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### Vigilant citizenship

*Legal imaginaries and political subjectivity in Miami*

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Chapter 2  
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IMAGINING MIAMI

Figure 2.1. "Hire Overtown, End Segregation", March 2015.

## TALES OF MIAMI

In early 2015, I caught a first glimpse of the city that would become my new home. A city that I was going to explore, get to know, and make my own. I had never visited Miami before, and I can still feel the excitement of seeing the beach, the grid infrastructure of the city streets, and the condominiums from my window seat. My imagination based on popular culture was immediately triggered and became intertwined with my immediate reality: I'm going to Miami. The name for a metropole with 4.1 million residents that consists of several different cities, including the City of Miami, Miami Beach, and Coral Gables, which also explains why there are different police departments (Nijman, 2011).

If it were up to Marcus, the owner of an Overtown barbershop, this dissertation would have been called "Beyond the Magic City". I had asked him to suggest a title, and he told me that my research was about "the real Miami". Marcus specifically differentiated between Miami Beach and Overtown. In his comparison, Miami Beach, and South Beach in particular, represented Miami's popular national and international image: palm trees, beach, Art Deco style architecture, entertainment, nightlife, and expensive cars. A "magic city" indeed. Overtown's reputation, on the other hand, was that of an impoverished neighborhood with a high crime rate and intense police surveillance. To Marcus, Miami's gritty side, characterized by crime and insecurity, tended to be overlooked compared to the city's sites of luxury and entertainment. According to him, it was this "real" side that my research explored.

His representation of Miami as a divided city is grounded in the city's racial segregation and unequal distribution of wealth amongst its residents. These perceptions are reflected in both popular culture and academic debate. In his song *Hustlin'* (2006), Miami rapper Rick Ross explains that the city's reputation as a "playboy paradise" is "just a façade: the bridge separates South Beach from my Miami, the real Miami." In the corresponding video clip, we see Ross driving a white BMW across the bridge, leaving the City of Miami Beach to enter a part of the City of Miami where mostly Black and Latino residents engage in various kinds of business: this is where he "hustles". Various TV shows, videogames, and movies have similarly used Miami as exotic but gritty décor, a vice-ridden city marked by crime and insecurity, for example, *Miami Vice*, *CSI: Miami*, *Dexter*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, and *Scarface*. Academic literature has also attended to the idea of Miami as a classic tale of two cities. In her work on the effects of civic culture on public policy, Juliet Gainsborough (2008: 419) suggests that "any discussion of Miami is really a discussion about two different Miamis"; she

views it as a city of two wealth poles, without a significant middle class. Quantitative studies (e.g., Bloomberg, 2016) support the perception of Miami as a highly unequal city, consistently ranking the metropole as one of the poorest cities in the US, even as it houses some of the wealthiest residential enclaves in the nation.

In addition to these tales of utopian magic and dystopian grittiness, local residents and academics alike see Miami as an exceptionally transnational city. The vast majority of researchers who study Miami focus on how migrant population groups, especially Cuban-Americans, have transformed the urban environment. Authors have dubbed Miami the "capital of Latin America" (Portes and Stepick, 1993), and the "gateway to the Americas" (Nijman, 2011). Focusing on its geographical position and migrant groups, these scholars point out that Miami offers exceptional business opportunities, making it unlike any other city in the US. In their view, companies and businesses based in Miami can tap into Latin American markets, while simultaneously enjoying the protected and legal environment of the US. In *City on the Edge*, Portes and Stepick (1993: xi) write: "Miami is not a microcosm of the American city. It never was." Based on its rapid growth through immigration and its Spanish-speaking majority population, the authors depict Miami as a melting pot with a fundamentally different sociopolitical and cultural character than other US cities.

The first aim of this contextual chapter is to unpack these spatial imaginaries of Miami: its "magic". I discuss the dominant imaginaries of Miami that circulate in popular culture and academic literature, and amongst local residents who engage with these imaginaries in their everyday lives. These imaginaries consist of ideas about the general characteristics that make places unique, of idealized representations of a certain geography, both in a negative and a positive sense (e.g., Watkins, 2015; Jaffe, 2012b; Gregory, 2004). Spatial imaginaries share resemblances to social and legal imaginaries, all referring to broadly shared understandings, of sociopolitical, cultural, and legal systems respectively. They are different in the sense that spatial imaginaries refer specifically to widespread ideas of a space or place, such as a city, a country, or a neighborhood. Spatial imaginaries tend to "fabricate ideas of difference" (Gregory, 2004: 17), spaces of exception, creating binary categorizations of a space that belongs to "us" and a space that belongs to "them". Academics and local residents both represent a selective image of Miami as an exception, as highly distinct from other cities in the US. Their utopian and dystopian stories construct an exotic, divided city shaped by the unique impact of Miami's migrant population groups. In other words, these imaginaries

reduce Miami to essentialist narratives, which are articulated in everyday images and language and shape urban governance. These narratives have skewed research towards an understanding of Miami as a transnational gateway and an exceptional city within the US.

I argue that in contrast to spatial imaginaries of Miami, the city is in fact a rather unexceptional place – much more similar to its counterparts in the US than many would believe it to be. Few scholars frame Miami as a US city that is directly shaped by the national legislative context and political discourse. Such a non-exceptionalist approach would involve focusing not just on Latino (and specifically Cuban) residents, but also on the sociopolitical status and experiences of African-American and Haitian-American residents, beyond a focus on Black Miamians as victims of crime or supporting actors in Miami’s popular crime shows. As Mohl already suggested in 1989, the history of Black Miami has generally played second fiddle to Miami’s stories of Latin-American migration and the American Dream: “Black Miami was shuffled off into the shadows” (1989: 66). This has not changed in recent academic research (see Connolly, 2014). This chapter is an attempt to contribute to such a shift away from exceptionalism.

The second aim of this chapter is to examine security trends and related socio-spatial inequality within the US more broadly. It thereby provides the national-level context for the ethnographic exploration in the next three chapters, each of which deals with specific elements of security provision in Miami. These national-level security trends increasingly shape Miami’s urban environment, and are a main reason why I consider the city to be relatively unexceptional. As in other US cities, racialized and selective security practices and policies strongly affect the experience of living and working in Miami. This does not mean that I consider Miami to be the same as other cities in the US – like any city, it has its own unique history – but studying the city from this angle does show it to be less of an exceptional and transnational place than academics and local residents have suggested so far.

The two national-level security trends that I focus on are the development of public-private security partnerships and the growing critique of police violence and the penal state. The first trend concerns the ways in which public and private actors increasingly collaborate when responding to diverse security needs. In Miami, both public agencies and private companies employ police officers as well as private security guards. It is a common practice for business owners to pay off-duty police officers to provide security, a form of employment often referred to as “moonlighting”. The second trend concerns recent collective mobilizations

against violent police actions and the penal state, often grouped together under the header of “Black Lives Matter”. Organizations connected to this collective project have taken action against various forms of violence and inequality, including systemic racism within US police forces. In Florida, the local branch of the Black Lives Matter ideal and movement is called Dream Defenders, and it was founded in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Philip Agnew, one of the organization’s co-founders, was living in Miami during the time of my research, where he organized and participated in multiple protests and cultural events.

I organize this discussion of the Miami context and the effects of national-level trends in this chapter by drawing from the experiences of three protagonists: Lux, Darius, and Sarah. As an African-American police officer, Lux sometimes felt part of a general community of security providers. But she also experienced increasing feelings of alienation and frustration, asking herself whether she was actually accepted as a full member of this professional community. To what extent can you feel part of the larger community of police officers if you disagree with some of your colleagues’ main perceptions and actions? Drawing on the perspective of Darius, an underpaid Cuban-American private security guard, I discuss the security practices and arrangements surrounding Memorial Day weekend. Throughout the year, Miami hosts many different festivities and cultural events, such as Spring Break, Art Basel, and Ultra (a popular electronic music festival in Downtown Miami). Memorial Day weekend attracts a predominantly Black crowd compared to these other events, and the City of Miami Beach and the MBPD respond with more intrusive and extensive security arrangements, relying on both police officers and additional private security guards. Finally, the case of Sarah, an African-American woman, illustrates an everyday reality of Miami’s racialized security practices. As a long-term resident of Overtown, Sarah saw herself as a “Towner”, but had conflicting feelings about her social and political allegiances. While Sarah joined several protests against police violence and discrimination in the neighborhood, she found it difficult to translate these beliefs to her own personal life. Sarah (and many others with her) struggled to reconcile her understandings of structural inequality and racism with dominant norms of individual empowerment and responsibility.

I eventually decided against using Marcus’ suggestion for a title because I wanted to look beyond popular, binary imaginaries of Miami. *Imagining Miami* is a title echoing Sheila Croucher’s (1997) work on ethnic politics in Miami. She argues that ethnic ties and ethnic tensions in the city are not only the result, but also part of Miami’s social, political, and economic

change. For example, she shows how the tale of the Cuban success story refers to Cubans as White, and contrasts them with African-Americans as hard-working individuals who deserve their success. She notes that “tales of individual freedom and enterprise, or in other words, fulfilling the American Dream, influence the construction of social realities that are rooted in power and politics” (ibid.: 141). Recognizing the importance of such imaginaries, this chapter examines how imagining Miami shapes everyday social and political life. My critique of the city’s popular and dominant imaginary, however, takes shape not through an analysis of ethnic politics, but through an exploration of the manifestation of two national-level security trends.

In the next section, I unpack Miami’s dominant imaginary. I call this imaginary Miami’s “magic” because the city has been dubbed “The Magic City” for several reasons. Most of them are intertwined with dominant imaginary of Miami as an exceptional city, and relate to issues of crime and insecurity, entertainment, individual freedom, and extraordinary growth. I discuss these interrelated issues through a discussion of the academic literature on Miami’s sociopolitical and cultural context. In the three sections that follow, I engage with the perspectives offered by Lux, Darius and Sarah to address, respectively, private-public security partnerships in Wynwood; selective and racialized security practices during Memorial Day weekend; and the local manifestation of the Black Lives Matter movement. In the final section, I return to a reflection of what constitutes Miami’s magic in light of the aforementioned security trends.

## UNPACKING THE MAGIC

Local residents, scholars, and journalists often depict Miami’s rapid growth since its establishment in 1896 as magical, indicating a sense of disbelief at how fast Miami was constructed out of thin air, from the wilderness, into a fully developed city. In less than six months, Miami had a newspaper, a bank, and several stores and churches. Writing about South Florida’s early development, Grunwald (2006) states that “nothing was crazier than the real estate market”, and that “Miami was epicenter of the insanity” (2006: 177, 179).

This “magic” was built and made possible by mostly Black work crews, who constructed a railway track from North (Jacksonville) to South Florida (Key West) for Henry Flagler’s railway company. In Flagler’s view, this railway track was necessary to make Miami attractive from an economic standpoint, which translated into the city’s rapid development (Connolly, 2014). Because of the rising demand for cheap labor, the Caribbean-

American and African-American population kept growing. In Miami’s early years, these groups made up forty percent of the city’s total population. While White residents relied upon them to build the city’s infrastructure, they also protested against the expansion of the Black population. Flagler eventually helped establish “Colored Town”, a specifically designed area where the city’s growing Black labor force had to live (Connolly, 2014; Nijman, 2011). This area eventually became known as Overtown. Miami’s magical growth thus went hand-in-hand with racial segregation, a development still visible in the city today.

In *A World More Concrete*, a history of real estate and racial segregation in South Florida, Nathan B. Connolly (2014) discusses how racial apartheid became a sociopolitical and particularly spatial and material reality in Miami. In his account of Miami, Connolly (2014) does not tell a story of exceptional people enduring exceptional hardships in an exceptional place. Rather, so the historian states, he “has offered a regrettably commonplace and *unexceptional* story about how people sought and used power over the land to make and unmake wealth, neighborhoods, and individual and collective identities” (ibid.: 278, emphasis in original). Instead of calling it the “magic city”, Connolly (2014) refers to Miami as the “tragic city”. He argues that racial inequality and segregation were always the engine behind a wide variety of sociopolitical and economic developments in Miami. Thus, according to Connolly, Miami is a city that is not characterized by magic, but by the tragic displacement and exploitation of its African-American and Caribbean-American residents.

Focusing on Overtown in particular, Connolly (2014) discusses the construction of the Interstate I-95 overpass in 1967. This development symbolized the continuous marginalization and discrimination of the neighborhood’s residents throughout history. The construction of the highway displaced over twelve thousand people and created a dark and empty space in the heart of Overtown, transforming the neighborhood’s atmosphere. As a way to compensate for this dead space and utilize it for something positive, city commissioners opted to create a playground for local children beneath the overpass. On the day of the playground’s opening, Mayor Stephen Clark reassured the audience that Miami would not sweep its socioeconomic problems under the rug. While spoken with likely unintended irony, that day below the freeway was remarkably symbolic for Overtown. During the opening, the grass – growing in weak soil and sparse sunlight – was already wilting, mirroring the expectations of Miami’s poorer Black children who attended underfunded schools and had minimal access to city services. “[No one would] comment on the potential

symbolism of a park that effectively rendered these kids invisible to travelers whisking above between the region's airports, beaches, and suburbs," Connolly (2014: 2) writes, as "the embodied future of black Miami looked up at a concrete sky." Today, the space underneath the overpass is mostly occupied by a large homeless population, and is used by MPD instructors to introduce new police recruits to a part of the local populace they will likely encounter in their future work.

The political and commercial transactions that are part of such projects underlie the "magic" Miami's economic and infrastructural growth throughout the twentieth century. Urban development, infrastructural projects, and the real estate market in particular represent dramatic ways to discriminate against racial groups and to maintain a specific White-centered interpretation of Miami's magic. A magic in which Miami is portrayed as America's playground; an imaginary in which there is no room to discuss the ways in which Black residents are exploited through various projects of slum clearance, urban renewal, eminent domain, the construction of interstate highways, and the housing market (as Sarah's situation, discussed below, also illustrates). Eminent domain, the expropriation of private property for public use, has been a particularly effective instrument to control the expansion of housing projects and slum housing in the city. As Connolly (2014: 5) explains, "When the buying and selling of real estate threatened to transgress the color line, or tales of rancid slum housing threatened to overtake the Magic City's more favorable publicity, Miami's local politicians looked to land taking as a market 'corrective'". Eminent domain, in other words, has protected white homeowners and contained black renters in impoverished and segregated neighborhoods.

Real estate development, the allocation of property rights, and housing policies such as eminent domain continue to reproduce racial segregation and the exploitation of Black tenants. Residents of Overtown have protested against large-scale development projects that are only accessible for more affluent classes. In 2015, residents organized against the development of the Miami World Center, a public-private space consisting of luxurious apartment complexes, shopping centers, and places for entertainment and nightlife. According to the developers, the location of the center was ideal: in the city that is the "gateway to the Americas", close to South Beach and the city's central business district, and surrounded by the best art and culture Miami has to offer. It was, however, also close, if not technically located in, Overtown. The protesters carried two large banners with them, on which they had written their demands: "Hire Overtown" and "End segregation" (see Figure 2.1). Local residents felt excluded and insisted they

also benefit from these urban development projects.

These demands nevertheless exemplified how the structural factors and the distribution of power behind racial segregation and inequality are not directly identified as main catalysts for inequality. While specific urban development projects have increased and cemented Miami's racial segregation and inequality, the protesters were suggesting that hiring Overtown resident would be a step towards inclusion and ending race-based residential segregation. Rather than contesting the development of the Miami World Center itself, the protesters did demand that they be part of it; even if this inclusion meant no more than a temporary position as a construction worker or an employee in a shop earning minimum wage, or the provision of free Wi-Fi in the vicinity of the center (another demand made by the protesters). By emphasizing socioeconomic opportunities and urban renewal, real estate developers and city commissioners successfully sold the magic to local residents – the belief that an exclusive real estate project such as the Miami World Center can also end segregation and promote a more inclusive urban community.

Although the magic of Miami's historical and contemporary urban development is in reality less of a fairytale and more a cautionary tale of exclusion, it also shows the city's parallels with the broader US context. At a national level, urban development has also coincided with the exploitation of low-income African-American and Caribbean-American population groups. In spite of its "glittering reputations and its tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity, Greater Miami was nothing special. It remained as economically dependent on a white-over-black system as more industrialized US cities, such as Birmingham, Alabama, or Chicago, Illinois" (Connolly, 2014: 6). Beyond the US context, the case of Miami has helped some scholars to understand US urban apartheid as a variation of colonialism seen in other parts of the world (e.g., Nightingale, 2012; Connolly, 2014). Miami's very visible inequality and racial segregation, as well as its more concealed power structures, are expressions of national and international systems of exploitation and White supremacy.

Miami's rapid and sprawling urban development also speaks to another interpretation of the magic the city has to offer: individual freedom (see Croucher, 1997). Because of wider capitalistic ideals, and because home ownership sometimes means more than other promises of citizenship, many residents articulate their freedom through property ownership. This means that political freedom and economic independence have become increasingly intertwined in Miami. Black residents are no exception here: owning property provides a measure of individual freedom from the

coercive power of landlords, sometimes referred to by local residents as “slumlords” (Connolly, 2014: 11). A case in point is the renovated house of D.A. Dorsey in Overtown. Son of a former slave, Dorsey managed to educate himself and built a million-dollar real-estate fortune before his death in 1940. To commemorate one of the first African-American millionaires in Florida, the main avenue of the neighborhood, NW 3rd Avenue, which runs alongside his former house, is also known as D.A. Dorsey Blvd. Currently one of Overtown’s landmarks and part of its legacy, the Dorsey house and story illustrate to the neighborhood’s contemporary residents the entrenched linkages between the idealistic goals of individual freedom and economic independence.

The American Dream is an idealized spatial imaginary at the national level that contributes to glorifying Miami’s alleged extraordinary sociopolitical and economic opportunities. Many Miamians consider the city to be exceptional compared to the US in general, a perception supported by the wealth and luxury displayed throughout the city. The narrative of Miami as a platform for social mobility has attracted migrants in every stage of the city’s short history. Miami has long been a destination of choice for many Cubans, who have been migrating to the city since the late 19th century. Since 1980, when 125,000 Cubans and 40,000 Haitians arrived in Miami in the span of one year, most of them as refugees, the number of residents with a background in Latin American countries increased considerably. The Latino population eventually became a majority and Spanish became a main language used in everyday life in Miami alongside English (Nijman, 2011).

In light of the dominant migrant population groups in Miami, scholars have suggested that political and cultural affiliation in the city is, and always will be, distinct from other US cities. A key debate has been on whether Miami’s different population groups have established parallel governance structures, or have contributed to the creation of an urban “melting pot” (Portes and Stepick, 1993). Elizabeth Aranda et al. (2014) suggest that Latin American residents primarily claim inclusion based on an urban connection (i.e., between a “hometown” abroad and Miami) rather than on a national level. They form their political identity and feelings of belonging through their everyday lives in Miami, as opposed to the US as a whole. The authors conceptualize this as lack of national-level rootedness as “translocal” citizenship, which emphasizes lived conditions of citizenship that are related to urban environments outside the US. In doing so, they reify the idealized spatial imaginary and successfully marketed image of Miami as a Latin city, and as a safe, accommodating gateway to the Americas for residents and business owners alike.

Jan Nijman (2011) discusses the ways in which migrants have defined and reflected the city’s magic, its attractiveness. Nijman focuses on the individualized experience of everyday life in the city. Based on the high turnover of residents, he argues that Miami is not a cohesive community, but that transience is the city’s defining characteristic. While the perception and lived experience of transience is perhaps particularly noticeable in Miami, it is also reflective of more national and even international trends. Nijman finds evidence of this exceptional transience in everyday life, where sports teams have difficulties building a loyal fan base and political rallies and protests do not gather much support. In 2015, the walls of Marcus’ barbershop were painted in the colors of Miami Heat, the local basketball team, and displayed some of its most renowned players. But little under a year later, Marcus had completely redecorated the shop, explaining that the Heat theme was just to attract customers when they were playing well. In 2006, massive immigration rallies were organized throughout the US, protesting the restrictive reform of immigration laws and policies. In Miami, the city with the largest share of immigrants in the whole country, the largest rally had only 4,000 people, compared to 500,000 in Los Angeles. Illustrating this transience and individualization in a dramatic fashion, Nijman describes how Miami’s more affluent residents move about the city: from their air-conditioned homes, in their air-conditioned cars, to air-conditioned offices and malls. Similarly, just as Nijman describes for the 2006 immigration rallies, the anti-Trump and anti-racism protests in late-2016 were considerably smaller and less organized in Miami compared to cities elsewhere in the US.

While the above suggests that Miamians are perhaps less politically engaged than residents in other US cities, the city has seen several periods of intense political protest. In general, these protests have revolved around police violence, ethnic and racial tensions, and the criminalization of different neighborhoods in Miami, such as Overtown, Opa Locka, and Liberty City. Between 1980 and 1990, four major riots occurred in Miami, the first following the acquittal of four Miami-Dade police officers over the killing of Arthur McDuffie in 1979. McDuffie died from injuries sustained at the hands of the four White officers, who sought to arrest the salesman after a car chase. During these “McDuffie riots”, police and military forces installed a curfew and used blockades and sniper fire to disperse crowds, ending the riots after three days, killing eighteen and injuring hundreds in the process (Croucher, 1997; Stepick et al., 2003). These riots are important indicators of the lived experiences of police violence and inequality in the city, experiences not only characterized by physical violence, but

also reflective of systemic and cultural violence. In 2015, a local resident discovered that the North Miami Beach Police had used images of Black men for target practice. She recognized her brother's mug shot at a shooting range, as one of several pictures at which the officers had been firing. In response, the police chief apologized and prohibited the use of mugshots for future target practice (Miami Herald, 2015). Nevertheless, the case exemplifies the institutionalized racialization of security practices, which have to become public and labeled as acts of racism before the authorities consider and deal with them as such. In this example, the police department stopped using the mugshots for target practice only after the *Miami Herald* wrote about it. The Chief of Police told the press that he felt really bad about the matter, but refused to enter into dialogue with Black Lives Matter activists who had called for his resignation.

In this section, I unpacked Miami's spatial imaginary as America's playground – an imaginary very distinct from the actual playground underneath the I-95. This imaginary, in which Miami is portrayed as an exotic and seductive gateway to the Americas, is one of an exceptional place that is both accommodating to, and defined by, its migrants. A story that favors a Latino image over that of an African-American or Haitian-American one. This imaginary has become dominant and (re)produced by scholars and artists (e.g., Nijman, 2011; Portes and Stepick, 1993). However, many of the city's social, cultural, and political features are in fact reflective of national trends, such as racialized security practices, spatial segregation, and housing policies that exploit Black tenants. Connolly (2014) convincingly shows that the dominant idealized representation of Miami as a tropical playground does not correspond with historical developments and a lived reality in which the importance of racial apartheid and exclusion are all too easily overlooked or ignored. His work suggests that Miami has always been less unique than many claim it to be. Like many other cities in the US and elsewhere, life in Miami, regardless of what geographical part, is shaped by national and global security trends. In an attempt to further our understanding of Miami beyond its magic, I show how public-private partnerships and racialized security practices characterize everyday life through individual perspectives. I begin with the story of Lux, the African-American police officer who worked for the MPD.

## LUX AND WYNWOOD'S PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

An important recent national-level trends in security provision involves arrangements between public and private security providers and clients

(see e.g., Goldstein, 2010). In Miami, this has been particularly visible in Wynwood, a popular and upcoming neighborhood for art, shopping, dining, and nightlife. The dramatic growth of the neighborhood's popularity, which began in the early 2000s, was the direct outcome of wealthy art collectors' decision to store their collections in the relative cheap warehouses in the neighborhood and open local galleries (Garcia, 2017). In combination with successful branding strategies, art collectors caused the value of real estate in Wynwood to increase, attracting developers, business owners, and investors as a result. The directors of Wynwood's own Business Improvement District (BID) looked to expand, and profit from, the neighborhood's popularity. BIDs "are public-private partnerships, in which property and business owners in a defined geographic area elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing/promotion of their commercial district" (Ward, 2007: 658). The collective contribution in Wynwood was, after City of Miami approval, compulsory for all businesses within the area. Although the exact institutional arrangements and practices of BIDs may vary from place to place, such public-private partnerships have become an increasingly popular model in both US and non-US cities (i.e., Canada, Australia, and South Africa).

Primarily concerned with urban livability, BIDs implement policies aimed to "revalorize city centers and downtowns, to improve the 'business climate'" (Ward, 2007: 668). In Wynwood, the Wynwood BID oversaw the neighborhood's transformation from a relatively empty space with warehouses and poorly maintained real estate to one of Miami's most famous areas in the space of a decade. Real estate developers and BID managers told me they envisioned Wynwood as combining elements of New York's Lower East Side district with a Dutch *woonwijk*, a place where people live and walk. In doing so, developers and investors also forced existing tenants and unwanted businesses to leave in order to make room for newer restaurants, galleries, amenities, and shops. The documentary "Right to Wynwood" tells the stories of tenants who were evicted, or who could not afford the exponential increase in rent (Álvarez, 2013). The documentary became a controversial subject, and its narrative was contested by investors and developers, who claimed in conversations with me that Wynwood had always consisted of empty warehouses.

From the start of its dramatic growth, local residents and developers understood Wynwood as situated in a larger area with a reputation of being unsafe. Located directly north of Overtown, both actual incidents and any perception of crime were likely to halt Wynwood's growing popularity. The BID was therefore preoccupied with providing what it saw as the necessary



security services. In order to do so, the BID collected extra taxes from business owners in the neighborhood, which they used to pay for collective services, such as a cleaning crew and security providers. One of the most influential real estate developers in Wynwood, a BID board member himself, told me that the organization spent almost a third of its total budget (\$700,000) on security in 2014. He wanted to increase this amount significantly in the coming years and aimed to invest in new surveillance cameras that could be operated and accessed remotely.

An important aspect of security provision in Wynwood is the everyday use of off-duty police officers. Off-duty officers are police officers who are not on patrol for the police department, but who are allocated a specific task while still enjoying the same rights and privileges to which they are entitled as a police officer. Collectives such as the BID pay these off-duty police officers' salaries indirectly, through the police department. At the time of my research, the department was usually paid \$35 an hour for regular officers performing these off-duty tasks, while the presence of higher ranking officers (official policy when several off-duty officers were needed) and special circumstances (during holidays) involved an increased hourly rate. Even though they are paid privately and are not working on duty for the police department, an off-duty police officer still wears their official uniform, carries a police-issued handgun, and drives an official police vehicle. In Wynwood, police officers drive around the neighborhood with a Wynwood BID sticker attached to one of the side doors. The sticker notifies the public that these police officers work for the BID, and that they are specifically (if not exclusively) concerned with any issues within the borders of Wynwood. Moreover, it suggests that the BID is able to inform these officers of their priorities during their shift, such as what to look out for and where in particular.

Hiring off-duty police officers is a common practice throughout Miami and the US in general. While off-duty officers are more expensive, many clients preferred them over private security guards. This is because police officers enjoy more rights: they can use force more liberally and can actually arrest people. Tim, the managing director for the Wynwood BID, told me during a tour of the neighborhood that they had decided to work with off-duty police officers in order to "cut out the middle man." In his experience, private security guards could do little more than call the police, whereas officers could respond immediately. Police work is, furthermore, considered to be more prestigious compared to the work of security guards. In general, wealthier companies and organizations are more likely to make use of off-duty police officers, because they can afford their salaries and because of

their higher sociopolitical status, a status that is, in their view, more in line with the clientele they wish to attract. An indication of this differentiation is the fact that more expensive supermarkets such as Whole Foods and Publix use off-duty officers, while discount stores such as Target and Presidente hire private security guards.

During my research, Lux worked as an MPD police officer. Every week, she worked four days in Overtown as part of her regular patrol shift, and one day for the BID in Wynwood. Lux generally enjoyed working in this visually attractive neighborhood. She considered it a welcome change to her regular patrol and it generated extra income. In Wynwood, she could drive or walk around without having to respond to the police radio and the dispatcher's calls. During these off-duty days, it was mostly up to her to decide where she wanted to go. However, she did carry a dedicated phone with her, and the BID provided the number of this mobile phone to all business owners in Wynwood should they want to contact a police officer in a non-emergency situation. A "Wynwood cop", as off-duty police officers were called, did not receive many calls on this number. Lux only occasionally had to respond to calls concerning nuisance caused by intoxicated or homeless people in the neighborhood.

Through her work as an off-duty police officer in Wynwood, Lux became part of a public-private security partnership that shared the ambition of preventing and reducing crime in the neighborhood. "Tim is entitled to make demands because he pays", Lux explained to me. "So I'm basically a private security guard... Wait, no, that's not what I meant." She quickly corrected herself, recognizing that police officers still enjoyed a higher sociopolitical status and additional rights. However, the formal arrangements of off-duty police work blurred the boundaries. Both the MPD and the BID suggested that reducing crime required both the police department and the public-private partnership to actively collaborate and share information about past crimes and current and future threats. In monthly meetings, MPD commanding officers presented crime statistics and raised awareness amongst members of the audience (primarily consisting of developers, investors, and business owners) in terms of what made the neighborhood susceptible to crime. Police commanders explicitly stated that they required input from the Wynwood community to establish effective responses to various forms of crime that occurred in the neighborhood, such as armed robbery, burglary, vandalism, and murder.

A main outcome of these collaborations between the BID and the MPD was a specific description of people, situations, and locations, which were made available to local business owners and police officers. In practice,

Tim and an MPD sergeant informed Lux of where in the neighborhood she should patrol, and what kind of individuals were of concern to them. After somebody attempted to steal a designer handbag from a female pedestrian, Tim asked Lux to be present in that particular area. In one meeting just *before* the schools closed for the summer, Tim told the audience that “kids are going to come out, around the age of twelve, thirteen, or fourteen, riding around on bikes in groups between five to forty, and all dressed the same, like a gang.” In his perception, these kids could steal a phone or a purse, and when they left it would be impossible to identify who was the actual perpetrator. “We need to stay proactive”, he informed the Wynwood collective. “Trust your instincts. If something doesn’t feel right, or feels a little funny, call the BID number.” As this example shows, the public-private partnership reproduced racialized security practices, as the BID asked the community to specifically keep an eye out for certain groups that, in their view, came to Wynwood for the wrong reasons.

Lux understood that security was a key concern of the BID, and that the MPD looked to keep such lucrative clients satisfied. She also understood that working for the Wynwood BID was a desirable position. Compared to more static off-duty work, such as in a supermarket or at a construction site, being able to walk around freely in Wynwood clearly had its perks. Lux was therefore worried whether Tim and her commanding officers were still happy with her presence and involvement. She sometimes called me after BID meetings, curious to hear if anyone had made any remarks about her, or about anything else that could be of interest. Lux also tried to affiliate herself informally with the area’s many local and influential business owners, which was relatively easy for her. Many restaurant and gallery owners were happy to have a police officer around, and in particular Lux, as many commented on her appearance – she was young and attractive. In practice, this often meant discounts and preferential treatment, such as skipping a line at a restaurant, which was also a common courtesy business owners give to police officers nationwide. One new restaurant owner offered Lux fifty per cent off her order if she entered in uniform, and twenty per cent off in plainclothes.

At the same time, Lux found it difficult to associate herself with people who were dedicated supporters of police practices, especially in light of the recent scrutiny of police violence. We watched recordings of police violence in Miami and elsewhere in the US on her phone together. In her discussions with me, she wondered out loud why officers retaliated with such aggression and sometimes lethal force. She was especially surprised when she saw a recording of one of her MPD colleagues hitting a handcuffed man multiple

times after the suspect had spat in the officer’s face. This made her wonder: how can people still be uncritical supporters of all police practices? Is police violence an outcome of institutionalized racism or the fault of an individual officer? These critical reflections on her own position and work gave rise to feelings of alienation. She worked together with Tim and the BID to address “unwanted individuals” and “potential criminals”, which were basically references to residents of Overtown and other nearby low-income areas. On the other hand, she also felt affinity with African-American and other Black residents, people who were considered by the larger society to be “not from Miami” and who were also targeted by police violence. These opposing affinities created a complex situation for Lux, alienating her from some of the ideas propagated by BID members, while at the same time she had become increasingly attached to her off-duty job in the neighborhood.

Lux’s story shows how public-private arrangements develop and work at a local scale, with public actors such as the MPD enacting private interests by enabling the hiring of off-duty police officers. Such arrangements have further institutionalized and reproduced segregation along lines of race, both formally and informally. In Wynwood, business owners, restaurant managers, investors, police officers, and developers became part of a partnership that seemed to support racialized police practices almost unconditionally. However, while we could understand this development as a confirming the reality of Miami’s spatial imaginary as a divided city, Lux’s story nuances a binary understanding. As a police officer her everyday experience was occasionally contradictory. While she was affiliated with the MPD, she also sometimes felt alienated because of the racialized security practices of her colleagues, suggesting that the idea of Miami as a divided city is perhaps oversimplified. Lux told me that she was not alone in her sentiment and many of her fellow coworkers shared similar views, but were too afraid to speak out in fear of retaliation. I return to Lux and her relationship with the MPD in more detail in Chapter Five.

This section examined the public-private partnership in Wynwood, showing how the collaboration between the Wynwood BID and MPD police officers can perpetuate racialized security practices. Through the perspective of Lux, it illustrated how such partnerships manifest locally and are experienced individually. Focusing on contemporary urban development (or “improvement” as the abbreviation of BID refers to the process), I have suggested that the BID is able to express corporate concerns through the work of police officers in Wynwood, increasingly aligning private and public interests, while institutionalizing and reproducing racialized security practices. In the next section, I continue my discussion of public-private

partnerships in Miami, elaborating on how they can shape the ways security is provided and experienced. I do so through a discussion of Memorial Day weekend in Miami Beach, an event that produced an extraordinary amount of security arrangements.

### **DARIUS AND RACIALIZED POLICING ON MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND**

In July 2014, an off-duty police officer hired by Mango's, a popular Miami Beach bar, was caught working under the influence of alcohol. Security cameras captured the officer with his handgun in his hand, showing off to the bar's customers. After eight months of internal investigation, the department asserted that the off-duty officer had drunk at least six glasses of double vodka and cranberry juice, and he was fired in 2015 (although the MBPD was forced to rehire him in 2016 after his lawyer successfully claimed wrongful termination). The Miami Herald (2015) printed the story and images from the video, scrutinizing the officer's actions and MBPD practices more generally, and questioning whether police officers should be able to work in bars. Daniel Oates, the MBPD's Chief of Police, took swift action and changed the department's official policy: police officers would no longer be allowed to work off-duty inside South Beach bars.

Mango's, and all the other South Beach bars, found themselves in need of alternative security providers. Rather than using their own security guards, these businesses preferred to hire external companies. In addition to private security companies' expertise, this arrangement meant that local businesses could avoid having to deal with legal accountability should incidents take place; altercations between guards and customers would be the responsibility of the security company and not the business itself. Many bars decided to hire private security guards from Xecurity, a company owned and managed by Rick: an MBPD officer who was known in the area. Rick told me that it had made sense for him to start a business, "[in] the world that I live in. My experience as a law enforcement officer gives me the opportunity to train my employees in a particular and proactive way: my guys are going to deal with a situation before it becomes a situation, you know what I mean?" Rick suggested that with his skills as a public security provider, he was definitely able to educate private security guards. In particular, he saw his individual perception of how threatening situations developed as useful for training his employees to be proactive in their work.

At Happy Hour on Ocean Drive, the same boulevard where Mango's was located, the special dining area reserved for off-duty MBPD police officers remained empty, and Darius, a Cuban-American private security

guard working for Xecurity, was hired as the replacement. He worked long shifts at the bar, sometimes up to twelve hours straight, mostly sitting at the entrance. Darius explained to me that his job was similar to that of police officers, but just "took place in a bubble", meaning that he was confined to a smaller and demarcated area. Several other private security guards, including instructors at private security companies, also framed the work similar to the world of police. However, it was often very different in practice – private security guards did not enjoy the same sociopolitical status, legal rights, or financial compensation. Indeed, the police officers with whom I became acquainted often made fun of private security guards, derisively calling them "mall cops". Darius really wanted to become a police officer, a role that, in his view, was more valued by the wider public.

Every night, he helped the MBPD to set up lighting around the police towers on Ocean Drive, chatting with the officers. He also bought personal items, such as a badge and a tactical belt, through which he sought to define himself as a provider of security. If a customer showed aggression or unwanted behavior in the bar, it was Darius' job to get him outside of the bar as soon as he could without provoking the customer and inciting more aggression or violence. Darius called this act of talking to someone in order to get them to leave the bar "verbal judo". A priority for Darius was to get someone to step outside. Should a customer physically attack him, the security guard and his company could not be held liable for assault or battery as long as the altercation occurred outside the bar. This would be a different story if the struggle developed inside the bar, in which case the customer could potentially sue Darius and his company, creating all sorts of legal and possibly even financial complications for them. This context led Darius to assert that he would only use physical contact within the bar as a last resort.

Although off-duty police officers were prohibited from working inside bars in South Beach, there was one exception: Memorial Day weekend. Every year during the last weekend in May, Miami Beach becomes the stage for a diversity of festivities and celebrations. The city's climate and reputation have made it an attractive place for celebrating Memorial Day and for many other festivities, such as Spring Break, Art Basel, and Ultra. Traditionally, Memorial Day is a national holiday to commemorate those who have died while serving in the US armed forces. It has, however, become a major tourist event in Miami, and city officials expect around 200,000 visitors over the weekend.

Darius already disliked most South Beach visitors and made racist and stigmatizing comments on regular evenings. For him, Memorial Day

weekend, also known as “urban beach weekend”, was the worst night of the year. More than Spring Break and Ultra, Memorial Day attracted a primarily African-American and Caribbean-American crowd. Although these groups always seemed to be the majority of South Beach visitors, including at the bar where Darius worked, local residents understood Memorial Day weekend to be primarily for Black visitors. For many, this was also a reason to oppose the weekend and to criminalize those who attended, or warn White attendees. In 2015, when I told my roommate, Olaf, that I was going to walk around Miami Beach during Memorial Day weekend, and that my parents were also coming over to visit, he laughed out loud. Like many other residents, he told me that he was going to stay as far away from the event as possible. Some Miamians even choose to close their businesses and leave the city for a couple of days.

Local residents, politicians, and journalists have perpetuated the weekend’s negative reputation by interpreting any violence that occurs during the weekend as a direct consequence of the visitors it attracts. In 2011, several MBPD officers surrounded a vehicle that had hit multiple cars and had come to a halt in the middle of the street. They fired numerous shots once the driver seemed unresponsive to their commands, killing him and hurting each other in the process. Many bystanders recorded the incident with their cameras, and even though the lethal violence came at the hands of MBPD police officers, the videos became a visual representation and reminder for local residents of what occurs during Memorial Day weekend in South Beach.

In light of such racialized interpretations, the City of Miami Beach and the MBPD prepare well in advance for the weekend. A wide range of organizations pass on information to local residents: universities notify their students by mail of upcoming arrangements, and news websites update their readers on the latest security developments and potential concerns. In the runup to the 2015 Memorial Day weekend, a major issue for the authorities was how to prevent people with an arrest warrant or with a stolen vehicle from entering Miami Beach during the weekend. Police officers therefore prioritized controlling and redirecting traffic during the festivities. As a result, arriving by car from the City of Miami (and there was no alternative) became both nearly impossible and very expensive (parking lots easily charged customers \$100 per day). The MBPD closed multiple lanes, reducing the traffic to one lane where they could check every single car waiting to go through. This resulted in a line of cars that covered the whole causeway to Miami Beach and began more than five kilometers away, all the way in Downtown Miami.

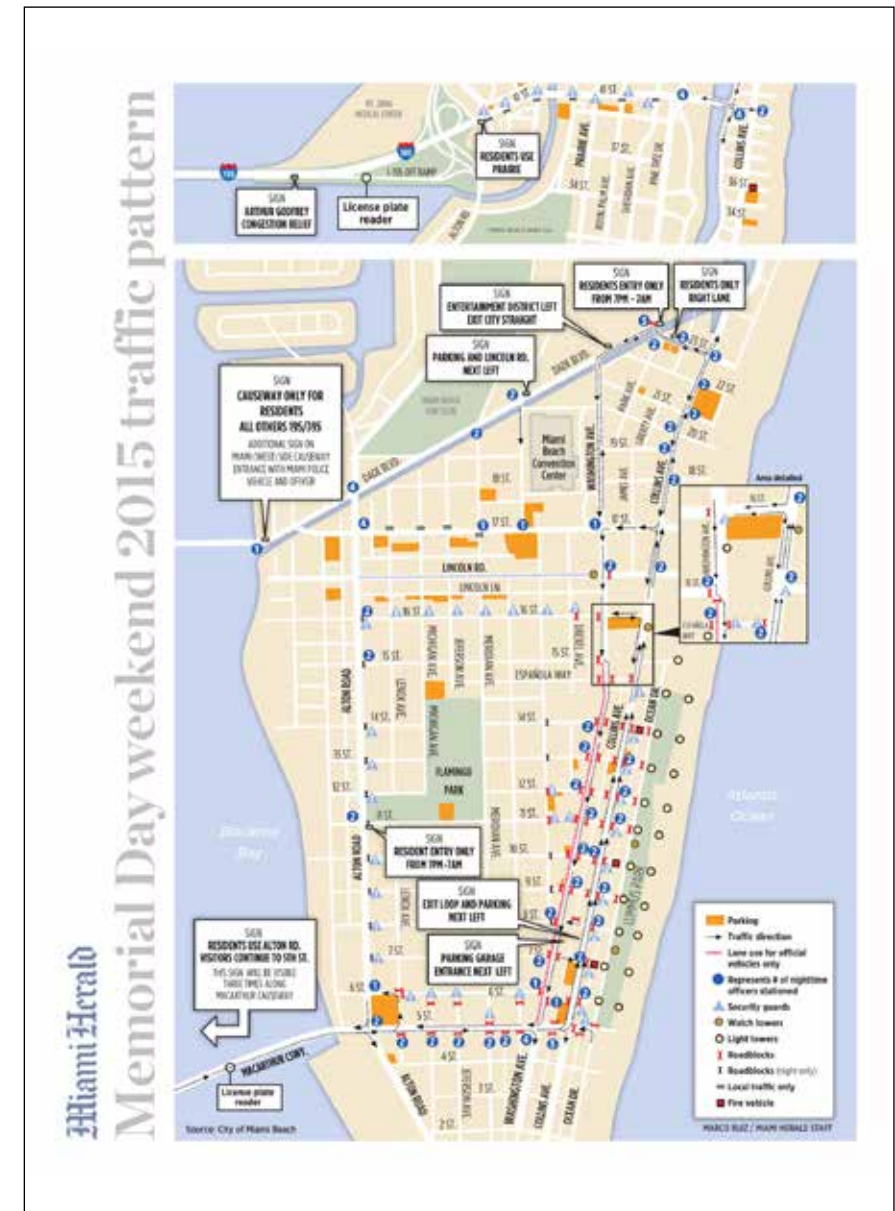


Figure 2.2. Memorial Day weekend 2015 traffic and security pattern, May 2015. Source: City of Miami Beach.

Various agencies and organizations in Miami distributed a map (Figure 2.2) in preparation for the weekend. I received mine by mail through the University of Miami, while other residents received it from their employer or public agencies that they were affiliated with. The map shows what security measures the local authorities had implemented. It illustrates how traffic was redirected (black arrows), and the location of the license plate reader (black circle) and roadblocks (red crosses). It also shows the position of security guards (light blue triangle) and the number of police officers permanently stationed at night (blue circle). As the map illustrates, there were police officers and security guards on almost every corner, and watch towers and light towers installed alongside the boulevard, including in front of Darius' bar. The security practices during the weekend bore similarities to those of a military operation; there was even an MBPD "mobile command center" (a large camper van with a satellite communication system) stationed on a corner on Ocean Drive, and police officers used the NATO alphabet to refer to the weekend, calling it "Alpha Bravo" time. Normally, the police officers' regular work days were divided into three shifts, A, B, and C, with each shift consisting of ten hours. During the Memorial Day weekend, however, the day was divided into two shifts, which meant that officers had to work for twelve hours straight. Although nobody was allowed to take the day off, the MBPD still did not have enough police officers to fulfill the necessary roles and positions during the weekend, and had to hire police officers from other nearby departments to patrol Miami Beach as well.

During this Memorial Day weekend, I walked around with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a national human rights organization. Volunteers from the organization joined the festivities and looked to make contact with security providers. Should any violent incidents occur (with a focus on police violence), these volunteers were there to witness violations of human rights. Armed with a mobile phone with a camera and the ACLU app, with which I could immediately upload any footage of a violent encounter to the organization, I joined several volunteers on Friday night.

As I walked past the bar where Darius worked, I saw him sitting behind an officer who was checking the identification cards of customers waiting in line. This was usually his job, but since extraordinary security measures had been implemented for the Memorial Day weekend, he was relegated to the role of backup security provider. It was busy and there was no way I could get through the crowd and talk to him, but I met up with him shortly afterwards. Still exhausted, Darius told me how scared he had been, and that he understood why several other bars and restaurants had decided to

close for the weekend. In his view, it was too great of a risk, and indeed he mentioned the 2011 shooting in support of his opinion of the crowd that came to celebrate. In addition, he also had a hidden weapon on him, a secret way of protecting himself during the weekend that I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

Memorial Day weekend illustrates how Miami Beach's reputation as a paradise was easily transformed into a narrative of a war zone occupied by foreign forces – a state of exception. Miami's idealized imaginary as a utopian city relies not only on the environment itself; it differs according to the perception of which racial groups are present at a given time. During Memorial Day weekend, these are primarily African-Americans and Haitian-Americans, a presence that in the eyes of the authorities require extraordinary security practices, with City of Miami Beach hiring private security guards and assembling police officers from all around Miami in order to match the perceived security threat. The 2015 weekend, was however, very peaceful and energetic. Many visitors wanted to take a photo with the MBPD police officers parked underneath the palm trees of Ocean Drive, most of whom willingly obliged. Luckily, there were no civil or human rights violations for the ACLU to witness either. Perhaps Miami's idealized stories may yet develop into more inclusive spatial imaginaries.

## **SARAH, DREAM DEFENDERS AND THE CRITIQUE OF POLICE VIOLENCE**

"Currently, there are more Black people in prison than captured during slavery!", the human rights lawyer proclaimed in her opening statement. She was the first to speak during a meeting in March 2015 on penal state practices and police violence in Overtown, in a packed conference room of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse Museum. The building had once served as the first Black police station in Miami, a station where only Black police officers worked. The building was later renovated and turned into a historical museum showcasing what police work entailed for Black officers at the time. That night, various politicians, residents, police officers, and activists from all over Miami, including Trayvon Martin's uncle, had come together to discuss their perspectives on, and experiences with, crime and violence in their everyday lives.

Sarah also attended that night's meeting, and like many others in the audience, she shifted between two broader perspectives. Many seemed to agree that racialized and systemic violence was a real concern. Referencing several recent cases of police violence in the US, it was clear that nobody understood Miami to be different, and some had their own experiences of

police violence to share. The lawyer informed the audience of the disproportionate incarceration rates of African-Americans compared to other racial groups (see also Garland, 2001; Goffman, 2009). The issue of the “school-to-prison pipeline” was discussed, with many recognizing how a negative relationship with law enforcement could begin at a young age.

On the other hand, certain members of the audience remarked that violence, both police violence and “Black on Black crime”, was often the outcome of individual behavior. A woman explained that her sons never dressed in a certain stereotypical way: “My boys never drop their pants!” Another man followed up: “My grandson is going to Harvard!” These two attendees implied that it was up to individuals to make sure their children did not become victims of violence, in all its forms. Their statements suggested that victimization was a choice, not a predetermined outcome. By dressing in a more “respectful” manner, by listening to the authorities, and by studying hard, some people present sought to suggest that Black children did not have to become over-represented in crime statistics. One attendee argued that as a predominantly African-American community, they had to overcome the image of slaves, to change their perspectives and attitudes, and fix their “identity crisis”.

Sarah also had a son, who was living with his father just outside of Miami. She expressed her concerns when she told me that he wanted to be a gangster, that he also wanted to wear his pants low so that his underwear was visible. Speaking to me after the meeting, Sarah wondered to what extent she was able to keep him safe, and to what extent his future had already been decided by forces that profit from Black children’s failures. At the time she was living in a small ground-floor apartment with a burned-out kitchen. An accidental fire had blackened large parts of the wall behind the stove, and the whole apartment smelled like soot. As the “slumlord” of her apartment complex seemed indifferent to her requests, Sarah was doing everything she could to find the right attorneys and city planners in order to “fight those who violated my rights.” In late 2015, after several physically and emotionally exhausting months, she found a completely renovated apartment in Overtown. Although she had a rough time during these months, her efforts also made her increasingly aware of several systemic inequalities that she, and other residents of Overtown, had to deal with. It was also during this time that she became more affiliated with organizations addressing various civil rights issues, such as the Miami Workers Center, the Power for U Center, and Dream Defenders.

Dream Defenders consisted of a group of young residents advocating the Black Lives Matter ideal in Miami. During my time in the city, they

organized several meetings, protests, and events in order to address a variety of different issues, but mostly focused on police violence and racialized security practices. One of the co-founders, Philip Agnew, told me that their main concern was not necessarily police violence in itself, but the broader culture in which self-defense, violence, and racism had become intertwined and enacted, and were considered acceptable by local and national authorities. He specifically used the term “deputized citizens” to refer to the ways in which citizens in Florida are endowed with the legal right to use lethal force, through private gun ownership and Florida’s Stand Your Ground law (see Chapter Three). In his view, this had promoted a culture in which violence against Black residents was acceptable. As a response, Dream Defenders was a local initiative connecting to the national-level trend of protest against the penal state and police violence. In Agnew’s words, the organization sought to “defend a life in the city that is not White.”

Although Black Lives Matter is a national-level ideal and movement, it is also rooted in the specific context of Miami. Dream Defenders organized around both national and local urban issues, mostly involving state violence, such as police violence. Following the lack of indictments in the police killings of Mike Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York in 2014, Dream Defenders organized a protest on the I-95 highway, blocking traffic in both directions after a busy Art Basel. During these protests, the crowd used slogans such as “I can’t breathe” and “Shut it down”, by then well-known expressions used by movements against police violence throughout the US. In addition to Garner and Brown, protesters also referred to local cases, such as the deaths of Israel “Reefa” Hernandez and Delbert “Demz” Rodriguez, two graffiti artists who had died at the hands of police officers in Miami Beach and Wynwood, respectively. These combined references exemplify how protests in Miami relate to and combine issues at different geographical scales, and highlight how local violence is interpreted through a national frame. A painted tombstone on one of Wynwood’s murals is a key illustration of this insertion of Miami into national narrative and vice versa, displaying the names of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Demz, and Reefa (see Figure 2.3): local and national victims of public and private security providers, united in their memorialization.

For Sarah, the Dream Defenders collective was a source of support during difficult times in her life. Even though the protests in Miami did not attract as many people as in other US cities, and were often loosely organized around different, though related, issues, they nevertheless provided Sarah with a more thorough understanding of how structural inequality and systemic violence had manifested in her everyday life, while



Figure 2.3. Demz, Reefa, Trayvon Martin, and M. Brown on a mural tombstone in Wynwood, April 2015.

uniting her with others who had similar experiences. In the discussions that were held during the evening in the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse Museum, mentioned above, residents were torn between solutions based either on individual or structural changes. Dream Defenders in general have been working to break this impasse, to voice local issues and connect them with national-level trends, and to show that although many understand Miami to be an exception, Miamians are not alone in the problems they face.

In late 2015, Dream Defenders organized a rally in front of the Stephen P. Clark Government Center – named after the mayor who had officially opened the children’s playground underneath I-95. I joined Sarah and the protesters, dressed in T-shirts that read “Hire Overtown”, as they entered the government building to make their demands known to city officials inside. Although some had entered an office and refused to leave despite repeated requests by police officers and security guards who had followed us inside, it remained a peaceful event. Most officers who were called to provide backup, including Rico (the officer I had joined on ride-alongs, see the introduction of this dissertation), did not feel that they had to intervene physically. I had never seen Sarah so filled with energy and so happy as she kept on making new posters with different texts, before finally deciding on the one that she would take with her to the protest. It read: “We are one.”

### MIAMI AS TRAGIC?

As I have argued in this contextual chapter, in which I have discussed both historical and contemporary sociopolitical developments in Miami, the city may be much less unique than many residents and academics would like to believe. Focusing on its transnational ties and Latin American character, scholars have tended to reproduce the idea of a culturally rich, diverse city, one that is unlike any other in the US. Indeed, Spanish is a dominant, if not the main, language used in Miami. The city has both been praised and criticized for its Latino influence, and it has become an important site for a variety of Latin American festivals, such as Cinco de Mayo. Yet there are many other US cities shaped and defined by migration, and Miami’s transnational linkages do not make it a singular place that is unaffected by its national context.

In this chapter, I have attempted to advance understandings of Miami by focusing on how national-level security trends manifest locally, at an urban scale, and how they are experienced by differently positioned residents in everyday life. The public-private security arrangements in Wynwood and the securitization of Memorial Day weekend both reflect broader US developments of privatization and racialized security practices. In response, Dream Defenders rally support and organize protests in spaces that embody Miami’s racial inequality and segregation, such as the I-95 and the government center named after Stephen Clark. Miamians have come to understand security and violence in their city by connecting different geographical scales: protesters organized around the deaths of both Demz, a local graffiti artist, and Mike Brown, who was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, and who became a symbol of systemic state violence against African-Americans throughout the US. Miami’s racial inequality, segregation, and selective security practices reflect endemic national systems of White supremacy and apartheid, and are not an isolated issue or even a particularly urban problem.

In the end, Marcus was correct in saying that my dissertation sought to focus on the “real Miami”, but not because I did research in places such as Overtown, which belied the city’s dominant spatial imaginary of tropical magic. In the real Miami, the magic and the tragic do not map neatly onto distinct urban spaces. You do not have to cross the bridge to the City of Miami to experience the “real Miami”, as the local rapper Rick Ross suggested: you can also try to cross the bridge to South Beach as an African-American on the last weekend of May. Unlike any other event, Memorial Day weekend shows how easily the idea of Miami Beach as a paradise can be transformed into the idea of a dangerous area, a state of

exception, perhaps even temporarily similar to that of the “ghetto” (Jaffe, 2012b). A place that, in the eyes of city officials and MBPD police officers, suddenly requires heavy policing and extraordinary security measures. Idealized spatial imaginaries are not necessarily fixed to a specific place, but can be selectively applied based on widespread normative beliefs of what utopian and dystopian places look like.

Through the lived experiences of Lux, Darius, and Sarah, I have sought to nuance the dominant imaginary of Miami as an utopian place, in which crime and inequality only play a marginal role, or are used in popular culture to frame the city as more attractive and exceptional. As several commentators have suggested, including rapper Rick Ross and Connolly (2014), there is much to be considered as “tragic” beyond Miami’s superficial magic. Indeed, Miami is a rather unexceptional city, characterized by segregation and exclusion reminiscent of racial apartheid and its systemic violence. This chapter has sought to contribute to unpacking Miami’s imaginary by discussing national-level security trends and examining the ways they manifest locally and are experienced individually. While my findings critique the idea of a magic city, I want to be careful in using the opposite frame of tragedy. While there are many reasons to refer to Miami as a “tragic” city, the stories of my protagonists also convey hope, for the development of a more inclusive city and for better lives for an increasing number of Miamians. In light of Sarah’s experiences and those of others, characterizing Miami along binary terms as either magic nor tragedy also reduces the lives of its residents to a one dimensional experience. In the chapters that follow, I show how my Miamian interlocutors sought to avoid tragedy and asserted hope through their engagement with guns, cameras, and secrets. I analyze their engagement with these three main elements through the idea of vigilant citizenship, of a normative agenda in which self-defense, vigilance, and violence have become central to what citizenship means in practice.