

## Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City

The city has become the sign of desire.

—Pat Califia, “San Francisco: Revisiting the ‘The City of Desire’”

**Martin F.  
Manalansan IV**

What does it mean to claim a space for queers of color in the global city of New York?<sup>1</sup> How do queer communities of color stake out a territory beyond ghettos and enclaves and beyond demarcated moments such as Pride Days and ethnic celebrations? These questions haunt the struggles, rituals, and practices of African American, Latino, and Asian American queers as they engage with the travails of urban life today.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite the centrality of the city as the site of queer cultural settlement, imagination, and evolution in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, larger economic and political forces have increasingly and vociferously shaped, fragmented, dispersed, and altered many queers of color’s dreams and desires.<sup>3</sup> These forces can be traced to the emergence of post-Fordist capitalism and its concomitant neoliberal policies and are most palpable in cities worldwide.

In the past few decades, new forms of urban governance have taken root in many cities and, in particular, global cities like New York.<sup>4</sup> Neoliberal policies seek to delimit governmental intervention, increase privatization, and remove the safeguards of welfare services, creating a virtual free-for-all arena for economic market competition.<sup>5</sup> Such policies have redrawn boundaries, neighborhoods, and lives and given rise to insidious forms of surveillance of and violence in communities of color.<sup>6</sup>

This essay critically examines and documents the violent remapping of lives, bodies, and desires of queers of color in contemporary New York caused by neoliberal practices. This remapping is the result of expansion of private businesses as well as city, state, and federal efforts not only in so-called crime prevention efforts and “quality of life” campaigns since the early nineties but also in what has come to be called homeland security after September 11. Using two New York City spaces, the Christopher Street piers in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village and the Jackson Heights neighborhoods in Queens, I assess how various neoliberal agents and institutions such as mass media, private businesses, and the state (including the police) mediate discourses about changing urban space. By mass

media, I include not only mainstream ones but also various publications that purport to serve the “gay community.” Examples from recent gay print media show that a significant number of gay journalists and scholars are in fact complicit with neoliberal interests.

To further elucidate this contention, it is important to note that neoliberal processes are partly constituted by a particular kind of sexual politics that Lisa Duggan has rightly called homonormativity.<sup>7</sup> Homonormativity is a chameleon-like ideology that purports to push for progressive causes such as rights to gay marriage and other “activisms,” but at the same time it creates a depoliticizing effect on queer communities as it rhetorically remaps and recodes freedom and liberation in terms of privacy, domesticity, and consumption.<sup>8</sup> In other words, homonormativity anesthetizes queer communities into passively accepting alternative forms of inequality in return for domestic privacy and the freedom to consume.

Through ethnographic observations and analysis of everyday lives and public spaces in the two neighborhoods, I describe how homonormativity creates violent struggles around urban space by queers of color. These forms of violence are characterized by their structural character spawned by neoliberal economic, political, and cultural policies and practices. By structural violence, I mean the informal and formal processes by which institutions promote what the social theorist Roderick Ferguson has called “ideologies of discreteness,”<sup>9</sup> or practices that seek to demarcate and police racial, ethnic, class, and sexual spaces and boundaries, while creating physical, emotional, and symbolic brutalities and cruelties toward marginalized peoples.

This kind of violence transforms the built environment, eradicating spaces imbued with meanings that coalesce around marginalized identities. For example, Samuel Delany eloquently chronicled how new urban policies around Times Square have created new forms of policing that not only transformed the architectural landscape or built environment but also altered the lifeways of numerous groups of people of color who used to hang out on the sidewalks and corners of the area for sex, leisure, and other forms of commerce. Not only are these groups visibly disciplined, they are also sequestered at a safe distance and are typically dispersed when they are seen to be a “nuisance” or are suspected of causing public annoyance or disturbance particularly to patrons and owners of new swank businesses.<sup>10</sup>

To underscore the insidious ways in which homonormativity is inscribed in hegemonic discourses and participates in these ideologies of discreteness, I suggest that established authorities and institutions such as police and city government are not the only perpetrators of this form of neoliberal violence; they also include a motley of mostly white gay

scholars from both sides of the political spectrum. For example, in the much-lauded book *The World Turned*, John D’Emilio, the eminent gay historian, encapsulates the contemporary queer moment as a celebratory one and goes on to enumerate the important social gains gays and lesbians have garnered in the past twenty years. By doing so, he can comment on the issue of inequality among gays and lesbians. D’Emilio, by no means a conservative, argues that the idea of racial differences and differential privilege should not be considered when coming to terms with gay oppression. At this moment of gay triumph, he posits that differences between white gays and gays of color are immaterial. He suggests that, in fact, all gays are oppressed and any move that attempts to delineate or complicate intragroup differences is an impolitic act.

The assumption that privilege makes one politically suspect or somehow inadequate as an agent of social change also threatens to obscure the truth at the heart of our movement: *All* homosexuals are oppressed; gay oppression is real and vicious. It isn’t necessary to shed extra tears for the plight of prosperous white gay men in order to acknowledge that if one scratches below the surface of any gay life, one will find a bottomless well of pain whose source is oppression. And gays with privilege risk their status and expose themselves to penalties when they make the leap to activism.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, the preceding quotation may seem to be a surprising statement coming from one of the most admired and respected progressive gay scholars and activists. However, I do not take this statement as occasion for a personal indictment against D’Emilio, whose works are to be admired, but rather as symptomatic of the insidious forces of homonormativity that encompasses political affiliations of all sorts. In her critique of gay pundits like Andrew Sullivan, Duggan argues for not dividing homonormative ideas in terms of conservative and progressive camps but rather framing these seeming political extremes as part of a continuum of ideas whose proponents are complicit with the stabilizing and normalizing of specific forms of capitalist inequalities. D’Emilio’s statement is indicative of the now-emerging call for “color-blindness” within the gay community and in the larger community. This call is based on the increasing privatization of gay struggles. For example, shows like *Will and Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* enable the parsing of identity wherein freedom to be gay is mobilized through niche marketing. Taking this logic to the extreme, to be gay and to be free therefore means to wear Prada. In other words, identity follows consumption.

The market is constructed to be the filter of gay freedom and progress so much so that dominant discourses in the gay community disregard how this kind of freedom is predicated on the abjection of other groups of people

Taking this logic  
to the extreme,  
to be gay and  
to be free  
therefore means  
to wear Prada.  
In other words,  
identity follows  
consumption.

who are not free to consume and do not have access to these symbolic and material forms of capital. Therefore, if one were to construe the free market as a kind of competitive arena or war zone, then the unnamed enemy in neoliberal warfare is not as varied as the proclivities and activities of these diverse groups of activists and politicians. Rather, on closer inspection what is seemingly a chaotic assemblage of political culprits fuses into the figure of the female and the feminized, the foreigner, the colored, the sexually deviant and the poor. In other words, queers of color are located at the crux of veiled homonormative rhetorical machinations of mostly white gay commentators and scholars.

To better understand these rhetorical strategies, I deploy a triangulated exploration of space, race, and queerness. However, while studies of space, race, and queerness and queer identities have proliferated since the mid- to late nineties,<sup>12</sup> these works have largely focused on the emergent qualities and valiant struggles to claim spaces by various gays, lesbians, and other queers. Such queer spatial narratives are notably lacking in their analyses of the relationships between queer cultural production and struggles with race and political-economic processes.

The axes and intersections that provide the framework for my analysis of queers of color struggles and narratives include the redrawing of boundaries between public and private, the creation of new forms of exclusions and access, consumption and citizenship. I pose the following questions that transform the concerns I outlined above into guiding frames of analysis. How does homonormativity operate on the ground (the ethnographic question)? How does the operation of homonormativity as a body of discourses inflect and shape narratives about space and race among queers of color? Also, what other kinds of narratives about various physical and symbolic topographies are imagined and enabled by homonormative practices?

### **Jackson Heights: Disappearance and Emergence**

Jackson Heights, like many other neighborhoods in the New York City borough of Queens, presents a kaleidoscope of communities that can be gleaned from the business signs and billboard ads along the main roads and the pedestrians who walk the streets. Sights and sounds of Spanish, Korean, Hindi, and many other languages declare the panoply of peoples and cultures that crisscross and overlap each other. Jackson Heights and Queens occupy a peculiar location in popular cartography of the city. For many people, including its own inhabitants, Jackson Heights is outside “the city” that is Manhattan. As such, it also occupies a relative outsider

status in relation to the mainstream gay neighborhoods of Manhattan like the Village, Chelsea, and, recently, Hell's Kitchen. As *HX*, a popular gay magazine, puts it, Jackson Heights and the non-Manhattan neighborhoods are all "Out There," which is the category the magazine uses to catalog all the gay activities that happen beyond the glare of mainstream limelight.<sup>13</sup>

Jackson Heights's gay bars and other queer spaces coexist with the multiethnic enclave economies that inhabit the same geographic location. At the same time, residences of various kinds from buildings to brick townhouses or row houses span out from the main thoroughfares, particularly Roosevelt Avenue where the main arteries of the New York City subway system converge around 73rd and 74th streets.

The recent history of the neighborhood as told by my informants of queers of color, many of whom have lived in the area for more than ten years, is typically constructed not through a linear chronology but in somewhat aberrant cycles of disintegration and reconstitution of spaces. For example, as one Colombian informant told me,<sup>14</sup> the gay bars on Roosevelt Avenue have come and gone, including a couple of really "private" bars or hangouts one needed a password or someone from the neighborhood to gain access to. These aberrant cycles are apparent in how spaces in the neighborhood have been subject to the conflicting processes of disappearance, disintegration, disciplining as well as emergence and so-called renaissance of places and venues.

One popular narrative about the transformation of the streets in the past five to ten years is through what most informants term as a "cleaning up," not in the sense of physical hygiene but in terms of routing out queer public-sex spaces. In particular, most people would talk about Vaseline Alley, which is an area not too far away from the main thoroughfare where cruising and some form of public sex were performed. But unlike most mainstream gay narratives of urban public-sex spaces where nostalgia and sense of privilege permeate the stories, narratives around Vaseline Alley are quite different. While the Alley, according to some informants, may still be a location where illicit activities may still take place depending on the time of year and hour of the day, the place has quieted down. As one informant framed it, "the nervous energy" of lust and desire has been shunted away or, in the words of an astute queer observer, "muffled" from public view. It is now more than ever just an ordinary street in an immigrant neighborhood. At least, that is what it presents at first glance.

Nowadays, the narratives are punctuated not only by some nostalgic longing but are strongly marked by fear and some kind of disbelief and even puzzlement. Some informants were especially cognizant of the changes after September 11. While many informants who were neither South Asian

As one informant  
framed it, "the  
nervous energy"  
of lust and  
desire has been  
shunted away  
or, in the words  
of an astute  
queer observer,  
"muffled" from  
public view.

nor Muslim did not readily feel any negative response immediately, after several months, they reported sightings of immigration, FBI, and CIA officials in the neighborhood, and these figured in many fearful gossip and informal accounts.

A Puerto Rican informant told me that while he initially did not see himself implicated in the imagined terrorist havens supposedly embedded in Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrant communities, he nevertheless noticed that there were more arrests and rounding up of Mexican and other Latino men, most if not all of whom were undocumented. These men typically stood around or sat on the sidewalks of Roosevelt Avenue waiting for someone in a car or van looking for cheap labor in construction, food service, and other industries to hire them. He noted that there seemed to be more surveillance of the neighborhood as evident from the increased presence of uniformed police around the public areas. He also mentioned that he has increasingly noticed individual or groups of mostly white men hanging around who clearly did not belong to the neighborhood. At the same time, he said that while the Latino men waiting and looking for work still occupy the sidewalks and are still hungry for work, he and other Latinos who are otherwise employed or who seek employment in other ways have started to not hang out in these public areas for sexual or economic purposes.

A Filipino gay man I interviewed also talked about what he perceived to be the disappearance of the groups of men that he labeled as Arabo for “Arab,” for the Middle Eastern and South Asian men who used to hang out in a couple of corners and would whistle at him every time he passed by.<sup>15</sup> They were nowhere to be seen, and, as he said, they disappeared “like smoke” or were “in hiding.” “From what?” I asked. He could only guess, “the government” or “Mister Bush.”

These narratives point to how the various styles of occupying everyday public spaces have been radically altered so that an innocent staking out of public space for whatever reason can easily be couched as “loitering,” “vagrancy,” or a suspicious congregation of people. Thus these public spaces are subject to intense monitoring that once started with former mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s “quality of life” program and now blur into questions of “national security.” This is evident in my informants’ lingering suspicions that the police and “other authorities” have equated the brown, black, and yellow bodies to be possible dangerous entities, purveyors of terror by reason of their color and in some instances of their so-called suspicious maleness. I coined this phrase to capture the various ways in which queers of color have taken the official state terrorist profile of a Middle Eastern or South Asian male in their teens to late forties. But while it may seem that such a profile releases “other” racial and ethnic groups

such as Latino and East or Southeast Asian from being implicated in this tawdry and messy affair, several informants insist that in the gritty light of everyday life, difference is always and already suspect. As one Puerto Rican informant said, “If you are not a white man, it does not matter, you will be scrutinized. You are not an ordinary citizen. If you are a little dark, then you better watch how you walk in front of them [the police].” Therefore quotidian images of citizenship and safety in the neighborhood are encased in racialized terms and colored by fear and trepidation.

Narratives about public spaces by gay Latino and Asian men have been transformed into what Teresa Caldeira calls the “talk of crime.”<sup>16</sup> These discourses involve a “symbolic re-ordering of the world” through “everyday narratives, commentaries, conversation and jokes that have crime and fear as their subject.” While at first glance these “talks of fear and crime” might reproduce and “naturalize” stereotypes,<sup>17</sup> they also talk about a commonality of experience. This is not to suggest an emergence of an organic solidarity across racial lines. Rather, there is a collective acknowledgment of how these queers of color who are neither South Asian nor Middle Eastern are not free from profiling, from the racist and racializing practices of state authorities, and how they are, to some extent, in the same predicament. I suggest that this situation may become the impetus or basis for political action to which I turn in the final section.

Interestingly, the reported evacuation of particular scenes and the alleged disappearance of groups of people coincided with other discourses around Jackson Heights as the new exotic gay mecca. The Manhattan-based mainstream gay press has created travelogue-like essays about the gay attractions in the neighborhood for adventurous outsiders and Manhattanites willing to “risk” the foray into uncharted territories. Consider this passage from the recent issue of *NEXT*, a weekly guide to the city’s gay activities and hangouts: “Might there be something that Manhattan snobs (like myself) are missing out on in those other boroughs? . . . To find out, a few friends and I got Metrocards, brushed up on our Spanish, prepared ourselves for the unknown, and ventured out to Jackson Heights, a racially diverse neighborhood in Queens which hosts a thriving gay scene and sublime Mexican food.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, this initial passage combines the culinary and the sexual quite purposively. The main idea is that Jackson Heights is not a space but a commodity to be consumed and literally eaten up for people who will spend a few hours being temporary gay tourists. Consider the next passage from the same article:

But don’t label us Christopher Columbus just yet. It’s not like we found a brand new gay scene. Jackson Heights has had a queer vibe since the 1940s.



Local nightlife impresario, Eddie Valentine informed us that “Jackson Heights had always been a predominately [*sic*] gay neighborhood, but it’s always been very quiet.” The bars have been subdued, they didn’t scream ‘gay’ because two more bars are opening up this month. I envision [*sic*] Jackson Heights becoming Chelsea with a Latin bite. And bite we did.<sup>19</sup>

Here are two seemingly paradoxically opposed or unrelated processes of the disintegrating and fear-laden neighborhood landscapes and an emergent and vibrant gay nightlife. But the scenarios are not of two Jackson Heights—the insider, or resident’s point of view, and the outsider—but rather of a neighborhood in the throes of two interrelated and intersecting forms of violence. The narrative of emergent gay life in this “Latino version of Chelsea” is premised on the performance of consumption. Indeed, like many contemporary narratives of gay mainstreaming, the practices of touristic consumption constitute the central performative scripts of good gay citizens.

As the article suggests, Jackson Heights is something that one “bites” into. It is not a habitat or dwelling but a temporary site for leisure and space for sociality to be eaten and quickly swallowed. At the same time, the neighborhood’s considerable marketing allure is its relative exoticness. Like a gay Columbus, the author of the travel guide performs the role of being able to conquer and hold at bay the other less palatable side of this location. The unsavory side includes the criminalization of South Asian and Middle Eastern people who have been gendered male and marked as sexually deviant. This situation has caused a veritable conjunction of conflicting identities and practices.

Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai powerfully recorded and analyzed the ambivalent and rather violent confrontation of immigrant heteronormativity and national xenophobia after September 11.<sup>20</sup> In their study, the coalescing of the images of the terrorist monster, the foreigner, and the sexually deviant into the figure of the South Asian immigrant has become evident not only in mainstream media images but also in the everyday practices of South Asian individuals and organizations—a good number of these were situated in Jackson Heights. The fear and suspicion that abound in the community have lead to extreme displays of patriotism such as the profusion of American flags on all the South Asian businesses immediately after the World Trade Center bombings and the removal of turbans as everyday wear for Sikh men. These fearful measures were performed under the duress of being questioned and surveilled for possible unpatriotic political leanings and desires. And yet, as I have suggested above, this is not the complete picture.

The narratives of fear told by a racialized, sexualized, and criminal-



ized group of gay immigrants and the exuberant tale of an emerging gay mostly Latino culture are mutually constitutive elements of a neoliberal portrait of Jackson Heights. Such a portrait is founded on the artificial bounding of identities into discrete elements. A Latino is not an Arab or a Filipino is not the same as a Pakistani, or an immigrant is not the same as an American. Such concatenation of negations and affirmations promote facile separations of political agendas. Mainstream gay culture has been calcified into the enactments of consumption rituals—buying, eating, dancing, wearing, and, yes, even fucking. Indeed, there is rarely any mention in the gay media of these kinds of tensions between other forms of gay cultures or other communities as well as the stepped-up policing of communities of color. The connections between the common narratives of fear and the intrusions of private gay enterprise are blissfully ignored. Jackson Heights’s predicament is made clearer by parallel kinds of developments in Christopher Street in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village.

### **The Village and Christopher Street: Fenced-Out Lives**

The Christopher Street piers no longer exist. As cruising and socializing areas in the seventies and eighties, they occupy an important place in the memories and imaginaries of queers, particularly queers of color. The piers were also the sites for Latino and African American queer youth who would prance around and practice their voguing moves and conduct informal competitions and runway shows. These piers and the surrounding environs were places for queers of color to congregate and to commune. But far from being a utopic space, the piers nevertheless signify the days when queers felt they owned the sites.

Located at the intersection of Christopher Street and the West Side Highway, several of these piers jutted out into the Hudson River. Today, the spaces have been dismantled and given way to a manicured park that runs the length of the highway beyond the confines of the Village. Near its edge, instead of the rundown warehouses, you find new buildings—mostly apartment and condominium complexes rising up along the water. A fountain and several meters of wire fences mark the intersection, and a jogging, biking, or skating path threads through several blocks of the pier. While this may seem to invite more leisure activities, many of my queer of color informants said that this was not built for them. One Latino gay man said, “We don’t come here to rollerblade or jog. We come here to practice our [voguing] moves. But we are told [by the police] not to play any loud music or to carry on. How can you have a bunch of queens and not carry on?”

The Christopher  
Street piers no  
longer exist. As  
cruising and  
socializing areas  
in the seventies  
and eighties,  
they occupy an  
important place  
in the memories  
and imaginaries  
of queers,  
particularly  
queers of color.

Surrounding the walkways are concrete plant holders punctuated by what many queer African American and Latinos have reported as increased visible police presence. While the queers of color still try to hold court in these spaces, they can do so only at certain times, and they are definitely discouraged and disciplined from congregating in the early hours of the morning and from being too rowdy. Between 2 and 5 a.m., the police show up in full force to make sure that no trouble occurs when the bars start closing. As one African American informant said, “They want to make sure to point us to the right direction—right to the Path Train [to New Jersey] station or to the number one subway. Girl, they make sure we don’t hang around and we go on right home after we have spent all our money in the bars here [in the Village].”

The present environment has led several African American and Latino queers I interviewed to remark that while many people have marveled at the area’s transformation—particularly around the literal and metaphoric “cleaning up” of the piers and the surrounding streets from vagrants, “gangs,” and other “unwanted” groups—they have lost something that could never be replaced: a sense of ownership of the area. Moreover, they complained that not only has the place become too expensive but it has also become hostile toward them.

One African American narrated how he and several of his friends were prevented from congregating in front of a new condominium on the West Side Highway. The building guard told them that they were scaring unit owners. The informant said, “You think we were garbage or something. So just to spite him [the guard], we turned on the boom box and strutted to Chaka and worked the sidewalk. The guard was so pissed but we didn’t care.”

Many of them also talked about the many ways in which they have been sequestered into particular areas. Despite the crowds of queers of color traipsing the sidewalks of Christopher Street, many still confided their feelings of being slowly eased out of the neighborhood. While queers of color frequent most of the bars on the street west of Seventh Avenue, for the past twenty years white upper-class people populated most of the surrounding residential areas. As one queer said, “We can only own Christopher Street for a few hours of the day—and for a couple of days of the week. But this is our street! How can we manage to stay here?”

No one quite knows the answer. However, these narratives can be counterposed with another emergent narrative, this time of the opulence and glamour that are part of the area’s new spatial narratives. These narratives are found not only in feature articles but in real estate ads. One prime piece of real estate in particular, advertised in the *Gay City*, a mainstream gay newspaper, is actually on the other side of the Hudson

and overlooks this fabled waterfront. Not surprisingly, the building is called “The Pier.”

The Pier—Rising from the Hudson, The Pier stands as the newest landmark to living on the water. Reserved for the few . . . the resident’s view is majestic. . . . the Manhattan skyline seems within reach and beckons to be touched. A statement of status and choice, The Pier offers a variety of luxuries and homes melded in contemporary architecture the essence of function. The Pier is a concept of living and a measurement of worth and style. The Pier . . . like no other.<sup>21</sup>

The play on the word *pier* against the meaning of *peer* is quite informative. The ad’s subtle use of gay lore about the piers is utilized to ironically magnify the condominium’s exclusivity. It seems to suggest, “This is ‘ours’ yet only a select group of ‘us’ get to live in it.” The rhetorical play parallels a neoliberal tactic that purveys inequality in the guise of similitude. In other words, much like the rhetoric of neoliberal gay pundits like John D’Emilio, the stabilization of difference is enacted to justify inequality. Indeed, the pier—both the renovated docks and the new condominiums—is about fencing off unwanted colored bodies, yet these elements of the built environment are rhetorically rendered as positive outcomes and developments for all queers. At the same time, such a declaration is possible only by symbolically and physically sequestering colored queer bodies. Colored queer bodies, if one were to dismantle the rhetoric, muddle if not muddy the “gay waters.” If one were to follow D’Emilio’s arguments, then, queers of color issues are rendered merely as “grievances” irrelevant to and in fact inimical to the understanding of the queer moment.

Presently, the mainstream gay agenda is preoccupied with privatized desires and issues, one of which is gay marriage. Gay marriage, according to many scholars and activists, cannot be muddied by and muddled with these other “external” issues. Marriage, like all of the other important gay agenda items, is really about keeping and maintaining the rights to privacy. Privacy was also the linchpin in the striking down of sodomy laws by the U.S. Supreme Court. Privacy and its propelling energies can uplift capitalist markets free from government intervention. Privacy is also about the needs and desires of the moneyed few who can fulfill them by indulging in the right brand of cosmetics and blue jeans and the correct exclusive home address. It is privacy, as Lisa Duggan tells us, in all its modulations and inflections, that shapes the very ethos of neoliberal homonormative conceptions of freedom—free to consume and to possess despite the hordes of lives and bodies fenced out of these extremely private and privatized domains.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it is privacy that induces some activists and contemporary scholars alike to parse out identities and social locations

---

Colored queer

---

bodies, if one

---

were to dismantle

---

the rhetoric,

---

muddle if not

---

muddy the

---

“gay waters.”

---

like race and sexuality as distinct stable categories and entities. Based on Roderick Ferguson's ideas, we can see that this practice of focusing on the discreteness of categories leads to the violent homonormative order of gay things, spaces, and bodies.<sup>23</sup>

### **Hopes for an Urban Democratic Future**

Based on my charting of the narratives of Jackson Heights and the Greenwich Village piers, I suggest that the increasing visibility of elegant condominiums, gay bars, and gay-friendly restaurants and other businesses go hand in hand with the other narratives of decreased visibility if not obliteration of queerness and race in the city's streets and other public venues. The seeming antipodal narratives of emergence and disappearance actually mutually constitute a form of structural violence. The rise of a vibrant exclusive real estate, gay commodified businesses, and other signs of the new gentrified New York are based on the very process of eradication and disappearance of the unsightly, the vagrant, the alien, the colored, and the queer.

While these narratives of fear and of structural violence need not involve actual physical violence, reports of increased frequency of actual beatings, harassments, and assaults of queers of color actually amplify the urgency of these stories. I submit that physical violence is a more overt manifestation of structural violence. A recent report from the Anti-Violence Project,<sup>24</sup> a lesbian and gay agency that aims to document and fight violence against queers, has presented evidence that while the number of cases involving violence against white queers have remained constant, the number of cases against queers of colors—particularly blacks, Latinos, and, most recently, Middle Eastern and South Asian queers—have doubled if not quadrupled. The dramatic and ruthless physical violence needs to be interpreted beyond the sheer number of those actually reported and understood in terms of the thousands more cases that have gone unreported or unmarked because of fear of the police and other figures of authority. Most important, these ghastly reports also need to be read with and against the highly muted if not muffled sights and sounds of structural violence that have been steadily aimed at effacing queers of color spaces and silencing their voices.

Now the question is, what is to be done? Here again, I follow the example set out by Lisa Duggan, who looks to coalition work across identities, causes, and politics as alternative tactics to the traditional activist practices.<sup>25</sup> The kinds of expansive coalition work she briefly outlined in

her latest book calls for dismantling the neoliberal programs that mystify and constitute inequalities and moving beyond the culture/economy split.<sup>26</sup> At this juncture, I go back to my initial suggestion above that the narratives of fear of queers of color need not be construed as either hysterical unfounded stories or empty useless talk. Rather, these stories can be the foundation for politicizing the citizenry and can be used as a wake-up call from the stupor of single-issue activism. As these narratives symbolically reorder the social environment, they can also serve as the pivot for mobilizing groups and constituencies to spearhead multilateral changes. Queers of color can potentially harness the fear and trepidation through a systematic and consistent organizing around cross-ethnic/racial and multisectoral issues by organizations equipped for such purposes. As possible models, Duggan points to exemplary organizations like the Audre Lorde Project, which “organizes queers of color . . . to address issues from immigration and HIV prevention, to violence and employment.”<sup>27</sup> Drawing a partial map of the way out of the debacle, she eloquently proffers the following words: “Calls for expansive democratic publicness, *combined* with arguments for forms of individual and group autonomy, attempts to redefine *equality, freedom, justice* and *democracy* in ways that exceed their limited (neo)liberal meanings. They gesture away from *privatization* as an alibi for stark inequalities, and away from personal responsibility as an abdication of public, collective caretaking.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite the battles and struggles that queers of color are currently waging, cities still hold the promise of redemption. For many queers, urban space offers some semblance of a possible democratic future.<sup>29</sup> Amid their hopes and disintegrating dreams, queers of color forge on. If, as Pat Califia has suggested, the city has become the sign of desire,<sup>30</sup> then New York City in the twenty-first century has become the sign and the site for the violent contestation of desire as queers of color resist and refuse the onslaught of urban neoliberal oblivion.

## Notes

This article was originally presented in the annual meeting of the American Studies Association. Special thanks to Lisa Lowe for convening the panel—together with Nayan Shah, David Eng, and Rod Ferguson—and for her comments and continued support. A revised version was presented in a lecture sponsored by the Center for the Study of Sexual Cultures and the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. I would like to thank Lawrence Cohen, Michael Lucey, and Aihwa Ong for their insights and questions. Siobhan Somerville provided a sensitive and encouraging reading of the first draft. I thank her for her incisive comments, collegiality, and friendship. Urbana-Champaign will be bleak without her presence.

1. I am cognizant of the fact that New York has a unique function as a global city and, as such, is subject to specific if not amplified operations of neoliberalist economic, political, and cultural processes that may diverge from other urban neoliberal experiences across the world. As an anthropologist, I believe that my role is to demonstrate the particularities of neoliberalism in specific global/local spaces. See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. I am aware of the problems of cross-racial groupings, but I use “queers of color” here as a provisional and strategic mode of understanding commonality experiences that can become a basis for broad-based coalition while recognizing numerous forms of difference.

3. Kath Weston, “‘Get Thee to a Big City’: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” *GLQ* 2 (1995): 254–77.

4. I used neoliberal urban governance and not “gentrification” to move away from the popular notion of the latter as an organic, natural supplanting of on-site inhabitants by outside forces and agents. I wanted to highlight how New York City’s neoliberal policies are not like many cities, particularly those of the third world, that are mediated by institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund; instead, the very forces at work are situated within the city itself as a global financial center.

5. For a schema of new forms of urban politics, see Margit Mayer, “Post Fordist City Politics,” in *Post Fordism: A Reader*, ed. Ash Amin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

6. See Andrea McArdle and Tanya Erzen, eds., *Zero Tolerance: Quality of Life and the New Police Brutality in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

7. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 173–94. See also Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003).

8. *Ibid.*, 179.

9. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

10. Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

11. John D’Emilio, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 152.

12. See, for example, Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, eds., *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay, 1997).

13. See “‘Out There’: The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City,” chapter 3 of my book *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). In this chapter, I argue for the intersecting “grids of difference that both fragment the queer spaces in New York City and at the same time create and constitute a unitary narrative of inside/outside and colored/white.

14. I use the term *Latino* for Spanish-speaking men for whom I was unable to get their specific ethnic identities; I use Colombian, Puerto Rican, and Mexican categories for men who self-identified as such.

15. This observation about “Arabos” has been eerily echoed by other queer Filipinos in other parts of the greater New York metropolitan area. See my essay “A Gay World Make-Over: An Asian American Queer Critique,” in *Asian American Studies after Critical Mass*, ed. Kent Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 104–5.
16. Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4.
17. Ibid.
18. Art Dias, “Hitting the Jackson Heights: Chelsea with a Latin Bite. Grrrr . . .,” *NEXT*, 26 September 2003, 25.
19. Ibid.
20. Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text*, no. 72 (2002): 117–48.
21. *Gay City News*, 26 September–2 October 2003.
22. Duggan, “New Homonormativity,” 190.
23. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*.
24. See [www.avp.org](http://www.avp.org).
25. Duggan, *Twilight of Equality*, 67–88.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 87.
28. Ibid.
29. See David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 82–95.
30. Pat Califia, “San Francisco: Revisiting the ‘The City of Desire,’” in Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space*, 177–96.



