

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

In January 2016, the nearly-condemned property next door to me in Brooklyn, NY sold for \$150,000. In the following year, we watched our neighbor, affectionately called “Hell Yeah” by the block, as he was forcibly evicted. The owner did nothing to update or renovate the property, but instead, focused on the riddance of the Black “squatters” and waited until the tide of gentrification traveled eastward, from Bed-Stuy to us in Ocean Hill, enough to make even an unlivable property valuable. In 2018, he sold it for \$1,090,000.

My landlords, a European couple of Swedish and German descent, celebrated the removal of my neighbors, while other residents mourned that Hell Yeah’s beloved cat wasn’t safely retrieved from the basement before the full-gut renovations began. Seemingly sparing no expense on the renovation, the new white landlord next door remarked to the Chinese construction laborer that he intended to rent out each of the three floors at \$3,000/month (only a few years ago, most people would have laughed at the thought of paying \$1,300 for even a three bedroom). In 2019, my Swedish landlord laughed when he heard this. Dismissively, he exclaimed, “yeah right, not yet. Maybe if we can get a few more cafés up.” He passed over my and my partner’s dismay.

In this moment we see the owning class, the police, the prospective business, the new high-income resident – the gentrifying bodies – clearly. They collaborate to settle in and develop an idle land. Long-term residents wear racialization as a mark for removal. Displacement will occur through pricing us out or, like the

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neighbor who has been transformed into “squatter” – through criminalizing whoever remains.

However unexpected the bald-faced admission was, the relationship between café culture and economic dispossession is furtive and historical. The earliest coffee shops mushroomed in the height of imperialism (Ellis, 2004). A false marker of civility within uneven rule, European cities boldly featured the African delight that is coffee, acquired through the power and wealth accumulated by imperial expansion. Markman Ellis (2004) remarks that such grandeur and elegance surrounded the café, that building a café was often one of the “first things Ottoman rulers did in newly conquered cities.” Forgotten through a continued colonization, the Englishman attributed coffee to the “oriental,” the Muslims whose settling of East Africa predated their own. Perpetual colonization thrives with the usurpation of ownership over cultural goods and practices, the naturalization of the new belonging.

The café provides the opportunity to consume the exoticized Black culture; materialized, coffee becomes simulacra of the colonized *other*. Brooklyn is just one “perpetually colonial place” offering a taste of Blackness (Shange, 2019). The many cafes with brand new, commissioned murals or imitation graffiti with “Spread Love, It’s the Brooklyn Way” (the famous Biggie lyric) host newcomers who don’t remember the just-before – the recent history erased like the paint from the brick that told us whose cousin/sibling/child died from gun violence on the block. Their names and faces washed off, laundered as so much of the state-enabled violence that created this Black death world.

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And still, most of us do not remember the name of the Lenape who thrived here in the long-ago, despite the very street name *Rockaway* and the neighborhood *Canarsie*. Instead, the “native” New Yorker is created through notice of whom is displaced in the wake of shorter waves of settling forces. These waves, in turn, force migration.

The new café that appeared on my block whistled to its desired clientele through the honky-tonk tunes loudly played and the success at hiring an all-white staff in a deeply segregated, all-Black neighborhood. The 2010 census recorded 1.4% of Ocean Hill residents as white. The patrons always come from Bushwick, the neighborhood to the northeast, and hurry past any resident shuffling up or down the stairs of the Rockaway subway station. There’s a subtle hostility underlying this new business, not merely in the averted eyes, the absence of greeting potential patrons of African descent. It is within all that is being communicated to each other, in exchanges beyond the interpersonal; we sense it but it is never spoken. It is instead communicated in policy, through the expansion of surveillance and securitization as well as the quality-of-life ordinances that rely on police discretion for regulation of racially-marked people despite “race-neutral” language.¹ In this article, I demonstrate that gentrification is thus a process that is facilitated by, and also facilitates, mechanisms of the carceral state,

¹ See Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* (2010) for an elaboration of colorblind racism in the U.S. criminal legal system.

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and so we must include gentrification as an axis of our analyses of the prison-industrial complex and visions of abolition.

CORRECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

New York State entered a period of rapid prison expansion between the 1970s, when there were 21 “correctional facilities,” including work camps and institutions for the “mentally ill or retarded,”² and 1990s, when the state reached 65 prisons (Lawrence and Travis, 2004). At the juncture of this phase’s settling and the neoliberal and punitive ideologies of Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, Brooklyn began to experience gentrification. That is, we see the displacement of the working-class population by higher classes, through a nexus of policy changes, increased policing, housing renovations exclusively accessible for the rich, and replacement of local, small businesses. Gentrification includes housing development, which prices out “unwanted people” or coerces people into moving out through aggravated landlord neglect (Crosby, 2020; Ponder, 2016) and racially-targeted buyouts (Gibson, 2015). It is aided by hyperpolicing, in

² The NYS Department of Corrections published the booklet *100 Years of Progress* in 1970, boasting the centralized governance of the 21 facilities, which featured unprecedented diversity of its officials and responsive medical care. The facilities included “four conservation work camps for young men, an institution for the mentally retarded male offenders and one for mentally retarded female offenders, two hospitals for mentally ill offenders, six maximum security facilities for men and four medium security facilities for men, three female correctional facilities.” A digitized copy is available at correctionhistory.org.

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which state terror methods increase stops and tickets (Kaplan-Lyman, 2012; Robinson, 2020) as well as arrests, assaults and homicides against marginalized people (Rodriguez, Ben-Moshe and Rakes, 2020). Importantly, hyperpolicing is also upheld by newcomers (often collectively called gentrifiers, and more recently, *Karens*) who knowingly or unknowingly deploy the forces of state terror in order to satisfy their personal senses of order and control in the area (Robinson, 2020).

Gentrification therefore relies on *corrective development*: the forced movement of Black mad, poor, and/or queer bodies from a target geography to less desired areas by use of corrective violence. Corrective violence is structural and systematic, encompassing the utilization and tacit approval of regularized violence against oppressed peoples as well as the violent enforcement of social immobility by protecting poverty in one of the richest states in the richest country of the world.

I offer the term *corrective development* to combat the idea of gentrification as a passive occurrence in which higher income people happen to find the hood interesting, trendy, or convenient. Instead, it is imperative that we acknowledge the underlying violence and how the power to dispossess is wielded. In this article, I also offer a snapshot of the abolitionist (anti-corrections) work that queer people of color in Brooklyn have mobilized in order to empower the community against corrective violence. Ultimately, I offer this language and analysis of corrective development so that we understand the entanglements of queerphobia,

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racism, ableism, and disposability that queer transformative justice moves to abolish in Brooklyn.

EJECTION, INVITATION, CORRECTION

To usher in trendy cafés and other profitable, gentrifying bodies, neighborhoods need both sides of *correction*; the punitive removal of racialized, poor, disabled people is met with the invitation of the desired resident. While the removal relies on police violence that criminalizes, brutalizes, and kills residents, the invitation, on the other hand, arrives through white investments: suddenly the city lends a regular sanitation effort, there is access to fresh or freshly-prepared foods. The state makes available certain quality-of-life investments that would have transformed life for previous residents.

Gentrification “develops” racialized areas for the colonial settling of those with high racial capital. The “one-dimensional queer” is a manifestation of this highly-valued subject, as the presence of white gay equality indexes begins to positively correlate with the economic potential of the successful, creative (one-dimensional) city (Ferguson, 2018). Racial capitalism, within a neoliberal framework, creates surplus out of the unassimilable (Gilmore, 2007). Surplus bodies, in turn, are capitalized upon, through their rebirth as carceral objects. Within “idle” lands recently marked for neoliberal development, carcerality serves as an opportunity to expand employment. Those within productive, assimilated classes gain access to opportunities for violence work, which proliferate with the passage of new punitive governmental policies that increase the presence and technologies of law enforcement. Simultaneously, a neoliberal

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rationality encourages a market to regulate human life (and death) and to work alongside the government to demarcate the safe citizen from the deviant.³

Development, therefore, relies on carceral tactics of surveillance, threat, and punishment equally to the projection of innovation, freedom, and “progressive” potential to achieve neighborhood corrections.

Corrections in the United States most often describes the institution that holds custody of criminalized people, purportedly to reform or reorient them from nonnormative behaviors through labeling, isolation, and constraint. Federal and state governments’ corrections departments warehouse people with the retributive and/or incapacitating aim to neutralize the populations that cannot be incorporated into the “normate” (Thomson, 2017). This includes a disproportionate representation of people of color, disabled and neurodivergent people, queer people, and the indigent. Therefore, in my use of the term *corrections*, I point to two intentions: 1) forced assimilation of the unproductive body into the normate social body, or, if found impossible, 2) the removal of this body from the public in order to correct the “balance” of the social environment.⁴

³ The violent tactics of the *goon squad*, at the employ of “elite corporate institutions using powers traditionally reserved by the state to clean up the streets” serve as a strong example of private investment in state terroristic policing during neoliberal times (Kaplan-Lyman, 2012).

⁴ For example, an explicit admission of this project was made by the sheriff of Kenosha, who argued for the warehousing of the Black population before they have time for wanton reproduction, which would serve the “greater good.” Milwaukee newspaper article available

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Foundational to corrective violence is the pathologization of difference. Sanism and criminalization interplay in order to manage the threat of different people and ways of being (Ben-Moshe, 2020). The perception of deviance is entrenched in the idea of an altered or sickened mindstate, therefore attaching psychiatrized meaning on to the queer body. These imaginative, ableist attachments then justify various attempts at neutralizing the deviance. One may witness such attempts in forced medicalization and (carceral) institutionalization in psychiatric hospitals (Ben-Moshe, Chapman and Carey, 2014; Appleman, 2018; Ben-Moshe, 2020), as well as jails or prisons (Black, 2008; Davis, 2003). However, as the “one-dimensional queer” enjoys the cultural and state process of normalization through homonationalism, the multidimensional suffer the brunt of anti-queer pathologization and, in turn, corrective violence (Puar, 2007).

Other forms of *corrective violence* include social exclusion, brutalizing, and killing, which all exist in concomitant anti-queer manifestations, by our state, our neighbors, and our loved ones. These tactics are meant to invoke deterrence – “retribution’s specter” (Gilmore, 2007, 14) – and symbolically communicate to others that the form of deviance chosen or embraced is indeed unacceptable in the society. The state also undertakes corrective violence in order to shift surplus bodies (the unwanted, unproductive, unassimilable) geographically, ushering them out of the desired urban or suburban location and “depositing them

online: <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2020/08/27/kenosha-county-sheriff-2018-statement-under-new-scrutiny/5645279002/>

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somewhere else” (Gilmore, 2007, 14). The *somewhere else*, strikingly, is often a distant and isolated rural location, removed from community and kin. In many ways, carceral violence is used in order to correct certain people and spaces, in service of protecting desired people and spaces (Rodriguez, Ben-Moshe and Rakes, 2020).

Within queer theory, we have the opportunity to put forward a more expansive understanding of corrections, so that its applicability extends outside of the prison or the jail. We can look into aspects of society imprisoned by similar logics: ones that “correct” (cure, reform or fix) deviance through coercive and violent practices. One of the most well-articulated in academic literature is *corrective rape* – a practice weaponizing sexual assault to instill a lasting fear into queer people with the aim of limiting their future expressions to heterosexuality and gender conformity (Morrissey, 2013; Moffett, 2006). Importantly, corrective rape has always been acknowledged to exist at the intersection of queerness and Blackness; so much so that authors in South Africa often limit its definition explicitly to intraracial violence (Morrissey, 2013). Within ostensibly democratic countries, particularly those with recent histories of overt white supremacist political domination, such as South Africa or the U.S., racially or ethnically minoritized people become the most susceptible to extra-legal punishment (Kynoch, 2016). As is the case of all violent criminalized action, the vast majority of it is intraracial, occurring within one racial group, rather than between groups. Corrective rape is one hate-based extension of the nationalist violence to coerce a population into coherence. Mirroring the state’s mandate for conformity, it is just

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one form of violence that is unironically utilized in order to “teach” or “convince” a perceived “offender” of social deviance to fall in line (Moffett, 2006). It is time to more comprehensively account for “corrective” violence.

**GENDER-BASED, HATE, AND STATE VIOLENCE AS MUTUALLY CONSTITUTIVE
CORRECTIVE VIOLENCE**

Corrective violence articulates itself through various institutional bodies and cultural exchanges. If we queer the gender-based violence (GBV) framework, we think of GBV not only as violence against women, but rather as attacks in service of gender correction, which disproportionately targets femininity (Haynes and DeShong, 2017; West, 2013), then we are more likely to see how anti-LGBT hate violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), and state violence all represent corrective violence.

Rodriguez, Ben-Moshe, and Rakes (2020) offer an intersectional view of state violence as corrective control, particularly of homicide in encounters with police, in which *racial criminal pathologization* relies on gendering Black and queer bodies as *other*. This other gender is cast as perpetually invulnerable to violence, despite being constantly subjected to it and disproportionately likely to experience early death (Rodriguez, Ben-Moshe and Rakes, 2020, 5). Following Cathy Cohen’s (1997) expansion of *queer politics* beyond those who identify with sexual marginalization or deviance, we can situate the police killings of even Black cismen like Michael Brown in the realm of gender correction. Such killings

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are the manifestation of hegemonic – or *structurally authorized*⁵ – masculine domination of marginalized or subordinate masculinities. In this case, it is the white male state’s correction of the imagined unruly Black subject’s masculinity.

The “gender deviant,” queer body, especially those of Black transwomen, has been at the forefront of this conversation due to increased vulnerability to corrective violence. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs has shown through regularly collected reports on anti-queer violence that it is not atypical that the majority if not all IPV-related deaths in the queer community are of transwomen of color (NCAVP, 2016). Similarly, the majority of people who suffer fatal victimization from anti-queer hate violence in a given year are transwomen of color (GLAAD, 2018; NCAVP, 2013-2016).

This corrective violence manifests sexually and is reinforced interpersonally and structurally. An interlocutor in Brandon Andrew Robinson’s “Coming Out in the Streets” (2020), “Justice” explains the circumstances surrounding a rape that she suffered. Not only did police not “protect” her, they told her that the incident was not important because they believe she engages in sex work to make a living (which, to them, justifies the rape). Notably, they also regularly harassed her before and after the incident for what is colloquially referred to as “walking while trans” (2020).

⁵ Raewyn Connell offers an introduction into these many layers of masculinities with the 1995 text *Masculinities*. She posits that the structural violence of racism and poverty excludes Black male masculinity from the hegemon.

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Justice's identity as a Black transwoman increases her likelihood of bias-motivated harm, IPV,⁶ and gender policing by both the state's official violence workers as well as those protected by the state, such as Justice's rapist. With a sample of 27,715 respondents, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) found that 72% of respondents who had engaged in sex work had been sexually assaulted in their lifetime. The majority of respondents – sex working or not – did not feel safe or comfortable calling the police if they needed help. More than half (58%) of transwomen had been mistreated by the police – many of whom experienced further assault. When we narrow our look into USTS data on Black transwomen in sex work, the figure becomes more striking, as 90% report experiencing harassment, sexual, and non-sexual physical assault by the police. Therefore, cases like Justice's demonstrate not arbitrary police discrimination or mistreatment, but rather systematic and perpetual violence work in service of correcting the deviance associated with queer sexual exchanges (Dalton, 2007) and Black gender expansiveness (Robinson, 2020).

State and gender violence exist as mutually constitutive corrective violence that are appropriated or exacerbated in gentrifying times. For example, gender-based state violence increased in the crackdown of Australian "beat spaces," when

⁶ With a sample of 27,715 respondents, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) found that the majority (54%) of trans and gender non-conforming adults had experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

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plain-clothes police officers would perform a caricaturized mimicry of presumed gay male femininity (Dalton, 2007). The pursuit of correcting “homocriminality” rose in the context of protecting normative straight, white publics during rapid cultural and social change (Dalton, 2007). This corrective pursuit followed the logic of “cleaning up” the streets by removing the “filth” of homosexual sex; a logic bolstered by the association of excrement with the bathrooms that were frequented for sexual interaction. In the former “Lavender Scare,” this police action may have been a part of a “Pervert Elimination Campaign” (Robinson, 2020). Today, in New York City, however, this is part of the neoliberal limitation of public “contact spaces” that used to nurture queer life and expression before gentrification (Delaney, 1999; Ferguson, 2018). The contact spaces of the old, multidimensional city were not meant for just sex, but for self-invention, self-exploration and the invention of new communities by those who have been expelled from their bio-family homes (Ferguson, 2018, p. 94).

Relatedly, Hail-Jares, Paquette and Le Neuveu (2017) demonstrate the detrimental effects of the transformation of a city by forcing local migration due to neoliberal shifts in policy. Civilian hate violence can occur when people, unaccustomed to the rules of particular blocks, unintentionally encounter a queer or trans space. This is especially likely if the encounter involves sex work or sexual exchange (Oselin and Cobbina, 2017). The collapse of formerly-distinct neighborhoods can force displaced folks into new blocks with differently established cultures or politics (Hail-Jares, Paquette and Le Neuveu, 2017). In Brooklyn, we see this as gentrification haunts from West to East, pushing Black

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residents to move their livelihoods to the furthest neighborhoods East, such as East New York.

As a community organizer, I have seen how hate violence occurs when community members begin to scapegoat queer people for the changes to the neighborhood. There is a prevalent myth of the “lesbian gentrifier,” in which *lesbian* always signifies *white woman*.⁷ The tension is heightened as the cautionary tale, that *Park Slope was first gentrified by the lesbians*, circulates and provides a target for anxieties caused by racial capitalism. This perception has its basis in urban developers’ strategic deployment of the image of a “one-dimensional queer”: the white, working-professional gay whose simplified creativity is one, perhaps, of a musical interest or software development, rather than a political commitment to creating a new, radical community-oriented culture (Ferguson, 2018). The image of the gay, white elite signals a “meritocratic norm” (Florida, 2012) in place of a repressive or backwards norm. Unlike queer people of color, this gay subject ushers in new capital and the migration of an elite, creative class (i.e. “techies”) who – as individuals and as businesses – constitute highly coveted gentrifying bodies (Ferguson, 2018). This presence

⁷ This narrative is commonly held and communicated. It is also found within academia, including in Rothenberg’s (1995) concluding remarks. The reductive point that is made is that clusters of lesbians (implying white women) moved to Park Slope as a network that eventually led to white domination of the space. The displacement is marked by the most recent Census data that shows Park Slope is nearly 70% white, 36.9% whiter than the rest of New York City in total.

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S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

becomes a representation of a racialized otherness, even when non-white queer people were always in the neighborhood, even among the truly Indigenous who once prospered on and with the land (Barker, 2017).

Lastly, gentrification causes economic and housing insecurity, which can instigate intimate partner violence. Navigating multiple valences of structural violence, trans and gender-nonconforming people are already at increased risk of experiencing IPV. In the national survey collected by Henry et al. (2018), 71.8% of trans and gender-nonconforming respondents reported experiencing at least one form of IPV in their lifetime. Police often shield those who enact hate violence and GBV as they are guided by their own subjectivities, that may also hold anti-queer biases (Richie 2012; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 2011). Police are disproportionately likely to commit gender-based violence, both in the home through domestic disputes (Valentine, Oehme and Martin, 2012) and against queer and trans people who attempt to seek their help (NCAVP, 2016). Data overwhelmingly suggest that police officers in the United States do not respond satisfactorily to 911 calls for domestic disputes, thereby enabling violence (Mogul, Ritchie and Whitlock, 2011, 119). Additionally, many 911 calls made by LGBTQ people end up with the police physically assaulting the queer caller (NCAVP, 2016, USTS, 2015).

Importantly, both phenomena of police violence and GBV affect multiply-marginalized groups, whether cis Black or immigrant women or queer femmes. As Saidiya Hartman remarked, Black femme life is in part defined by an “incredible vulnerability to violence and to abuse” (2020). This is due to the

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S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

underlying corrective impulse, to maintain a cis-hetero-patriarchal social order, which views acts of gender subversion as particularly threatening. In this way, GBV epitomizes the spirit of policing. Only through acknowledgement of these interconnections are we able to exact abolitionist work.

Therefore, corrective violence is not only a distinctly gendered phenomenon, but one that queer-of-color activism is particularly well suited to address. The root of such work must be anti-corrective, so that abolition does not just eliminate physical institutions (jails and prisons), but rather, that it transforms the cultural institutions that lie at the foundation of our most harmful impulses. So while distinct campaigns such as #NoNewJails reflect abolitionist organizing, abolition itself “is constituted by so many acts long overlapping, dispersed across geographies and historical moments, that reveal the underside of the New World and its descendant forms - the police, jail, prison, criminal court, detention center, reservation, plantation, and ‘border’” (Rodríguez, 2019, 1577). It is also constituted by movements against penal attitudes (Berger, Kaba and Stein, 2017; Pepinsky, 1994) and the “carceral enclosures” that contain our corrective logics (Ben-Moshe, 2020, 111).

GRASSROOTS ANTI-VIOLENCE ACTIVISM

Arriving home one 4th of July, my wife and I noticed two lovers, both women, fighting. I note that it was an American holiday not for reverence of the date, but because holidays often accompany spikes in interpersonal violence. The lovers were noticeably intoxicated, especially the “stud,” as they walked from one party

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to a family BBQ in the neighborhood. An argument ensued because the femme lover did not want to go to the stud's family's BBQ; she wanted to stay home. At some point, the argument escalated and became physical. At the point of my arrival, the femme had been pushed into the street while attempting to use a parallel-parked-car as a buffer between her and her lover. She narrowly missed an oncoming car, speeding above the 25-mph limit for the city.

It took forty-five minutes and the twice unintentional shedding of blood to de-escalate the situation. Forty-five minutes on a New York City block is enough time to encounter an entire small town's worth of people. No one helped. No one stopped outside of the café. My partner and I only succeeded in moving them away from the café's doorstep because the country music served as a clear indicator that all of us were in danger of police violence at any moment. The back and forth of insults, the mutual cycles of aggression and self-pity, the little failures and successes to defuse finally – they remind me of the imperative of Black-led, queer, abolitionist organizing in Brooklyn.

According to Ejeris Dixon, transformative justice works when neighbors execute “bold, small experiments” to practice community accountability and reduce or eliminate interpersonal violence (Dixon and Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020, 19). Ejeris, the founding coordinator of the Safe OUTside the System Collective (SOS), believes in the power of community-based strategies for intervening in violence. This belief is grounded in a history of coordinated anti-violence movements that began largely in the 1970s, coinciding with the advent of mass incarceration and the growth of the carceral state (Pleck, 1987).

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S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

Transformative justice describes a system of responses to violence that relies on community and civil leadership, especially of those most impacted by violence, to identify and transform the root causes of violence (Kim, 2018).

The SOS Collective is the creation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) abolitionists of color who have committed to fighting state and hate violence without the use of the police.⁸ Its 15-year history of enacting abolitionist anti-violence organizing has only grown stronger and more strategic through the rapid, forced displacement of Central Brooklyn’s working-class people of African descent. SOS employs transformative justice (TJ) responses, acknowledging that interpersonal violence thrives in the context of structural violence: the poverty, ableism, racism, heterosexism embedded within coloniality exacerbate interpersonal division. TJ also allows practitioners to recognize that the *retributive justice* system, or regime of punishment that we currently endure, provides counter-deterrent measures that actually further entrench cultures of violence (Bazemore and Umbreit, 1995).

Therefore, community accountability organizers experiment and employ anti-violence tools in which the state doesn’t invest. Empowering community members with verbal violence de-escalation strategies is one such “bold, small experiment.” SOS offers trainings regularly and grounds this work as the

⁸ SOS is also the organizing body to which I have dedicated nearly the last decade; from which I have been offered an elevated analysis through sustained grassroots efforts (“experiments”) with recognizably positive results.

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foundation of its many community offerings. For example, The Safe Party Toolkit (2016) teaches how to minimize the likelihood of violent encounters during social gatherings.⁹ Community Security for protests and events provides a buffer between protestors and state agents or counter-protestors. There are workshops for safety planning when surviving IPV. All of these community engagements stimulate the propagation of learned, anti-violence in Brooklyn.

Verbal de-escalation is the centerpiece of it all. The larger community organizing center, the Audre Lorde Project (ALP), to which the Collective belongs, offers verbal de-escalation training and security training regularly and for free to its thousands of members and allies. Developed in conversation with other Black community organizations such as the Malcolm X Grassroots Project, the antiviolence strategies offered let community members identify their own core skills. Violence de-escalation can occur with humor, with empathy, with elder authority or youth leadership, etc. What fits each de-escalator is learned and personalized, and the idea is that each trained individual would feel not only personally responsible for intervening in violence, but *empowered to do so safely*.

Trainings mostly focus on the *how* of engagement: how do you communicate antiviolence with your posture or tone; how do you avoid attracting violence workers (police); how do you deliver a calming message? How do you offer a follow up that supports those who may be harmed in the interaction (or, especially

⁹ The Safe Party Toolkit is available, free for anyone, here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxlqoamGVS6IMV9oSy0zNGIYNEE/view>

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S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

in IPV situations, both parties, as healing and support is especially necessary to transform situations of sustained engagement)?

In my de-escalation of the fight between the lovers, I knew my best traits to engage were sincerity, sternness, and empathy. (I am not particularly funny, physically imposing, or elderly). Instead of flatly assuming a mimicry of a patriarchal power dynamic, I listened to the stud express anguish that her lover had hit and scratched her; I heard the femme describe her frustration with this arbitrary and forceful detention. I expressed sympathy for their pains and doubled-down on the need to never push or strike each other. In the breaks between the agitation – the calm openings – I stressed the urgency of separation for the day.

In the moments taken over by the chaos of anger, all that could be done was an attempt to create buffers between the two parties. We swiped the femme lover into the subway station, hoping that the physical bars would facilitate separation. In the Rockaway subway station, where the stillness of the (dependable) train delay required everyone to witness the commotion rather than keep-it-moving, it was ultimately the sustained, outside attention and my and my wife's unrelenting company that abated the tension. I collected both of their phone numbers so that I could verify that they were safe and separate that night, and refer them to a caring check-in from someone in the Collective.

Those who undergo safety training also learn *how* to identify violence. While some forms of violence are easily spotted; others are subtle, especially when in your own peer group, romantic relationship, or social structure. The violence of

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

the state can be especially veiled. This remains true regardless of how obvious the effects are: the unavailability of fresh food in my food desert, the early death of my people, the school-to-prison pipeline. Every training offers a theoretical and speculative introduction, which offers us not only a deeper grounding in the work, but also ownership over the *why* to engage.

The SOS Collective expanded the definition of violence during the Community Freestyle on *Space Violence* in 2014, under the leadership of Ejeris's successor, Che Johnson-Long. The annual Community Freestyle provides an opportunity for the neighborhood to come together and learn from member-led facilitators, "riff off each other" (exchange thoughts in a casual or even poetic manner), and develop new relationships. The Freestyles connect people intergenerationally and without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation, as allies are welcome. The Space Violence event featured four workshops, in two sessions where members could choose which to attend based on the relevance in their lives or what they desire to learn. The workshops focused on "being a supportive community member in a new neighborhood," "creating safe spaces," and two "know your rights" sessions, one in encounters with police, another for encounters with landlords. The event closed out with an open mic session.

This conceptual expansion transforms the collective members from passive victims of displacement to active participants in combatting neighborhood correction, a form of violence experienced by the majority of those involved in the anti-violence movement. Incorporating gentrification into the purview of the anti-violence collective allows for the work to extend into housing security

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

organizing. This proves particularly necessary given the problematic assumption that queer people are themselves a sign of gentrification or a new racialization of the neighborhood. The “Space Violence” framework also allows us to highlight the connections between the forms of violence that both queer people of color and straight men experience in Brooklyn at the hands of the state. It is this connection-making that encourages the involvement of Black cisgender-owned businesses in intervening in anti-trans violence on the block. In fact, when SOS started the Safe Neighborhood Campaign (SNC), the majority of businesses involved were owned by Black cismen.

HOW SPACE VIOLENCE COMPROMISES GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

The Safe Neighborhood Campaign’s central tenet is that anti-violence is a communal responsibility and local businesses are crucial entities nurturing and cultivating community. A fuller reduction of “the bystander effect” requires the participation of the businesses that often serve as the backdrop to violent public encounters. Therefore, the SNC initially set out to train business owners, managers and employees to become “safe spaces” that would provide safe harbor to queer people experiencing harassment, threat or assault on nearby streets. The imagined network of businesses would provide a geographical web which would cover the relatively small area of Central Brooklyn neighborhoods (predominantly Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights). This collaboration invites two major accomplishments: it halts some of the street-based removal of queer and trans people by cops and it increases the business flow into Black-owned businesses, by

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

queer patrons who want to support the livelihood of their neighbors. The mutuality affirms Black lives locally and forges connections between queer and straight community members.

The initial work of a Safe Space training as conceived by the SNC is, like de-escalation trainings, to identify the *why*'s of engagement. Why not just call the cops? Why bother do anything at all? We are able to do this with a “methodology of connection” that grounds us in the “historical present tense” (Rodríguez, 2019, 1576) necessary for the abolitionist imagination. That is, we engage the overlaps between our struggles more furiously than the disconnects, and we stress it while highlighting the continued marginalization and state of “normalized misery” that those of African descent endure, regardless of sexuality (Rodríguez, 2010, 8). This, in fact, puts us in a similarly queer position – outside of, contrary to, or disruptive of assumptions of what Americanness supposedly proffers. It also radically reframes the deviant label applied to Black trans people and the supposed “invulnerability” of the Black (queer) body (Rodriguez, Ben-Moshe, Rakes, 2020).

By 2018, the SNC included not just “brick-and-mortar” businesses, but also virtual businesses, cultural workers, and others who may be more transient (working from home, or shared workspaces). This transition was due not only to the desire to expand the network, but also to the striking decline in Black-owned physical spaces in Central Brooklyn. For example, in 2014, Che Johnson-Long, Ceci Piñeda and I trained a small café in Bed-Stuy owned by an enthusiastic, young Black (straight) woman. The training took four hours and especially

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

attended to the ways in which certain forms of structural violence - racism, nativism, homophobia, and transphobia - are connected. We ran through tactics of de-escalation, what to do when you hear antagonistic language yelled outside (deployments of “faggot” or rape threats, for example), and role-played some strategies that she could use since she owned a private space. I remember leaving an eager and engaged business owner. I remember holding cyphers in the space afterward just to support her business. I remember her rent rising in the following year and community members going out of their way to buy goods from her location. I remember her going out of business and losing her economic livelihood anyway. *This has happened to the majority of spaces that we trained in the first half of the 2010s.*

Therefore, gentrification limits the number of safe spaces available in a neighborhood for queer people of African descent. The rising cost of rent, both residential and commercial, means that not only are the old faces gone (elders and lifelong residents – who are often more likely to say something or intentionally witness a hostile exchange), but also the longtime, local business owners who develop personal relationships with residents, straight or queer. The high turnover, in a practical sense, makes on-the-ground training campaigns unsustainable. As soon as we trained a business, it closed down. As soon as it closed down, a new sign is erected, often something in French or Italian, with another class of clientele in mind. The new spaces transformed Black people into an indistinguishable, undesirable mass, even when purporting queer friendliness,

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

like the new café on my block, which hosts *RuPaul Drag Nights* for an all-white audience.

When I attempted the de-escalation in front of the café, the range of tactics that I could use were limited. The white-only nature of the café renovated it from a potential safe space that could aid in the intervention, into hostile territory that could invite violence workers at any moment. The safe spaces that were trained between 2010 and 2016 were trained with connection in mind: the violence we face is the violence you face. The violence has a different angle but the makeup remains. On the other hand, places that rely on “space violence” articulate that they are not only okay with our removal through housing displacement, but that when we – suited in various amalgamations of racialized, queer, and disabled codes – become nuisance, they are okay with our removal through criminalization and corrections.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *corrective development* describes the marriage of coercive logic with the clearing and resettling of our hometown by populations of greater racial capital. The regulatory desire to “clean up” a neighborhood is intimately linked to the white, heterosexist imagination that positions the queer and Black body as inherently sullied and sullyng. The streets that have been known as queer spaces are refashioned or repurposed for state-corporate commercial endeavors, which elites and the state then rely on the police to “clean up” or “perpetually surveil” (Dalton, 2007). This is well-known in certain New York (Manhattan) spaces such

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

as the Christopher Street Piers (Struening, 2016). It is less well-known that areas of Brooklyn, especially Coney Island and the Promenade underwent this process (Ryan, 2019). Today, we see the same patrolling of Riis Beach – just the queer side – that invites police harassment and brutality for the desire of commodifying the land (Fox, 2016; Sayers, 2021).

The mandate to “clean up the streets” also leaves some to suffer quality-of-life policing, which enables expansive measures to consign racialized people to the cyclical reality of labeling. Whether poor in real terms of income, or assumed poor through the lens of racial capitalism, this labeling allows those in power to assign criminality and deviant potential. The criminalized class then “requires” additional surveillance, which produces regularized punishments (especially through fines and jailing). These punishments accumulate and produce a “high crime area,” which then justifies increased policing. This cycle exists while securitization funds snowball and state violence workers take over our streets, our schools, our subways.

The queer praxis currently combatting corrective development embraces abolitionist methods to create and sustain life in this increasingly panoptic, punitive area. Our transformative methods decrease the likelihood of encountering the violence workers of the state and the institutions of corrections that liberal leadership seeks to multiply.¹⁰ Queer abolitionist community organizing also

¹⁰ In 2019, the administration of New York City’s Mayor Bill de Blasio allocated 8.7-billion-dollars to build four “modern,” borough-based jails to replace Rikers Island by 2026. With no firm

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

cultivates messages and methods to encourage and empower us to engage in anti-violence practices that can actively create the safety that we seek as a multiply-marginalized community.

Queer community organizing that centers transformative justice and community accountability holds the potential to radically reimagine our sense of deservingness. A collective struggle against the state and structural, space violence of gentrification amplifies the message that everyone deserves bodily integrity, livable shelter, a clean environment, food, and community. What does penal abolition mean to SOS and ALP? It means ridding the community not only of institutions of violence and corrections, but of the perpetual punishment of African bodies in the United States. It means enabling life-affirming institutions and practices that rehumanize us after slavery and colonization. This is abolition, reimagined by queer collectivity in Brooklyn, NY.

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deadline to actually close Rikers facilities, activists fear that by 2026, a new administration will retain Rikers and utilize new jails to expand incarceration.

**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
Article forthcoming in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2022
S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

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**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
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S.M. Rodriguez, London School of Economics and Political Science

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**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
Organizing in Gentrifying Times**
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**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
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**Queers Against Corrective Development: LGBTSTGNC Anti-Violence
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