, and so we ought to open our eyes to other modes and sites of agency and recognise its practice in subject’s speech acts of self-/social reflection.

Two potentials of the Dzi/queer performances are manifest in the enhanced power participants felt after watching the Dzi (and other queer) performances, the strength to stand their own ground and to call the self and the social into question. One, as explicitly contended above, their potential to function as an extralegal site of political resistance and agency—even before the rhetoric of LGBT rights was imaginable or (un)desirable, such as in 1970s Brazil. Secondly, the potential of queer performances to catalyse/constitute broader networks of “chained action” (Medina 2013: 225-234). The quoted concept is useful here because it sheds new light on the collective contagion of the Dzi philosophy of life and way of being. Looking at “heroes” of resistance and social/legal change such as Rosa Parks and Juana Inés de la Cruz, Medina (2013) shows that material, significant changes require more than isolated acts of heroes. While these are important, deep social transformation crucially depends on echoable acts supported and ignited by interconnected individuals and groups that inspire and ‘imitate’ each other.

From this angle, we can argue that the Dzi Croquettes were a central node in this chain of echo/imitation because they functioned as “agglutinators,” to borrow from the Dzi Bayard a term he used twice on different occasions. Section 5.3 described some agglutinations prompted by Dzi Croquettes’ performances. Lidoka and Lu Grimaldi became lifelong friends (and Dzi Croquettas) after meeting in the Dzi audience and
bonding over a mutual feeling analogous to Turner’s (1974) communitas. After their performances, as Dario put it, people fell in love and identified with each other, which he associated with the consolidation of the ‘gay movement in São Paulo’. What I seek to bring under relief at this point is the Dzi performances’ “ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging” (Muñoz 2009: 99). Muñoz indeed uses the term counterpublics to analyse the aftermath of queer performances, which he draws from Nancy Fraser to investigate “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1990: 67).

If power and resistance are both discursive and embodied, we may consider queer/Dzi performances as not just a site where political paradigms may be reformulated and kaleidoscopic consciousness generated through multiple epistemic friction (as argued in Section 6.1.) Furthermore, the Dzi counterpublics in/as the aftermath of their performances, and more specifically the multidirectional identifications and Dziorientations examined by Sections 5.3 and 5.4, fed into a collective process of calling social truths and conditions into question, exposing them as contested/contestable. We see a link here between identification and politicisation of shared needs, whereby people come to see (purported) conditions of individual failure or misfortune as part of a broader history and structure. This politicisation of needs is all the more necessary and powerful in light of the neoliberal disavowal of social relationality and myth of individual responsibility. We may even read this very process of politicisation as itself counterdisciplinary, as it frictions with the neoliberal individualisation of responsibility (Richardson 2018) and brings into relief that we are not autonomous, sovereign individuals but rather sustained and/or debased by (the lack) of sociopolitical infrastructures.

So far, we have dwelt on the production and dissemination of embodied, counterdisciplinary knowledges and modes of resistance by/through the Dzi
performances. The insights above evince how the Dzi/queer performances may help nurture bottom-up resistance and empowerment—even political base, as contended by Dario in his observations on the process of identification/politicisation of needs and identities. What is mobilised and strengthened in this process is the Pillar of Power, which Spade (2015) argues is both the most important and neglected pillar in current politics. Their complement/challenge to the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric is precisely the Dzi/queer performances’ potential to intervene with the affective, disciplinary, and even population-management workings of power. If a central premise thus far is that we need to be critical of and reformulate how the neoliberal-legal rhetoric construes power and fundamental political vocabularies, this task would be impossible or surely incomplete without rethinking the paradigmatic sexual and gendered subject at the core of the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric.

### 6.3.3 Competing Ontologies

Based on the assumption that the law does not merely reflect pre-existing realities or sexual/gendered subjects but contributes to their formation, Sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4. asked, respectively, how/whether liberal law accounts for cultural and historical specificity as well as how the mainstream LGBT rights discourse apprehends and conceives its quintessential sexual and gendered rights-bearing subject. The overarching purpose of those sections was to unpack and critique the “particular identitarian script” (Golder 2015: 100) of LGBT human rights which rights-bearing subjects are required and disciplined to perform and internalise. We saw that standing in for a/the purported universal subject of LGBT rights was a particular figure—the sovereign, self-sufficient individual of liberalism who resorts to the law mainly for (patrimonial) protection against (or remedy for) intrusion from the state and/or others. As examined on that occasion, the inscription of sexual and gendered subjects into liberal (LGBT) rights relies on three manoeuvres: essentialisation, propertisation, and atomisation. Let us review each briefly.

Because the international ascension and legitimacy of LGBT human rights relied partly on scientific knowledges from other disciplines, such as medicine and psychology, the
LGBT entitlement to human rights has been supported for the most part on the basis that sexuality and gender are traits both intrinsic to human nature as well as fundamental to one’s personhood. As was argued, this (legal) essentialism has two pernicious effects: on one hand, it seems not to ameliorate or expose the material conditions giving rise to political needs and differences as much as obscure them. On the other, treating sexuality and gender as universal and shared traits across time and space risks neglecting their constitution as effects of power rather than prior to or outside it, that is, that gender and sexuality are culturally, historically, and socially contingent and that their meanings and expressions intersect with, and are co-constituted by, other social markers and identities. The ‘propertisation’ of sexuality and gender reduces them to a manageable object over which the sovereign subject has unrestrained ownership and control, whereas the atomisation of rights-bearing subjects relies on a myth of separate borders that disavows social relationality and reduces democratic freedom to a sheltering from external intrusion (Brown 2004). If self-sufficient and self-bounded, the liberal subject clearly is not isolated; yet the existence of others is fundamentally a source of danger and threat to one’s property. In this framework, sexuality and gender are conceived as inherent, pre-political, and pre-cultural phenomena whose public expression is to be ensured by the law and tolerated by others. In other words, the role of the law here remains the protection of individual property.

What I seek to render contingent and open up to the possibility of otherwise by juxtaposing the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric with queer performances is not just the rhetoric of rights, but also the notion of gendered and sexual (rights-bearing) subjects. As the name of this subsection indicates, my contention here is that Dzi/queer performances ventilate alternative ontologies that expose the limitations of this individual rights/property model. What might queer politics gain by challenging the liberal rights’ paradigms of essence, property, and self-boundedness? And how may queer/Dzi performances guide us in that challenge? I pose these questions with an avowed utopian, antiliberal purpose: to search for ways to approach our loves and desires not so much as property or essence as much as “as a matter of how we inhabit
spaces as well as “who” or “what” we inhabit spaces with” (Ahmed 2004: 1). This depropertisation might point us towards paths to conceive/perform, as the late and brilliant bell hooks famously said in a panel, ‘queer not as being [mainly] about who you are having sex with…but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live” (hooks 2014: 1:27:41).

Approaching gender and sexuality from this spatial lens, with whom and how we inhabit—and build—spaces allows us to challenge the liberal subject, whose sexual and gender identities seem to be already fully formed as a private matter prior to its emergence/expression in the public sphere. When viewed as private matters, the processes (and hindrances) through which we come to form our sexual and gender identities (a process that is always relational) are disavowed as political/public issues (Aultman & Currah 2017: 39). As early as the 1970s, the Dzi Croquettes’ performances and philosophy of life ventilated competing ontologies against this privatisation/essentialisation of sexuality and gender. Consider here their very blurring of the private/public divide, as argued in Section 4.5 on the ‘Dzidentifications’, and their ‘Dziorientations’ examined in Section 5.4. Rather than fully formed or fully formable, the Dzi Croquettes propagated a notion of subjectivity that was fundamentally dependent on others, that comprised both ‘learning’ and ‘unlearning’ about the self and the social. In this regard, we saw in Chapter Five participants’ reference to the aftermath of the Dzi performances as a turning (oneself) inside out, unlearning social inculcations, and perceiving new horizons that transformed both selves and their worlds. Rather than pre-political or eternal, the Dzi movement enacted a version of subjectivity as open-ended and co-constituted by/co-constitutive of others, as opposed to an individual feat that could ever be fully achieved/achievable by a self-choosing master.

The very gerund in one principle of their philosophy of life (see Section 4.4), becoming-people or learning (how) to become people, highlights the tropes of ongoing experiment and development whilst eschewing blanket identitarian scripts. The practice and realisation of this principle relied on three elements, that is, “a combination of
egalitarianism, mutual learning and expressive self-actualization, affectively spanning both group and audience, which became a welcome antidote to the oppressive moralism of the military regime.” (Hutta 2016: 146). These three elements complicate and challenge the liberal metaphysics that posits the other as ‘external’ and ‘threatening’ to one’s self (and property). The defensiveness of that metaphysics is contrasted with an openness, even a cruising towards others that the Dzi Croquettes movement enacted and disseminated. Rosemary Lobert noted that “at a time when the official discourse was of intolerance... [the Croquettes’s] loose posture, both tolerant and receptive, allowed for, on the contrary, the incorporation of individuals with any personal and social characteristics” (Lobert 2010: 188). The point I seek to make here is that the Dzi/queer performances provided a social and epistemic counterpoint that ventilated an openness to others beyond/against the defensive and atomised ethos of neoliberal (LGBT) politics. The significance of this competing ontology, Judith Butler (2015: 66) reminds us, lies in the fact that

For the struggle for rights of gender and sexual minorities to be a social justice struggle, that is, for it to be characterized as a radical democratic project, it is necessary to realize we are but one population who has been and can be exposed to conditions of precarity and disenfranchisement. Further, the rights for which we struggle are plural rights, and that plurality is not circumscribed in advance by identity, that is, it is not a struggle to which only some identities can belong, and it is surely a struggle that seeks to expand what we mean when we say ‘we’.

Of particular concern to Butler here is the phenomenon of public demonstrations where bodies assemble and gather to protest certain conditions. These social gatherings, Butler argues, represent the plural and performative exercise of the right to appear, “one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions” (Butler 2015: 11). Worth bringing to mind are the gatherings that started to occur and expand after the Dzi performances on the
weekends, analysed above for buttressing the Pillars of Power and Consciousness. Here may derive a further understanding of this phenomenon. Butler (2015) suggests that, even when a public gathering takes place under a certain nominal right, that assemblage’s claim for justice exceeds whatever may be expressed through written or oral speech. In other words, Butler argues that these bodies *speak* prior to, regardless of, and in excess of, speech acts (an example provided is that of silent vigils). We may here think of the Dzi/queer performance as one form of public space where queer bodies gathered in and around the stage may and do speak—even in the absence of vocalisation—through choreography, affective contagions, and Dziorientations.

A general purpose of this chapter, therefore, may now be read as an effort to trace and examine the ways that the Dzi performances/movement countered and ‘spoke’ against the liberal ontology and rationality underpinning the mainstream LGBT rights rhetoric and politics. This ‘speaking against’ forces us to consider our sexuality and gender, beyond the notion of property or individual truth, “as the locus of our own social dependency, as a site that exposes us to our radically relational condition, an experience by which we are reminded of our fate as dispossessed beings” (Sabsay 2016b: 25-26). It is this excess of speaking bodies prior to/Regardless of speech acts that advances queer performances as a central political strategy/site and evinces what decentring the neoliberal rhetoric of LGBT rights may open up for radical queer politics.
Whenever I got asked over these years of doctoral research what precisely my research entailed, people’s most frequent reactions to my various answers evoked a particular quote from Wendy Brown—who quoted Gayatri Spivak’s thoughts on liberalism’s “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011) —that “rights appear as that which we cannot not want (Brown 2002: 421; emphasis in original). How could I critique rights, LGBT rights, coming from a country like Brazil? When even the most basic rights already seemed too much to ask, could I/we hope for more? Or would a (utopian) critique inadvertently side with right-wing attacks on our incipient and fragile LGBT rights framework? My thoughts on decentring the rhetoric of rights from our queer political imaginaries and arsenals once led to an accusation that I was undermining people’s lived experiences, as though legal decentring was a mere theoretical utopia that, however convincing or interesting, was impossible or undesirable in praxis. I even got told once that it was easy for gay men to ‘not want’ rights when they/we have already achieved some forms of legal equality, as opposed to trans and gender-nonconforming people still facing severe forms of legal disenfranchisement and social/state persecution. I bring these anecdotes, on one hand, to foreground the risky nature of critiquing, or attempting to resist, two ‘inescapable’ forces: neoliberalism and the language of rights. On the other, although I share their concern about how knowledge may be re-/misappropriated and perhaps backfire, I questioned the presumed distinction between theory and activism underlying these reactions. Many of the writers I have drawn from in this thesis were also radical activists or were at least attentive to the praxis of activism and social struggle. Moreover, as I hope became clear in my preceding chapters, some of the most reinvigorating and provocative elaborations on legal decentring have come precisely from feminist and trans scholars/activists.

A central subtext of this thesis is that political struggle and social change involve a series of dis-/reorientations of where we are headed, towards which goods and goals we are oriented as a society. Paths, disidentification, (dis)orientation: all these notions informed my oral history interviews/analysis and the investigation of how the realms of
queer performances and the of law, among other political strategies and modes, may (not) redirect individual/collective orientation, identities, and trajectories. By juxtaposing queer performances and the mainstream notion of LGBT rights, I was able to contend that the law’s worldmaking powers to constitute new forms of subjectivities and social/political relations are eviscerated and washed down by its neoliberal framing. More precisely, in dialogue with scholars I identified four pitfalls of neoliberal legalism: its operations of displacement, narrowing down/reduction, concealment, and disavowal. In light of these ontopolitical limitations, I argued that decentring rights and foregrounding displaced political strategies such as queer performances may help us to expand and reconceptualise fundamental political vernaculars, modes of resistance, ontologies, and identities. I was particularly attentive to how the Dzi/queer performances circulate anti-liberal notions of power/resistance, sexual and gendered selves/others, freedom, and equality. In this vein, I argued that the Dzi, and queer performances more broadly, function as sites of production as well as dissemination of embodied, counterdisciplinary, and affective knowledge/resistance that helps to expose and complement the shortcomings of the conceptualisation of power as top-down, individual subtraction. Moreover, I showed how the Dzi/queer performances ventilate meanings and ontologies that friction against the possessive, self-enclosed, and self-choosing subject. Rather than a programmatic plan of action, I sought to highlight the contextualist nature of both rights and performances, which encourages and requires collective deliberation and nurturing.

Although writing/researching about the law within a Law School, I have resorted to a variety of sources and disciplines in order to answer the overarching research questions. This interdisciplinary dialogue was part of my scavenger methodology described in the third chapter and may be considered the first unique contribution of this thesis, that is, the juxtaposition between rights and performances. I have sought to deepen the body of scholarly critique on (neo)liberal rights, on one side, by focusing on its implications for LGBT/queer politics and, on the other, by generating primary data based on archival and oral history fieldwork. More than simply documenting past memories or bygones, a key purpose—and contribution—of my fieldwork was the production of knowledge.
about/with those whom I talk about in this thesis. As discussed earlier, this is especially important and necessary for archives of queerness and ‘deviant’ bodies/histories. Another original contribution of this thesis is the application and development of theoretical concepts such as disorientation, disidentification, and the decentring of rights. These concepts were essential to my analysis of the Dzi/queer performances and their subjective/phenomenological/affective reverberations on spectators (‘Dziorientation’ in section 5.4) as well as their impact on the broader symbolic, sociopolitical landscape (‘Dzidentification’ in section 4.5). As for the decentring of the rights rhetoric, although not an entirely new claim in the literature, besides suggesting or justifying why we should decentre them I also sought to elaborate on what may follow from it. In this vein, I contended and demonstrated how a kaleidoscopic imaginary and arsenal would benefit queer politics through a multiplication of sites of resistance (as multiple as the modes and workings of power) and “friction” against/alongside the precluding, concealing, and restraining operations at stake in the signification and ontology of neoliberal legalism.

However, as acknowledged in the first paragraph above, the proposal of decentring rights may be challenged by claims that it is either too utopic or too theoretical. One possible retort is that the line between theory and praxis is not as obvious as it may seem prima facie, since proponents of legal decentring are (in close dialogue with) activists. A crucial point to note about the concept of legal decentring is that the inevitability of rights is distinct from its inevitability in each and every instance of political claim. Put otherwise, even if we think of rights as inevitable, there are still other strategies that we need to nurture and consider besides/against the law. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the potential limits of the concept of legal decentring, that is, the places where it may be least useful. We must constantly ask what legal decentring might mean in different contexts and struggles—particularly for those individuals and communities who find themselves, occasionally or consistently, abandoned by the law and/or by the state, such as immigrants, asylum seekers, trans people, and people of colour. The tactical calculation of when/whether to decentre rights should pay particular attention to differing power dynamics as well as social, economic,
and historical conditions that constitute political actors with diverging levels of (dis)enfranchisement and with uneven stakes and possibilities of pushing back against legal structures. What alternative, extralegal networks of protection and solidarity might be in place, or might need to be in place, to support those whom the law fails and/or those who turn away from it? Akin to the argument pursued in relation to transgression and freedom in the fifth and sixth chapters, pushing back against the rights rhetoric too is arguably informed, as in more or less facilitated, by the resources and backgrounds ‘behind’ a given community or struggle.

As with the rights rhetoric, performances too constitute both a site/means of resistance against, as well as a conduit and vehicle of, power. Although acknowledged in this thesis, it was beyond its scope to thoroughly examine how (queer) performances may be, and have been, co-opted by neoliberal capitalism, and which forms this appropriation may take. Although my analysis here was based mostly on the Dzi Croquettes, in the later chapters I used the slash in ‘Dzi/queer performances’ to signal that the performative worldmaking powers examined here are neither constricted to the Dzi Croquettes nor fully exhaustive. However, it was also beyond my purview to offer an in-depth examination of other queer performances other than brief parallels with those included in the oeuvre of José Esteban Muñoz. That said, some paths for future research include further elaborating on the concept of legal decentring from our political arsenal in order to map other areas and sites within and without law that more directly, and perhaps more covertly, affect disenfranchised and marginalised populations.

To conclude on the thread about queer performances/culture, the law, and Brazil that permeated this thesis, we may here consider a recent controversy about a bill passed by the Parliament but vetoed by the Bolsonaro government in April 2022. The bill was named “Projeto de Lei Paulo Gustavo” after one of Brazil’s greatest comedians and an open homosexual, who died of COVID-19 complications at a time when it came to the public knowledge that the Brazilian government had rejected several deals for a vaccine. The bill aimed at alleviating the pandemic’s effects on the cultural industry and included a provision encouraging the participation of and funding for minoritarian groups such as
people of colour, women, and LGBT and queer people. We may read the government’s veto of the bill and its effort to thwart the bill’s inclusion into the law along the lines of the Dzi threat/censorship, that is, as a form of pre-censorship of minoritarian cultural projects by denying them funding and legal incentive. The veto follows a series of more or less blatant forms of censorship of such projects and groups, which became a particular target of the Bolsonaro government (Wasser & França 2020). I hope that this thesis has illuminated some of the reasons why this realm has become a particular target and source of fear for conservative, right-wings politics, as well why it remains a crucial site and battlefield of queer politics, in Brazil and beyond.

Finally, in rethinking queer politics beyond/alongside the law, we may consider how the law may help reinforce, fund, and foreground extralegal projects and realms displaced by the legal colonisation. How may the law nurture and collaborate with historically displaced and contested/contentious sites of queer politics such as the performing arts or the school system? Hinging on the worldmaking and pedagogic powers of queer performances and law that I sought to examine in the previous chapters, future research and politics may also consider that from Thatcher’s Section 28 in the late 1980s to Bolsonaro’s election in Brazil, besides the realm of performances, another source of great fear and paranoia for the international crusade against ‘gender ideology’ is the school environment. Against this backdrop, Scotland’s first-in-the-world inclusion of LGBT education programmes into the school curriculum appears quite relevant and urgent. However, its impacts will only become clear once the programme is designed and delivered. It may very well be a way of teaching school pupils the neoliberal, ahistorical versions of diversity and tolerance or of what it means to be a sexual/gendered subject, but there is also a chance, a hope, a utopia, that it may illuminate how historically both the law and the school have played a key role in disciplining queer bodies and desires, and how—within and without the law—we can seek and build paths/desire lines towards queer ways of being and doing otherwise.
ANNEX I
Dzi Croquettes and Oral History Participants

The short biographies in the two tables below are based on the 2009 documentary, Lobert’s book, and the oral history interviews. That means that the tables below present a short biography of each participant based on generally available information as well as on the way that participants used to describe themselves in our interviews. The four Dzi Croquettes currently alive who I interviewed are marked with the symbol * to indicate that they also belong in the second table on the oral history participants. Yet, to avoid redundancy, these four Dzi are not included in the participants list (hence only nine participants, despite the total number of participants being thirteen).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Dzi Croquettes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wagner Ribeiro:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mother.</strong> A thirty-eight-year-old and extremely skilful craftsman who owned a small leather boutique prior to, during, and after the Croquettes. Originally from a small town in the countryside of the State of São Paulo. Considered the Dzi guru and mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennie Dale:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father.</strong> Originally from Brooklyn, NYC, and with an exceptional talent for dance and music, albeit erratic behaviour, he left Broadway and relocated to Rio de Janeiro in the early 1960s. In no time, he became a significant influence on (and influenced by) local dancers, singers, and musicians.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eloy Simões:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Dzi magician.</strong> At the age of 22, he came from Bauru, in the outskirts of São Paulo, and was the last member to join the Croquettes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reginaldo de Poly (a.k.a. Rainha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto Rodrigues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo Bacellar (a.k.a. Paulete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudio Gaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogério de Poly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Machado (a.k.a. Lotinha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciro Barcelos*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>one of Croquettes most vocal about the group’s legacy. Before coming of age, Ciro ran away from his parents’ home in Porto Alegre and eventually managed to join the casting of the musical <em>Hair</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedicto Lacerda* (a.k.a. Benê)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Claudio) Tovar*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayard Tonelli*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral History Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alberto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair performer and actor from, as he described it, a white, middle-class, and Catholic family from Campinas, a medium-sized town in the outskirts of São Paulo. Involvement with the hippie movement and the arts appear as watershed and empowering moments in his youth against the repression and homophobia that surrounded him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anonymous</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlike most of the other participants, no friendship or closer relationship developed with the group/family. Self-employed, never pursued performing or acting professionally, even if at the time it was a great desire to join the Dzi Croquettes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Célia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzi Croquetta and self-taught fashion producer and costume designer from Campinas. Célia and Regina Muller were to become an inseparable duo, bonding over the shared passion for the Dzi and eventually auditioning together for the Dzi Croquettas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dario</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist and editor-in-chief of an important paper in the early 1970s. He went to become close friends with the Dzi Croquettes. When the group left for Europe, such was his melancholy that Dario decided to cross the Atlantic to follow the group and report on their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu Grimaldi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regina C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vilma</td>
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ANNEX II

Online Archives

The National Library
Digital archives of newspapers, magazines, and periodicals such as: Correio da Manhã, Diário da Noite, Diário de Notícias, Diário de Pernambuco, Jornal do Brasil, Manchete (RJ), O Cruzeiro, O Jornal, Tribuna da Imprensa
Folha de São Paulo
O Estado de São Paulo

Physical Archives

The National Library (Rio de Janeiro)
Arquivo Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)
FUNARTE (Rio de Janeiro)
Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo (APESP)
Acerbo Bajubá (São Paulo)
TV Cultura (São Paulo)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


