

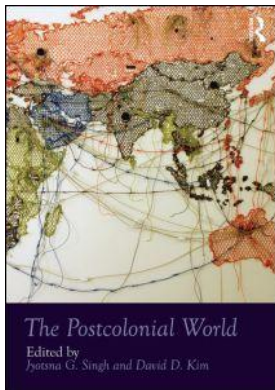
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## **The Postcolonial World**

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### **On Postcolonial Happiness**

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PART I  
AFFECTIVE, POSTCOLONIAL  
HISTORIES



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## CHAPTER ONE

# ON POSTCOLONIAL HAPPINESS



*Ananya Jahanara Kabir*

On the 2nd of March 2014 I was part of an extraordinary spectacle, popularly described as “the greatest show on earth”: the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, specifically, the competition in which schools of samba parade in front of a nearly 100,000 strong audience in a structure called the *sambódromo*. It was Sunday, the first of the two main days of the parades, reserved for Rio’s best samba schools (their ranking is determined through a combination of seniority and selection rounds). A Brazilian friend gifted me her entry ticket so that I, and an accompanying Spanish friend, could attend along with two friends of hers (tickets are limited and we had only four tickets amongst the five of us). This act of double altruism (a free ticket and the sacrifice of a place) was fuelled by my friend’s conviction that an opportunity to enter the *sambódromo* was so special that it had to be granted to the visiting foreigner. An element of national pride was definitely involved: to cede one’s place thus was to enable the visitor to understand Brazil in all its spontaneity, its generosity, and its capacity to generate happiness or *felicidade*. Closely linked to *felicidade* is joy or *alegria* – a feeling experienced in and through the body. During Carnival, *alegria* connects all those who give themselves up to a week of spontaneous and organized partying. The palpable force of *alegria* peaks during the parades in the *sambódromo*. As expressed in one of the samba songs I heard chanted that night, “sou brasileiro, vou festejar / Meu palco é a rua e a luz, o luar” (I am Brazilian, I will party / My stage is the street and the light, the moonlight). To party in this fashion, drawing on a mythical conjunction of urban planning (*rua*, “street”) and natural bounty (*luar*, “moonlight”), is the essence of being Brazilian.<sup>1</sup>

I was in Brazil for a three-week period of fieldwork, which included the seven principal days of the Rio carnival. Through this experience crystallized certain observations about postcolonial happiness – its premises, its possibilities, even its impossibilities – which earlier visits to Brazil had already triggered.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I present those observations, formulated in silent dialogue with my very different experience of postcoloniality in South Asia.<sup>3</sup> I thereby lever the essay towards a broader consideration of the place of happiness within postcolonial discourse. Theories and analyses of postcolonial subjectivity focus overwhelmingly on the “unhappiness effect”: trauma and its aftereffects, oppression, displacement and deracination, and pervasive melancholia as the result

of long histories of being either colonized or colonizing cultures.<sup>4</sup> Is this scholarship's only major insight about postcolonial cultural production? What are the choices – conscious and unconscious – that make us (re)produce studies of unhappy states of being through the postcolonial cultural archive, and what do those reveal about us as scholars? This essay thinks through postcoloniality by shifting the hermeneutic paradigm from trauma to *alegria*, and, in a concurrent move, from textuality to the body. In probing the mechanisms that generate a citizenry's sense of collectivity through the production of happiness, it asks, via the case of Brazil: what does it mean to insist that a person can be happy, that a nation can be happy? This examination cannot do away with melancholia altogether. In the words of one of Brazil's most-loved songs, which also invokes the carnival as paradigm, "tristeza não tem fim / felicidade, sim" (sadness has no ending, happiness does).<sup>5</sup> We need to probe the relationship between happiness and melancholia, including their mutually interruptive temporalities, in the postcolonial frame. How does the promise of happiness battle with the ghosts of melancholia to form the postcolonial subject?<sup>6</sup>

### THE ENCHANTMENT OF MELANCHOLIA

At the time of writing, a bibliographical search for "postcolonial happiness" throws up not a single hit. There seems to be no scholarly examination yet of the idea and possibility of postcolonial happiness that starts, not from a position of suspicion or skepticism, but from unambiguous acceptance that there can be "happiness" under the sign of postcoloniality. This observation is made not to insist on this essay's pioneering status, but to begin asking why this lacuna should exist. The study of postcolonial subject-formation was initially dominated by the dismantling of colonial discourses that were textual rather than embodied in their expression; these analyses, influenced by Foucauldian understandings of knowledge as power, focused on processes of colonial subject-formation through the subject's interpellation in these discourses, rather than on affective states of being.<sup>7</sup> When, with the work of Homi Bhabha, psychoanalytical models entered the frame, the intention was to open up spaces of becoming rather than being. Bhabha foregrounded interstitial sites and liminal conditions whereby the colonial, and, subsequently, postcolonial subject could be seen as creatively responding to dominant regimes through surreptitious forms of retaliation ("sly civility") that exploited the potential of the margin (the "third space," the "in-between").<sup>8</sup> The subsequent wave of scholarship that self-identified as "postcolonial" largely iterated the ubiquity of these practices in the colonial past and in the diasporic and (in keeping with the 1990s zeitgeist) the "multicultural" present. This continued focus on *process* meant that the emotional and affective domains of postcolonial subjectivity were in the vanguard of neither critical enquiry nor the fashions it triggered.<sup>9</sup> When they ultimately did come to occupy the vanguard, it was overwhelmingly in the form of "bad" or "negative" affects and feelings: trauma, melancholia, alienation, disillusionment, and disappointment.

Since roughly 2000, postcolonial studies have been in dialogue with scholarship on collective memory, which in turn has been "closely connected with the study of the Holocaust and World War II, and, more recently, other wars, genocides, and dictatorships."<sup>10</sup> Given that "wars, genocides, and dictatorships" have been the enduring leitmotifs of decolonization, it is unsurprising that scholars interested in probing

the conditions of postcolonial existence have frequently turned to the sophisticated methodologies for examining trauma that were developing as “Holocaust Studies.”<sup>11</sup> The founding moments of postcolonial nation-states, officially celebrated as glorious achievements of independence, were exposed as subtended by private and unofficial experiences of psychological and physical violence. The story of decolonization was unmasked as profoundly traumatic with ever-evolving repercussions.<sup>12</sup> The overdetermination of the “postcolonial” by “South Asia” means that the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 has dominated this turn. A strong alliance with feminist politics also developed.<sup>13</sup> Even as the theoretical apparatus for “Partition Studies” was taken from Holocaust Studies and its *loci classici* for the investigation of trauma, particularly Freud on mourning and melancholia, empirical evidence was furnished by retrieved histories of fugitive experience, especially those of women, by South Asian feminist writers, collectives, and publishing houses.<sup>14</sup> Their powerful example dominated scholarly interventions into the politics of memory and forgetting around South Asian postcoloniality. The Indian Partition became the privileged site for investigating the South Asian postcolonial experience as fundamentally traumatic and minoritizing;<sup>15</sup> more recently, the War of Bangladesh’s Liberation in 1971 and other manifestations of eruptive violence, such as the Naxalite Movement, are being drawn into the confluence of postcolonial studies and trauma studies.<sup>16</sup> In the meanwhile, a new memory studies has emerged through a renewed (pre)occupation with sites of twentieth century traumas that have undergone political, if not memorial, changes in the post–Cold War period.<sup>17</sup>

If trauma has become established as the foundational condition for the postcolonial subject, its corollary affect has been articulated as melancholia. Scholarship has revised and complicated the original Freudian binary between (“good”) mourning and (“bad”) melancholia, and a range of vernacular effects has also been proposed as valid modes of articulating melancholic affects.<sup>18</sup> Despite these revisionisms, the negative quality of melancholia remains undisputed; indeed, it is understood as intimately constitutive of its hermeneutic potential – as in Ranjana Khanna’s discussion of “critical melancholia.”<sup>19</sup> The focus on melancholia has allowed the retrieval of individual postcolonial experiences that have been, in the words of Salman Rushdie, “brushed under the carpet” of nationalist master-narratives.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there is a new convergence between postcolonial and queer investments in the disruptive capacity of melancholia and allied unhappy affects. Most prominent here is Sara Ahmed’s influential book, *The Promise of Happiness*, which declaredly writes from a position of “skeptical disbelief in happiness as a technique for living well,”<sup>21</sup> and rejects the temptations of the “happiness archive” to “follow,” instead, “the weave of unhappiness, as a kind of unraveling of happiness, and the threads of its appeal.”<sup>22</sup> Assembling “feminist killjoys,” “unhappy queers,” and “melancholic migrants,” Ahmed’s inquiry into the “promise of happiness” is, despite the book’s title, a thoroughgoing critique of happiness. While it is not clear what a revolutionary utopia from this perspective might entail, it certainly includes a call for the “freedom to be unhappy.”<sup>23</sup> Ahmed does admit in closing that “the struggle against happiness as a necessity is also a struggle for happiness as a possibility,” which might materialize if we adopt a “politics of the hap.”<sup>24</sup> Yet this concluding move is one of infinite deferral, reducing the “happy” (a feeling in the here and the now) to the “hap” (always tinged by contingency and futurity).

## HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM CALLED “HAPPINESS”?

Evidently, there are problems with happiness. There exists within Western metaphysics and ethics a long tradition of taking happiness seriously, but where this tradition has passed on to contemporary philosophers, their arguments about what constitutes happiness are conducted (typically) in the philosopher’s discursive mood of abstracted idealism.<sup>25</sup> There seems to be no clear methodological route for the transfer of their insights to analyses of contemporary societies and their cultural production in the age of advanced capitalism: those seeking to critique happiness simply catalogue this tradition, reference its most recent avatars, and move on to make their own arguments for happiness as inherently problematic.<sup>26</sup> A starting point in these arguments is the intellectual orientation of those who, these days, study happiness, and how they do so. “Unlike work in queer and ethnic studies on affect,” declares an essay that places itself squarely in that scholarly company, “the new science of happiness is profoundly positivist.”<sup>27</sup> Pitting themselves against such positivism and its advocacy of “emotional conformism” and “enforced happiness,”<sup>28</sup> the new approaches to affect within “queer and ethnic studies” cannot but emerge as cutting-edge. Happiness is passé, and even melancholia too limiting, perhaps, for those embarked on valorizing “the politics, aesthetics, and projections of political depression.”<sup>29</sup> The critical prose of these projects reveals a deep rhetorical and emotional investment in the privileging of instability and indirection: thus Lauren Berlant explicates “cruel optimism” as the “exuberant attachments . . . that keep ticking as a rhythm people can enter into while they are dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing or other being worn out by the promises they have attached to the world.”<sup>30</sup> Within this unstable, exhausted worldview, optimism can only be figured as “cruel,” any politically admissible joy must perforce be “queer,” and, as Elizabeth Freeman astutely observes, “pain . . . the proper ticket into historical consciousness.”<sup>31</sup>

The scholarship we can identify as “melancholic queer theory” stakes its rejection of happiness on the latter’s co-optation by advocates of heteronormativity. Heather Love points out that “new work on the psychology of happiness demonstrates a link between marriage and overall satisfaction”; likewise, Ahmed invokes similar studies to observe – with evident sarcasm – that “one of the primary happiness indicators is marriage.”<sup>32</sup> This is a valuable emphasis within queer critiques of happiness, which carries the added benefit of clarifying the related co-optation of happiness by the philosophy and practice of capitalism. From Jeremy Bentham’s “greatest happiness of the greater number” to Adam Smith’s contrast between pre-capitalistic “miserable inequality” and capitalism’s advancement of “happy inequality,” classic utilitarian treatises contain memorable axioms concerning the quantification and definition of happiness as an emotion that links the aspirations of individuals to those of a society.<sup>33</sup> The discursive alignment of marriage, family, and society through their congruent search for happiness, as crystallized in a harmonious flow of demand and supply of commodities, is regulated by the interpenetration of market and libidinal economies.<sup>34</sup> However, the need to project and participate in a happy society is not restricted to capitalism; indeed, its socialist mirror images suggest that the instrumentalization of happiness is a problem of modernity itself.<sup>35</sup> Most crucially, the building of global modernity on the institutions of slavery and colonialism, and their moral

justification through constructs of the “happy slave” and “contented colonial” reveals a problematic happiness lodged in the heart of the modern. “[T]he simulated jollity and coerced festivity of the slave trade and the instrumental recreations of plantation management” lay bare “the entanglement of terror and enjoyment” in the perpetuation of the slave trade.<sup>36</sup> Saidiya Hartman’s account of the African slave’s imagined inner resources for innate happiness – “childish, primitive, contented, and endowed with great mimetic capacities” – is an equally valid description of the ideal colonial subject from the colonizer’s perspective.<sup>37</sup>

Queer theory’s insistence on “the right to be unhappy” as a political response to capitalism’s demand for “compulsory happiness,”<sup>38</sup> and a historicist and materialist understanding of the basis of this demand, together make happiness a tricky subject for postcolonialists wishing similarly to speak from the margins, especially if they are already committed to the hermeneutic power of melancholia. For scholars of an activist bent, their battles with the nation-state’s powerful exclusions and neo-colonialisms leave little room for thinking about happiness and allied positive affects. Additionally problematic is the semantic relationship between “happiness” and those allied affects, including “pleasure,” “exhilaration,” and “joy” (all of which terms are subsumed under the Spanish and Portuguese word I have used earlier – *alegria*). These latter terms constellate around an underlying sense of the physical and the sensual that complicates an understanding of what constitutes the field of happiness as an analytical domain.

Suffering remains the almost exclusive preoccupation of professional psychology. Journals in the field have published forty-five thousand articles in the last thirty years on depression, but only four hundred on joy. There was one form of pleasure that deeply interested psychologists, from Freud on, and that was sexual pleasure.<sup>39</sup>

Within scholarship of all kinds, the commonest way to take happiness seriously has been to sever it from pleasure and its physical connotations, which, in turn, are all too often confined to the sexual domain. The narrowing of “pleasure” to “sexual pleasure” consolidates, paradoxically, that very connection between heteronormativity and happiness that it sought to break. Ironically, it also comes to the rescue of those trying to wrest some form of queer happiness from their critiques: “in addition to creating new forms of happiness,” declares Love, “we have developed a remarkable ability to live without happiness.”<sup>40</sup> When different orders of happiness tie up argumentation in knots, the separation of “pleasure” from “happiness” helpfully intervenes: “contemporary queers may find themselves in the odd position of making a claim for the right to be unhappy. In any case we have tended to find our pleasures elsewhere.”<sup>41</sup>

## EMBODIED AND COLLECTIVE PLEASURES

I contend that to separate pleasure from happiness – ultimately, a Cartesian reflex of the Enlightenment severance of the mind and the body – is to miss the opportunity to decolonize the mind and body through a politics of happiness redefined as embodied, collective pleasure. Any critique of happiness that invokes this separation



must be critiqued in turn for ignoring the radical potential of a happiness infused with pleasures emanating from the body's immersion in physical activity: the state of being that Mihály Csíkszentmihályi has defined as "the flow." Csíkszentmihályi's assertion that "the almost unlimited potential for enjoyment that the body offers often remains unexploited" holds true for scholarly approaches to subject-formation under advanced capitalism.<sup>42</sup> "Everything the body can do is potentially enjoyable," observes Csíkszentmihályi; our quality of life is enhanced through a cultivation of the body's "inherent ability to provide flow unexploited."<sup>43</sup> This sensual understanding of the flow aids our strategic delinking of pleasure from the purely sexual realm (imagined through the coupling of two bodies), and its return to a broader sensory domain. Recall Marx's comments on how the libidinal economies of capitalism alienate us from our sensory faculties:

"when it [private property] exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, when it is used by us . . . in the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, into the sense of having."<sup>44</sup>

The repossession of these senses, but by the individual functioning within the collective rather than as part of the heteronormative (and hetero-aspirational) marital unit, constitutes powerful strategies and practices of everyday resistance that, nevertheless, bypass our scholarly radar if we are fixated on melancholia. The postcolonial theorist needs to ask, instead: what flow-producing practices exist in postcolonial societies, and how do we theorize, from them, radical happiness as a *modus vivendi*?

As Achille Mbembe has best demonstrated, the postcolonial subject possesses multifarious resources for resisting neo-colonial hegemonies by exposing power's capitulation to the frailties and necessities of the body. Through the embodied micropolitics of mockery and play, the postcolony's demos survives the exigencies, precariousness, and petty humiliations of the everyday.<sup>45</sup> I mobilize Mbembe's awareness of the postcolonial efficacy of the Bakhtinian "lower body realm" into an exploration of how postcolonial subjects perform the ritualistic assertion of a deep-seated right to be happy, despite their routine interpellation within socio-economic structures that function by systematically disempowering them. I agree with Rosi Braidotti that "happiness is a political question and the role of the state is to enhance and not hinder humans in their striving to become all they are capable of."<sup>46</sup> The echo of Amartya Sen's "Capabilities" approach here finally brings us to a philosophical restatement of the necessity of happiness within a framework that can actually sit within postcolonial conditions.<sup>47</sup> The utopian moment of decolonization regularly articulated – typically, within elaborate Constitutions – the postcolonial state's responsibility to ensure that humans are not hindered in a legitimate quest for happiness (either defined as a series of non-restrictive rights or, as in the case of the US Constitution, as the right to happiness *tout court*).<sup>48</sup> As the realities of postcolonial nationhood unfold ethnic strife, class- and identity-based discriminations, and environmental degradation, what is exposed most egregiously is a state that promotes capitalism and its own definition of a commodities-based "happiness" without any ethics or alternative ideologies to counter the tendency towards selfishness and individualism that capitalism encourages. The postcolonial moment of utopia, founded on the trauma of

violent decolonization, then becomes an endlessly open moment for the recapture of the original feeling of “anything is possible.” A postcolonial practice of happiness can be located in a return to that moment not driven by melancholia, but by the need to retrieve and postulate “happy memories.”<sup>49</sup>

Seeking “an alternative to the emphasis on suffering in much academic literature on memory,” and to the “largely negative understandings of the emotions of memory” that scholars have offered while “identifying trauma [as] the defining condition of our times,” Carrie Hamilton advocates a scholarly turn to happy memories.<sup>50</sup> The political meaning of such memories need be neither “reactive,” nor associated with a “naively cheerful view of history,” nor indeed involve “a denial of oppression.”<sup>51</sup> Rather, for Hamilton, “[f]ar from being the prerogative of the privileged, happy memories may be especially important in sustaining political projects of the oppressed.”<sup>52</sup> Here, she cites Yolanda Pierce’s reading of the reminiscing of “happy” times in post-bellum accounts of US slavery as a coping mechanism for “the brutality of the lingering impact of slavery in order to maintain a semblance of hope for the future.”<sup>53</sup> Such alternative approaches to happiness and its recollection can help us redefine what Freeman identifies as inappropriate eruptions of “eros in the face of sorrow as traces of past pleasures located in specific historical moments.”<sup>54</sup> For Freeman, the “powerful turn toward loss – toward failure, shame, negativity, grief” within queer studies turns away from a “seemingly obsolete politics of pleasure” and indeed “acquiesces . . . to a Protestant ethic in which pleasure cannot be the grounds of anything productive at all.”<sup>55</sup> Her reading of the post-Freudian psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok surpasses that offered earlier by Ranjana Khanna’s reading of “critical melancholia” as postcolonial palliative to propose, instead, “erotohistoriography as a model of reparative criticism.”<sup>56</sup> However, the utility of Hamilton’s “happy memories” and Freeman’s “erotohistoriography” is restricted by textual examples and exegesis that remain tied to the pleasures of queer sexuality. Using the concept of the “flow,” as described earlier, I have moved pleasure away from this narrow application to private relations between two people, while retaining the insights of Hamilton and Freeman to illustrate the postcolonial reclaiming of happiness as political, embodied, inclusive, and collective pleasures.

## THE SAMBA PATH TO HAPPINESS

I return, finally, to Rio de Janeiro’s *sambódromo*. What I experienced there was a highly regulated, synchronized production of happiness, spatio-temporally organized along the length of the structure (roughly 700 meters of the Avenida Marquês de Sapucaí, the street on which the *sambódromo* is constructed), and the period of time each parading school has at its disposal (an hour). My participation began by draping on my entry ticket, a laminated affair ready-strung with a neck cord, bearing a barcode and a number, which indicated which part of the structure the ticket-holder was meant to occupy and also determined one’s entrance turnstile. On scanning the barcode at the turnstile, volunteers handed us: a booklet of lyrics, the parading schools’ flags, condoms, and a plastic bag to keep everything in. Passing through a foyer-like area with a band and food and drink stalls, we entered the *sambódromo* through one of several portals underneath massive concrete tiers that rise from the ground level

upwards for the length of the structure. These banks of tiers are divided into numbered sectors which are priced differently depending on its view – though it is also a matter of taste whether one wants to be close to the *concentração* (Concentration), where the schools assemble before starting; or at the end, marked by the *praça do apoteose* (Apotheosis Square), where they shed their feathers, baubles, and wings and become ordinary human beings again; the best seats are in the central sectors, which not only command a panoramic view of the start and end of the parades, but also offer the best effect of the *bateria*, or drumming section, which comes in at the midpoint of each parade. While the sectors are standing-only, there are some seats near Apotheosis Square for those who cannot stand for long, and in the luxury cabins (*camarotes*) that line the avenue's right-hand side.<sup>57</sup>

Vertiginous floats, sumptuous costumes, dazzling lights, insistent drums, and the swell of singing voices: during my night-long sojourn in Sector 11, time was occupied not by hours, minutes, and seconds, but by parades, *alas* (“wings” differentiated by costume and choreography), and rows of dancers. The parades unfold in harmony with the spatio-temporal specifications of the *passarela do samba* (Samba Path): schools are penalized for under-utilizing or exceeding an hour, or for gaps that open up between rows or wings. Each of the other elements which schools are judged on, including categories such as *fantasia* (costumes), *alegoria* (the realization of allocated allegorical themes), *bateria* (drumming), *harmonia* (harmony between the different elements) and *comissão de frente* (“front commission,” or the dancers leading the parade), consolidates this alternative temporality. It is sustained through synesthetic exhilaration that peaks midway with the pulsating *bateria*'s appearance, and is given voice through c. 90,000 spectators singing the carnival songs (*sambas de enredo*) nonstop. On the compact disc containing the year's *sambas de enredo*, released annually prior to carnival, each song lasts roughly six minutes; but its repetition ten times during the parade means that, very quickly, even neophytes who have not memorized their favorite songs during the preceding months can – aided by the free booklet of lyrics – soon join in. As the parades conclude at the aptly termed Apotheosis Square, the ritual time of Carnival is complexly intertwined with the linear time of the *passarela* and the mercantile time of the compact disc's release and consumption.<sup>58</sup> This braiding of several capitalist temporalities is an example of vernacular modernity's “stitches on time,”<sup>59</sup> and it is intrinsic to the *sambódromo*'s production and consumption of excess: “the carnival is like a giant popular opera, with so much happening, musically and visually, that you cannot possibly take it all in at once.”<sup>60</sup> In surpassing both “the chronopolitics of development” and “postcolonial notions of temporal heterogeneity,” Carnival's temporal and performative complexity also plays out a version of Freeman's “erotohistoriography” – as I explain below.<sup>61</sup>

“Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times.”<sup>62</sup> So does Carnival. The other places and times recalled in the *sambódromo* are specific to Brazil's national myths of cooperative miscegenation and racial democracy, nourished by tropical fecundity.<sup>63</sup> As with every year, 2014's *sambas de enredo* expounded themes of racial diversity, natural bounty, and the maintenance of harmony between people and nature through African-derived percussive rhythm.<sup>64</sup> “Bateu mais forte o coração / tocou, senti a vibração da África” (the heart beat faster / it played [like

an instrument], I sensed the vibration of Africa). These emphases were reaffirmed through the costumes and physical types of the dancers, their samba steps on the ground and on the teetering floats, and the almost infrared bass of the *bateria's* *surdo* drums.<sup>65</sup> United by the deep vibrations coursing through our bodies, I sang alongside a housewife from the Amazonia, a female doctor from Brasília, and other sector-companions. We sang of “coisa de pele, batuk ancestral” (that thing of the skin, ancestral African rhythm); of “o índio quem admirou a imensidão da beleza local” (the [Amer]Indian who admired the immense natural beauty) as she played innocently by the sea; of the *favela* (slum) where the “bisneto de imigrantes” (the great-grandchild of immigrants) offers the gift of miscegenation (“a miscigenação eu vou brindar”); and, of the parade itself, which re-enacts Brazil’s history from the arrival of the Portuguese to the consequent syncretism between “o nosso Senhor” (our Lord Jesus) and “rainha Iemanjá” (Yemaya, Afro-Brazilian goddess of the sea), resulting in creolized dances (“quadrilha,” “forró”), fighting games (“capoeira”), instruments (“sanfona,” “zabumba”), and saints (“São João”). We sang of the uniting force of the percussive beat, the *passarela's* performative power, ancestral musico-kinetic cultures, of new identity forged on Brazilian soil and reaffirmed through the city, and, of course, of happiness: “eu sou feliz” (I am happy).

### TERRA BRASILIS: A NEW WORLD IS DAWNING

As the night transformed into *madrugada* (“early morning,” Spanish and Portuguese), the invocations to newness within the lyrics we chanted brought forth a new dawn, tinged by the promise of social progress: “orgulho, respeito, igualdade / tremula a bandeira da diversidade / um novo tempo nascerá” (pride, respect, equality / the flag of diversity flutters / a new era will be born). Repetition – of movements, of lyrics, of themes, of myths, of newness – was key: “É carnaval, estou aqui de novo” (It’s carnival, I’m here once again). The Portuguese way of saying “once again” blurs newness and repetition, answering in a very Brazilian way that postcolonial question: “how does newness enter the world?”<sup>66</sup> This apotheosis through repetition is anchored in the “batucada do samba” (the African-derived samba rhythm), celebrated that evening in the opening song – “Batuk” – by the school Império da Tijuca: “na ginga do corpo / na batida no pé, axé, axé! Eleva a alma, o canto e a dança / unindo as raças na fé e na esperança” (in the sway of the body / in the march of the feet, “axé, axé!” Song and dance elevate the soul / uniting the races in faith and in hope). The song is a performative speech act *par excellence*: the words are articulated to the swaying bodies and stepping feet of dancers and the spectators alike. In the alternative temporality of Carnival, the collective archive of our bodies unfolded the movement from African *batuque* to modern *batucada* – a Brazilian sonic history realized through the space in which it is sung and danced. In the words of the lyrics booklet as it introduces “Batuk”: “Afinal, em nenhum outro lugar esse som é tão brasileiro quanto na Marquês de Sapucaí” (In the end, in no other space is this sound as Brazilian as when in the Marquês de Sapucaí). The *passarela do samba* becomes a synecdoche of *terra brasilis*. The term, first used by European explorers to designate a pre-conquest, paradisiacal Brazil, is a concept that haunts the Brazilian creative imaginary: note, for instance, its use as album title by Tom Jobim, one of Brazil’s iconic bossa nova musicians and lyricists.<sup>67</sup>

Jobim, together with his collaborator Vinicius de Moraes, also created the bossa nova song “A felicidade” (To Happiness) whose memorable declaration, “sadness has no ending / happiness does,” I quote at the beginning of this essay. The happiness of the poor is like the “grande ilusão do carnaval” (great illusion of carnival): people work for an entire year to create the costumes, music, and dance that build up the illusion, only to have it crumble into nothingness on Ash Wednesday: “tudo se acaba na quarta-feira” (everything finishes on Wednesday). The delicate melody in bossa nova minor notes brings out the ephemeral nature of both fantasy and the happiness erected on these sandcastles; yet, its invocation of cyclical carnival time assures us that, *de novo*, once again, next year, happiness will return. *Terra brasilis* will be renewed, even if fleetingly. Beneath the minimalist bossa nova arrangements, moreover, is the “batucada de samba”: the African-derived syncopations insinuated into European 4/4 time through the soft insistence of hand-held rattles and shakers filled with the seeds of indigenous trees. The edifice of bourgeois melancholia stands on this shuffled counterpoint that rhythmically weaves in the memory of happiness. This memory finds its full-throated expression in the *sambódromo* as we chant, along with the Império de Tijuco, “axé, axé!” – a pan-American expression of African-derived spiritual energy.<sup>68</sup> Yes, the song’s celebration of inter-cultural mixing under the moonlit maroon village is a placeholder for the interracial and ecological violence that constitutes the original trauma of Brazil’s foundation on *terra brasilis*. Yes, Brazil is an unequal society still marked by the effects of slavery and socio-economic marginalization on its Afro-Brazilian population.<sup>69</sup> But the performative affirmation of happiness through the ritualistic, embodied recollection of the foundation myth also validates the political potency of happy memories: “such memories may act as an ingredient in formulating alternative futures. Nostalgia does not necessarily represent an idealization of the past but incorporates the emotional tensions within memory itself.”<sup>70</sup>

Following Carnival, an article in *Le Monde* analyzed the Rio parades as the markers of a city divided between poor Afro-Brazilian favelas straddling the *morros* (hills), and the rich white Zona Sul fringed by famous beaches.<sup>71</sup> My experience confirmed the opposite: that the parades and their audience periodically suture a divided society. A Chilean-French friend who participated in one of the parades I witnessed eloquently repudiated *Le Monde*’s perspective:

the samba schools are all from poor neighborhood “comunidades”; everybody knows that and acknowledges that they are a Black heritage . . . since 70,000 people participate, 4000 for each school, a lot of people from the favela communities participate for free, or almost free. There are as many dancers as people sitting on the *sambódromo*.<sup>72</sup>

The generation of an embodied, collective pleasure as the route to happiness, however protean, needs a critical mass comprising all components of Carioca society, and leaves lasting traces on the urbanscape. “Where else in the world do you have a dedicated carnival avenue, a Bikini Arch symbol, and a city carnival warehouse where the top schools can work all year round on their gigantic cars?”<sup>73</sup> It was Brazil’s leading modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer, who, commissioned by the government, designed both the modernist capital Brasilia and, in 1984, the *sambódromo*; with the



Bikini arch that towers over Apotheosis Square, he paid homage to the bikini-clad women of Carioca beaches.<sup>74</sup> The State and its capitalist allies – most prominently, the media conglomerate Globo TV – regulate the samba spectacle to perpetuate the national myth of racial democracy. But the people – *o povo* (a term ubiquitous in samba songs) have repeatedly invoked the myth to generate *alegria* as a democratic right. We hear it as early as “vem cá, mulata” (come here, mulata), a *samba de enredo* from 1906: “o povo gosta da nossa dança” (the people love our dance). Not accidentally does the mulata of the song’s title declare, “sou democrata do curacao” (I’m a democrat at heart).<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF BACCHANAL

“Samba is happiness. To perform samba, regardless of whether it is fast or slow, marched or not, played on expensive instruments or plastic buckets, one needs to be happy. This is because happiness is embodied in samba.”<sup>76</sup> Although his research context was not Carnival samba but the samba performances connected with devotional practices in northeastern Brazil, Michael Iyanaga’s ethnographical study of samba’s ability to perform, create, and augment collective happiness powerfully confirms the connections between samba, happiness, and postcolonial subject-formation that I have advanced in this essay.<sup>77</sup> “Eu quero mais é ser feliz” (I want most of all to be happy),



Figure 1.1 Rio de Janeiro, *Sambódromo*, 2nd March 2014.  
Source and Permission: Author, Ananya Jahanara Kabir.

declares the chorus of the 2014 *samba de enredo* “Favela” performed by the school São Clemente. Taking a cue from my immersion during an evening of Carnival fervor in Rio de Janeiro, when I, together, with nearly a 100,000 people, performed, declared, and realized that which we wanted most – to be happy – I have offered a prolegomena to the problems and possibilities of postcolonial happiness. The songs that are sung, the rhythms that are played and danced to, and the narratives that are referenced re-enact what Diana Taylor has called “foundational scenarios” within performances of cultural memory in the Americas.<sup>78</sup> While Taylor has demonstrated how these scenarios commemorate the mestizo/a as an embodiment of racial violence, I would go a step further and asseverate that the Rio Carnival is a postcolonial social pact that returns to those scenarios through the happiness of the samba. This national spectacle of Dionysian proportions provokes and channels flow to provide secular modernity with a postcolonial version of Carnival as premodern ritual.<sup>79</sup> The consequent paradigm of collective pleasure enacts an erotohistoriography not of the couple but of the collective – the “bacchanal,” to adopt for a moment the Trinidadian patois term for a party.<sup>80</sup>

The example of Brazil, with a history, language, and temporality of (post)colonization very different from the paradigms and exemplars that have come to signify the “postcolonial,” serves to defamiliarize those of us perhaps a bit too accustomed to that received reading of the postcolonial to be able to generate from established terrain new points of theoretical and philosophical departure, such as the move from trauma to *alegria* that I had called for in the introduction.<sup>81</sup> Embodied and collective forms of pleasure not only bring to the work of analysis affective modes other than melancholia of all shades and political depression; they remind us that happiness, play, and exhilaration can be deeply political forces for radical change. Celebrating happiness as a resource for post-traumatic survival is the first step towards understanding the work the performance of happiness does in a seemingly broken world.

## ENDNOTES

1. Mangueira samba school, “Samba de enredo,” 2014. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.
2. Since January 2013, I have conducted three fieldwork visits to Brazil, funded by research monies from the University of Leeds, a British Academy Small Research Grant, and, most recently, a European Research Council Advanced Research Grant. The material for this essay was gathered during the ERC-funded visit. I am deeply grateful to my friends from Sao Paulo for their company and knowledge: Paola Cepeda Andrade, Cris Duarte, and, most of all, Regiane Ramos. Thanks also to Beatriz Eugenio Mayo, Dimitri Lopes, Leonardo Guerra, and Diego Gonzales. Obrigada Sofia Martinho for superb Portuguese tuition. An initial version of this essay was delivered as a lecture to The Centre for Contemporary Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Thanks to Raghavendra Gadadkar and Amrita Shah for facilitating it, and to Achal Prabhala and James Tiburcio for feedback. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.
3. Brazil achieved independence from the Portuguese Empire in 1822. This was a very early moment of decolonization even within the Lusophone world, with African colonies of Portugal generally achieving independence in the 1970s. This extended timeline makes the Portuguese postcolonial experience, stretched over c. 150 years, very different from experiences in the Anglophone world. Brazil’s existence as a postcolonial nation from the time when Britain was, for instance, consolidating its imperial presence in India, and

- the fact that its cultural affair are conducted in Portuguese, contributes to the erasure of Brazil from a horizon of scholarship on the “postcolonial” that is often narrowly Anglophone and South-Asia-centric in orientation. For a critique and the possibility of new approaches to a Brazil–South Asia postcolonial dialogue, see Ananya Chakravarti, “Peripheral Eyes: Brazilians and India, 1947–1961.” *Journal of Global History* 10.1 (March 2015): 122–146. On Brazil and the postcolonial, see Francisco Ortega Martinez, “Postcolonialism and Latin American writing, 1492–1850.” In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 288–308.
4. The relationship between postcolonial studies, melancholia, and trauma is explained in detail in the first section of this chapter, “The enchantment of melancholia,” below.
  5. Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, “A Felicidade” (Rio de Janeiro: Augustinho dos Santos, 1959).
  6. These are critiques and new questions directed towards myself as much as everyone else involved in the scholarly reproduction of postcolonial melancholia. For my first attempt to move beyond that frame, see Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Affect, Body, Place.” In *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Gert Beulens, Samuel Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2014), 63–77.
  7. Most evidently, Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012). See also Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
  8. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). See in particular his comments on mimicry and mimic men in “Sly Civility,” *ibid.*, pp. 132–144.
  9. Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
  10. Carrie Hamilton, “Happy Memories.” *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 65.
  11. For an early example of this, see Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Subjectivities, Memories, Loss: Of Pigskin Bags, Silver Spittoons and the Partition of India.” *Interventions* 4.2 (2002): 245–264.
  12. See here Arend Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Landeg White, “Empire’s Revenge.” *Index on Censorship* 28.1 (1999): 50–55. For examples from South Asia, see nn. 14–15 below.
  13. This convergence is discussed by Srila Roy, “Melancholic Politics and the Politics of Melancholia: The Indian Women’s Movement.” *Feminist Theory* 10.3 (2009): 341–357; which, *inter alia*, also provides a thoughtful inquiry into Indian feminism’s melancholic preoccupation with an earlier historical period of activism.
  14. Ritu Menon, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (Rochester: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
  15. Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
  16. See Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition’s Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia* (Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013); Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Violence, Gender, and Representation in Postcolonial India* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014); and Srila Roy, *Remembering Revolution: Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India’s Naxalbari Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
  17. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Gert Beulens, Samuel Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone, eds., *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2013).



18. For the movement towards vernacular affective vocabulary, see Nukhbah Taj Langah, *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan* (New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012); Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2014).
19. Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
20. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 1995; first published 1981), Chapter 4, "Brushed under the Carpet."
21. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.
22. *Ibid.*, 18.
23. *Ibid.*, 222.
24. *Ibid.*, 222.
25. See Darrin M. McMahon, "From the Happiness of Virtue to the Virtue of Happiness: 400 BC–AD 1780." *Daedalus* 133.2 (2004): 5–17; this entire issue of *Daedalus* contains several other essays considering happiness from diverse philosophical angles.
26. Ahmed, *Promise*, 4–12.
27. Heather Love, "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence." *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 53–54; see also Ahmed, *Promise*, 7.
28. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 54 and 63.
29. Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss and the Senses." *New Formations* 63.1 (2007): 33–51.
30. *Ibid.*, 35.
31. Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography." *Social Text* 23.3–4 (2005): 57–68, at 59.
32. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 53; Ahmed, *Promise*, 6.
33. See Richard Schoch, *The Secrets of Happiness: Three Thousand Years of Searching for the Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 20–45, for a review of this tradition.
34. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).
35. Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
36. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.
37. *Ibid.*, 23.
38. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 63.
39. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 13.
40. Love, "Compulsory Happiness," 63.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 94.
43. *Ibid.*, 95.
44. Karl Marx, "Economic and Political Transcripts." In *Early Writings*, ed. Rodney Livingstone. Trans. Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975; first published 1844), 162.
45. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
46. Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (London: Polity, 2006), 230.
47. Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Capabilities." *Journal of Human Development* 6.2 (2005): 151–166; Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice." *Feminist Economics* 9.2–3 (2003): 33–59.
48. Julian Go, "A Globalizing Constitutionalism? Views from the Postcolony, 1945–2000." *International Sociology* 18.1 (2003): 71–95.

49. Hamilton, "Happy Memories."
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Yolanda Pierce, "Her Refusal to be Recast(e): Annie Burton's Narrative of Resistance." *The Southern Library Journal* 34.2 (2004): 12, n.1.
54. Freeman, "Time Binds," 59.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.; Khanna, *Dark Continents*; Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
57. For a full account of this structure and organization, see Frederick J. Moehn, "'The Disc Is Not the Avenue': Schismogenetic Mimesis in Samba Recording." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 47–83.
58. Ibid., explicates in detail these temporal entanglements.
59. Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
60. Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian Sound: Samba, Bossa Nova, and the Popular Music of Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 58.
61. Freeman, "Time Binds," 59.
62. Ibid.
63. See Gilberto Freyre's classic tome, *Casa-grande e senzala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; first published 1933), where these discursive elements are already fully present.
64. The following discussion summarizes the tropes, images, and themes used in the lyrics of 2014's *sambas de enredo*, and in the paratexts (both aural and textual) surrounding their transmission in print and sound: on the one hand, the introductory comments we hear before each song in the "official" CD, *Sambas de Enredo 2014* (Universal Music Ltda, 2014), and on the other, in the introductory comments we read before each song's lyrics, are presented in the free booklets distributed to the *sambódromo*'s visitors: *Rio, Samba e Carnaval* (Rio de Janeiro: RSC Ltda, 2014). All quotes in the subsequent paragraphs are taken from the samba lyrics presented in this booklet.
65. On the meaning of the *surdo*'s deep sound, see Frederick Moehn, *Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 100–102.
66. Homi Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World." *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 212–235. The question was first asked by Salman Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2011), 8.
67. Tom Jobim, *Terra Brasilis* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1980). See also Edivaldo José Borroto, "The Land Brasilis: The Paradise of the God (s) and (in) Credulous People or the Place Where 'there is no sin below the equator'." *Impulso* 27 (n.d.), accessed February 12, 2015. <http://www.unimep.br/phpg/editora/revistaspdf/imp27arto6.pdf>
68. Clarence Bernard Henry, *Let's Make Some Noise: Axé and the African Roots of Brazilian Popular Music* (Missouri: University of Mississippi Press, 2010).
69. Erica Lorraine Williams, *Sex Tourism in Bahia: Ambiguous Entanglements* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).
70. Hamilton, "Happy Memories," 70–71.
71. Julia Mourri, "A Rio, les défilés du carnaval sont les marqueurs d'une ville divisée." *Le Monde*, March 3, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015. <http://mondeacinter.blog.lemonde.fr/2014/03/03/a-rio-les-defiles-du-carnaval-sont-les-marqueurs-dune-ville-divisee/>
72. Diego Gonzales, Facebook Communication, March 4, 2014.

73. Ibid.
74. David Underwood, "Popular Culture and High Art in the Work of Oscar Niemeyer." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 16.65 (1994): 139; Styliane Philippou, *Oscar Niemeyer: Curves of Irreverence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
75. "Vem cá mulata," Carnival hit of 1906. As is the norm with popular Brazilian songs, several interpretations of it exist. The earliest recorded version is accessible on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOgyAy4W8To>. There is a pun, I believe, on the mulata's assertion that she is a "democrat at heart": the song was the carnival song of the early samba school Os Democratos ("the democrats"), and the woman would seem to be asserting her affiliation to this club by refusing the invitation to dance issuing from a member of, it would seem, a rival school. Given the song's focus on Carnival's ability to generate collective joy that moves incrementally from the dancing couple to the crowd (*o povo*), it asks also to be read as a comment on the radical, inclusive politics of Carnival happiness. See also Antonio Herculano Lopes, "Vem cá, Mulata!" *Tempo* 13.26 (2009), accessed February 12, 2015. [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1413-77042009000100005&script=sci\\_arttext](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1413-77042009000100005&script=sci_arttext)
76. Michael Iyanaga, *New World Songs for Catholic Saints: Domestic Performances of Devotion and History in Bahia, Brazil*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles. 2013, 293.
77. Ibid., 295–296.
78. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 55–58.
79. Csíkszentmihályi misses a trick when he considers the social potency of premodern, sacred rituals spawned by "previous models of cosmic order" as lost to secular modernity, for he seems to have forgotten the nation's ability to generate popular, flow-creating rituals in the name of patriotic pageantry (Flow, 77). Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 9–12, very usefully discusses the Enlightenment's loss of interest in, and colonialism's concurrent demonizing of, rituals of collective ecstasy, and notes their harnessing by Facism (ibid., 180–181). Suggestively enough, she concludes her book's call for a renewal of collective ecstasy with a description of the Rio Carnival's streetwide manifestations (ibid., 260–261).
80. On bacchanal in the Trinidadian context, see Milla Cozart Riggio, ed. *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Daniel Miller, "Absolute Freedom in Trinidad." *Man* 26 (1991): 323–341; and Peter Mason, "Bacchanal": *The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers 1998).
81. On Brazil and the postcolonial, see note 3.

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