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OF IALODÊS AND FEMINISTS

Reflections on Black Women's Political Action in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Black women's struggle for emancipation is not only meant to build more secure, capable, and brilliant women who can attain individual privileges. Such struggles are avenues to bring about transformation to black people's lives.¹

First Movement: Where Does History Begin?

A few years ago, I watched an indigenous activist leader being interviewed on Brazilian TV about the 500th anniversary of the so-called 'discovery' of Brazil; that is, the invasion of Pindorama (as some Indigenous peoples referred to the region) by European (Portuguese) colonizers. When asked about his opinion of the 500th anniversary, he said: '500 years? My people were already here when they came . . . I can tell the history of this river, you see, going back 5,000 years . . . what can I say about 500 years?'² I start this article by acknowledging this perspective of *anterioridade*, of a history that is not founded by the Europeans (although, latterly it has been profoundly influenced by them); of other interpretive possibilities that allow for multiple frameworks to recount history.

I acknowledge that the ability to name things refers to a position of power; that is, of a possibility to order the world according to one's own views, be it as an individual or as a collective. It is a position of privilege. Although I will not discuss what and how many weapons have been involved in obtaining such privileges, I cannot ignore the fact that there were, and are, weapons involved.³

By naming women's struggles based on their own perspective—that of 1970s European bourgeois women—the early agents of feminist theory brought to that newly created concept a profoundly western standpoint which lacked any knowledge of other women in the world. That concept

was also wrapped up in a growing individualism supported by a capitalist society.

To what extent is the concept of 'feminism' sufficient to embrace all women, all kinds of women's activism, and all forms of women's struggles? For us black women—understood as being ourselves immeasurably diverse but also targets of inequalities that stem from inferiorization and exploitation—the multiple political actions we undertake traverse different levels of action and different fields of existence marked by conflicting or violent meetings with the West and with patriarchy, with capitalism, and with individualism. Is it enough to call this feminism?

Bell hooks affirmed that 'the feminist movement occurs when groups of people come together with an organized action strategy to eliminate patriarchy' (2000: xi). But we should make explicit the practical impossibility of disassociating patriarchy from racism, colonialism, and capitalism—all parts of the same 'package' of western domination over all the other regions in the world. These systems of domination are not structured as chapters or as hierarchies; on the contrary, they operate simultaneously over women, and at times, all too arduously.

However, as posed by bell hooks, the struggles of black women for decolonization occur at different levels; in other words, at the level of their bodies and minds as well as in political, economic, social, religious, cultural, and racial systems. This can lead to a different kind of feminism, markedly different from more mainstream (read 'white') forms of feminist thought. This distinct feminism exposes a contradiction in that dominant feminist trend, one that cannot be disassociated from confronting positions of privilege and control. That means confronting white people's everyday interests in the world, primarily those living in Europe and the United States, regardless of whether they are men or women.

As a movement within feminism, contemporary black women's organizational forms confront bourgeois values wherever they may appear, be it in carbon monoxide and other poisonous gases being uncontrollably emitted, be it in the increase of toxic waste being dumped in black and indigenous peoples' communities, or be it in the bourgeoisie's comfortable lifestyle which stems from capitalist overexploitation and from the enslaved work of women, men and children. Black women's feminism also confronts a self-centered activism dependent on a Darwinist rationality and evolutionism, as well as on notions of center and margins.

Affirming its own non-dialectic foundations, black women's feminism reveals its roots in *arkhé*⁴ cultures, which privilege cyclical notions of time and particular ways of ritualizing that infiltrate the West and its rationality and work alongside it while attempting to weaken it. From the perspective of a power play, *arkhé* cultures should be understood as movements that generate and sustain our own existence.

On the other hand, it does not seem appropriate, either here or in any other space of political reflection, to work within the moralist and psychological spheres that lead to the mobilization of guilt so present in the identity affirmation mechanisms integral to the standpoint of women in positions of domination. We cannot utilize the same rationale to support our arguments as those that stem from the standpoint of these women. In this unwanted position, a reductionist perspective entails considering black feminist speech as that of the victim, which is, for many different reasons, unacceptable.

Second Movement: The Violent Foundation of the Diaspora

Black women's history is linked to that of the region which convention, in the last 500 years, has identified as Latin America and the Caribbean. Their presence in this region is part of what has come to be known as one of the greatest human afflictions ever lived: the transatlantic slave trade of people from different African ethnic groups brought as a labor force to that European-invaded region.

The slave trade was accompanied by wars, the annihilation of entire African ethnic groups, as well as physical and cultural destitution, which still occur on the African continent. It can easily be understood that the transatlantic slave trade has had great and varied impact on the lives of black women since the very beginning. Fully understanding the impact of this massive movement of African peoples to another part of the world continues to require broader and deeper studies. At any rate, it is known that, between the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the continent's shores and the year 1776 (the year of the American revolution), the New World received an influx of some 6 million peoples, 5 million of whom were enslaved Africans and 1 million European settlers. During this period of forced migration due to the transatlantic slave trade, about 40 percent of all enslaved Africans ended up in Brazil (Dodson, 2001: 119).

Slavery meant and still means reducing human beings to the condition of market goods, highly valued perishables moved to be employed in the exploitation and production of wealth in the tropical environment. Mining, agricultural work, building and maintenance of makeshift villages, cities and housing for Europeans and their descendants are amongst the main jobs performed in a context of extreme violence and exploitation. The systematic export of that wealth and its by-products served as a platform for the installation and consolidation of capitalism back in the white, metropolitan centers of Europe.

According to historical accounts, the average life expectancy of enslaved workers, primarily those designated to work on the plantations in countries like Brazil, did not exceed seven years! It is not difficult to understand the

context of slavery as one comprised of resistance and struggle once the humanity of enslaved black women and men is acknowledged. In doing so, it can be seen that they were capable of proposing daily alternatives of sociability, habitability and political strategies for either returning to Africa or rooting themselves into a new geography. Armed revolts, new freedom territories (such as maroon societies⁵ and others), and everyday acts of sabotage and refusal to work are all among the actions that contributed to an environment of transformation that led to the demise of the transatlantic slave trade and of the system of enslavement in the region. Brazil was the very last country to abolish slavery in 1888.

Independent of the timeline which tells this history of patriarchy in the world and in this region, it can be said that patriarchy was a vital part of the slavery regime and had become ingrained in society. The appropriation and exploitation of human bodies had no boundaries, and men held the power to torture black men and women as well as to control political systems and the production of wealth. The center of power was the white man—African and indigenous women and men and their descendants were subjected to corporal, sexual, and political subjugation.

The creation of the European-controlled slave regime meant, for African women, a profound rupture with old patterns of individual and collective power and control over their bodies, their political lives, and their relationship with the sacred. Consequently, the social and political disorganization among the different peoples inflicted by the African *holocaust*⁶ was a model for economic, cultural, and political globalization that predates the current one that possesses a predatory pattern that emerges from Europe and spread to other continents. New alternatives had to be reborn and applied, in the sense of searching for new heights of cultural existence and resistance. At the same time, old patterns and traditions had to be recreated and adapted to such adverse conditions both in Africa and in these new territories.

According to knowledge and practices passed down through generations of black women members of several religious communities in Brazil, female leadership and responsibility in dealing with transcendental religious and cultural issues and political matters is ancient and long predates the history of European colonialism in Africa. Even if the origin of many customs created in the so-called New World cannot be precisely identified, it is possible to affirm that these have been reinterpreted and adapted to a new context. In many of them, the action of women acquires fundamental importance.

The Trip of Ialodês

There have been many African cultural remnants that, once transported, allowed for the rooting of a massive number of African women and men in the Diaspora. Many elements, deliberately transformed by the action of the

colonizer during the middle passage with the aim of making connections within ethnic groups more difficult, along with the conviviality of different African ethnic groups in the streets and in the slave quarters,⁷ have blurred the marks that could have made the journey back to a specific place of origin possible. And this origin refers to an unattainable, emblematic Africa; a female ideal built as an instrument of cultural resistance to a Europeanized ideology.

It comes, then, from a mythical and imagined Africa, from an Africa that is as real as it is translated through the patterns of organization and political action carried out up to this point. The different modalities of women's organization and forms of representation and political actions that have acquired yet other different forms in Brazil come also from this Africa. The celebration of queens in public cultural festivals, as well as their political role as conciliators; the organization of religious, profane and cheerful activities stemming from conditions of slavery; the gathering in secret or public women's societies based on ethnic or religious commitments, all are among the initiatives that have in common the recognition of women's leadership, their presence in public activities, and their political role. These are all experiences lived between the 16th and the 19th centuries, while the European patriarchal slave regime was in full force.

Such initiatives have acted and still act as organizational and behavioral models for women and men from post-slavery societies to this day. Among the different possibilities of exercising female leadership based on a political action perspective, I would like to highlight that of the *Ialodês*.

Third Movement: The Ialodês in the Diaspora

The idea of an *Ialodê* as a cultural and political definition of women's action has no definite date of appearance in Brazil. Its origin is the African continent and it became widespread within Amerindian cultures with the transatlantic slave trade. Information about the Brazilian slave regime⁸ suggests that the *Ialodês* arrived in Brazil along with enslaved Yoruba people, around the late 18th century.

In fact, *Ialodê* is the Brazilian adaptation of a Yoruba word, *Ìyálóòde* (Verger, 1997: 174). According to some of the African traditions transported to Brazil, *Ialodê* is one of the titles given to Oxum, a deity whose origins are traced back to Nigeria, in *Ijexá e Ijebu*. *Ialodê* also refers to a women's representative, to some kinds of emblematic women, female political action leaders of an eminently urban extraction. It is, as we say, a women's representative, who speaks for all and participates in spaces of power.

On the other hand, *Ialodês* have affirmed their presence and contemporary relevance in the 21st century on the basis of oral and corporal traditions

passed from hand to mouth to attentive eyes, in spaces where the inherited tradition was updated. In the case of Brazil, they can be seen in any black community where women, taking leadership or collective roles of responsibility, develop actions in which a future is affirmed to all those subordinated to them. This takes place within the struggles to improve people's material conditions and in the development of behaviors and activities that seek to reclaim the pertinence and contemporary relevance of an immaterial perspective. Thus, the *Ialodês* are given importance and celebrated not only in Afro-Brazilian religious communities, where they have a fundamental role in the dissemination of *axé*,⁹ but also outside of such sacred spaces.

What follows is a tale about them. It is a story within the oral tradition which has been passed down in *Candomblé* of *Ketu* communities in Brazil.¹⁰

This is the story of a hardworking and determined woman named Oxum who, despite her many efforts, did not get to improve her life. As she noticed that nothing she did was good enough to overcome her difficulties, she decided to seek help among the wise people in her community. As always happens in such cases, she cast the cowries to ask the *orixás* for guidance and to find a way to solve her problems. The answer came with the need to prepare and deliver an offering in the house of Orixalá, the king. The delivery should be accompanied by requests, said out loud, concerning everything Oxum needed so that she could move on with her life. And so it was done. Once the handsome offerings were ready, Oxum took them to the king's palace. When she got there, instead of asking, Oxum started to bad-mouth the king. She accused him of being unfair and opulent, while she, a hardworking and dedicated woman, could not have anything.

Her curses thrown against Orixalá caused a stir and slowly people gathered around the king's house to see what was going on. Inside, hearing the crowd's murmurs, Orixalá summoned his advisors and asked for information. They told him that there was a woman who vigorously cursed the king, accusing him of all sorts of inequalities and injustices. Orixalá asked his advisors what to do and they recommended he give the woman a gift. And so it was quickly done. Receiving the gifts, Oxum thanked them and continued her curses, insisting on the injustice of a situation where the king accumulated wealth while she, a fighter, had very little. New gifts were given to her.

More curses she threw at the palace, in front of the whole town that excitedly observed the accusations against the king whose sovereignty was being questioned. Inside the palace, the advisors continued to recommend that gifts be sent to Oxum. Finally, the king sent for her and, already inside the palace, ordered that she be given everything she wished.

Thus, Oxum became the owner of all the gold and all the wealth.

Here, this story is utilized to illustrate one of the premises of black womanhood embodied by Brazilian women. These premises speak of the different dimensions of struggle and the instability of social positioning,

for example, the human ability to break with established patterns and to rebuild new structures; of the power to exercise agency and to experience transformation. They speak of the viability of struggle and the possibilities of success that struggle brings; of women's responsibility to their group and of the existence of collective interests to which each individual should answer.

These premises speak of the masculine power being questioned; of the power of wealth being questioned; of a revolution in which wealth changes hands. They speak of women's presence in public spaces; their ability to lead and to exercise political action. They speak of Oxum, the primordial *Ialodê*, according to tradition, who is an *orixá* marked by sensuality, will power, and the ability to deliver results. They celebrate the *Ialodês* as women who act as agents of political change and the primary owners of the wealth they successfully conquered. In sum, they reinstate the activist dimension that black women have lived in their African past (or present) and continue to exercise every day in the Diaspora. Although the exact timeline of this archetypal story may have been lost, it can be said that the struggles against patriarchy and political and economic domination associated with them are ever present to us black women. The fervor with which this narrative has been updated to the 21st century signals its pertinence to western modernity, pointing to a perspective of fundamental continuity throughout the centuries. As a theory, feminism comes much later.

Fourth Movement: Ialodês and Feminists, the Encounter

The transformations experienced by western societies in the late 1960s had among their 'findings' the reappropriation of the body by those women and men who had been profoundly influenced by the ways of Judeo-Christianity, which conferred upon them an inferior status in the face of *higher* spaces, dwellings of the soul or the spirit.

This reclaiming of the body had as its symbol the so-called 'sexual revolution', made possible by the consolidation of scientific thought as the key to explain the world. The rise of scientific, biologic thought in opposition to previous sacred- and religious-bound readings made possible the 'decodification' of the body that, from then on, was seen as a moving mechanism to be controlled. The next step to consolidate such control was access to the new technological possibilities represented by the adoption of hormonal contraceptive methods. The body's 'liberation' from its biological processes opened new doors to ways of living one's sexuality, which provided, for western women, an important instrument for the affirmation of individuality.

We might suppose that such experiences, understood as preconditions for the political transformations experimented with by white women and men,

would signify an encounter with the forms of existence and humanization of other populations (such as indigenous peoples and blacks for whom the split between body and mind made little sense or was a result of colonialist and racist violence) by those who were themselves the objects of long enacted resistance and confrontation strategies. Yet the same could have occurred with new exchanges taking place in the everyday experiences in the workplace, in public spaces and in the streets, continuously inhabited by indigenous peoples and blacks. Or this could have taken place through leadership experiences, be they political, community-based, or religious, to name just a few possibilities, so crucial to emerging political movements.

However, while feminism appears as a movement of political affirmation for women in Europe and the United States, its profoundly Eurocentric, bourgeois, and individualistic perspective, imprinted by colonialism and racism, made it difficult to establish a relation with black, indigenous, Asian, and Gypsy women, among others. All of these women were members of diverse cultures although they sometimes shared the same geographic spaces. The affirmation, articulated by the then-emerging feminism, of the homogeneity of needs and aspirations among women brought built-in mechanisms of reduction, invisibilization and even the reinforcement of annihilation actions against millions of women worldwide. Thus, this new political theory and practice was openly refuted by most black women, in tandem with their refusal of anything that meant domination and racism.

On the other hand, given black women's standpoint in Brazil, the incipient feminist theory caused both repulsion and attraction. Repulsion in response to its alienating content and attraction due to its offering of new tools for overcoming a subordinate status, for once, and for utilizing performance models that were very close to those lived by us. Thus, everyday feminist practice, which sought its foundations in the valorization of living in groups, in the reclaiming and praising of the body, and in the celebration of sexuality, approached the practices and struggles that blacks had been long experiencing.

Nevertheless, the elements of western feminism valuing rationality, also present in these practices, with their judgmental view about the non-verbal and symbolic practices lived in the context of indigenous and black cultures, have created an inhospitable environment for building partnerships and exchanges.

On a daily basis, racism and class differences were also consistent barriers against the participation of those black women who did not fulfill the schooling requirements nor shared a closeness to scholarly bourgeoisie values. Most importantly, black women's systematic denouncement of racism as structuring of social relations, including that occurring among women, went against the perspective of shared sisterhood that feminism sought to reaffirm at the time.

When a Meeting is Possible

Definitely attracted by the new feminist discourses, black women have slowly come closer to its practices. It is important to consider that this approximation will take place amidst important conflicts, some of which are race- and class-driven. It is a clash with the feminist mainstream that considers the active and denouncing presence of black women as unacceptable expressions of a passionate behavior, also incompatible with the ideals of sisterhood in construction.

At the same time, this presence of black women also makes visible other conflicts within that emerging feminism. These are the discourses of lesbians, of rural and urban female workers, of Indigenous women, of prostitutes, and many others. Experiencing these conflicts will, in the long run, produce a new face for feminism, one that ought to be multiple and diverse. Hopefully, this will produce an environment attractive enough to experience the rise of black women's NGOs, which are also self-defined as feminist organizations, and for whom conflict is understood to be part of a process of coexistence and growth, as a creative flame and not as a threat. Certain segments of feminism, especially those formed by white bourgeoisie women, have lived this conflict as a threat to their hegemonic positions and in some cases have distanced themselves from the daily processes of the broader feminist movement.

Black women self-identified as feminists and their 'reflection groups' (*grupos de reflexão*) appeared in Brazil in the 1970s. An important characteristic of their work was the initiative to join anti-racist practice and debate with feminism utilizing resources from the Afro-Brazilian cultural tradition, which affirmed the wholeness of human perspectives. This wholeness, central in the lived experience of black women, becomes evident in their political agendas, characterized by a new profusion of themes and aspects related to their subordination that had to be approached and resolved. In addition, there were also considerations in the use of these cultural resources related to the search for models for the exercise of power. In the case of black women, such considerations included leadership patterns and alliances that existed in religious communities that were founded on continuous learning, on the ability to improve the groups' strength, and on the responsibilities within the different dimensions of existence. It is worth noting that many of these organizations were led by highly educated women, considering the average schooling of the black population in the country.

A leading name in this initial moment was that of Lélia Gonzalez, deeply committed to bringing together the different aspects of black women's political action. She was herself a respected intellectual, sociologist and college professor. She also helped found several feminist groups and was an active

leftist. She was a member of the Workers' Party (PT) national committee and left because she disagreed with the party's decision to disregard the anti-racist struggle as part of its platform at the time. Gonzales was a founding member of the Grêmio Recreativo de Arte Negra e Escola de Samba Quilombo, of the Movimento Negro Unificado contra a Discriminação Racial (MNU) and of Nzinga — Instituto de Mulheres Negras do Rio de Janeiro.

Gonzalez's history demonstrates her leading role in several spaces beyond women-only organizations, a practice common to many black women activists, from the 1970s to today. In addition to the organizations like those mentioned (political parties, black-inspired mixed organizations, cultural associations, colleges, and feminist groups), black women were also active in *favelas* and the residents' associations of poor neighborhoods; organizations for rural and urban male and female workers; groups of mothers struggling for better public education and health services; both Afro-Brazilian and Christian religious coalitions; groups in resistance against the dictatorship; and in the formation of homosexual movements. And yet such extensive participation lacks recognition from both these movements and society in general.

In different arenas of political activism, actions confronting racism and patriarchy could not be disassociated, in a way similar to the perspective that black feminist activists and theorists from the United States have recently named intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2001), which recognizes that women and men's subordination and struggles for social transformation are shaped by different factors that act concomitantly over individuals and groups according to particular characteristics and that correspond to systems of power and domination. However, the very definition of intersectionality is, for the most part, an attempt to come closer to a perspective of wholeness of both individuals and groups in dialogue with the western standpoint that disassociates, orders, and rationalizes the different aspects of existence. Such a concept may signify a step forward in terms of incorporating the perspective of political action posed by black women. It is also, however, limited due to its difficulty in acknowledging African-bred cultural perspectives. It is as if an *Ialodê* broken in multiple pieces could be reconstituted by the premises set by the notion of intersectionality. Yet the notion lacks the perspective that an *Ialodê* can be truly whole and authentic, which would prevent her continuous fragmentation resulting from domination processes that seek to disqualify and subjugate her.

Black Women's Feminism at the Onset of the 21st Century

The main challenges that the 21st century poses for activists in general, and black women feminists in particular, are mainstream thought, neoliberal

policies, and the process of worldwide economic polarization and hyper-concentration of wealth dominated by a few individuals and small groups that control the technological means of financial speculation.

Years after its inception, black feminism in Brazil, Latin America as a whole and the Caribbean has changed feminism in the region, allowing for the problematization of hierarchies and inequalities among women. Moreover, it has broadened the possibilities for black movements in the region through the implementation of an agenda for reflection and action on gender inequalities within a larger anti-racist agenda.

It is obvious that new global features imply conflict, struggle, instabilities—all elements that seem to be very close to the premises set by Afro-Diasporic cultures, which assume the interaction of different forces and conflict to be integral parts of processes of coexistence and enhancement of potential. It should be kept in mind that identity struggles have had, and continue to have, special relevance for black women feminists in the different places where they function as political actors. Such particular struggle entails positively reinforcing the role of black women as agents of social transformation and as members of a diasporic community with origins in the African continent. This means that they have a shared past, a shared present, and the agency to set their shared future in face of the western white establishment, its racism and the reappropriation of African cultures as the founding stones of our community.

Nevertheless, in their cultural aspects and with regard to the elements inherited from our past, the identity struggles undertaken up to this moment seem to be insufficient to face the current challenges imposed by economic globalization. The digital, rapid movement of financial and market assets is premised upon a disregard for frontiers and borders, for identity symbols and for anything resembling singularity. It is through this deliberate ignorance and the production of instabilities it entails that financial capital installs its peculiar environment prone to speculation and relentless profiteering.

In the face of such intense internationalization of destructive mechanisms, the resistance posed by civil society demands greater ability to promote coalitions of political forces at the international level. It is a different model of internationalization and digital circulation of alternative political forces involved in political actions that confront the hyper-economization of life and the reduction of singularities (or identities) to speculative instruments. In this scenario, black women's movements experience the weakening of their tools for action, especially those based on identity affirmations, since the complexity of limitless, geographically unbounded world arenas—where new coalitions are possible and necessary—turn identities into something fluid, unstable, and even temporary. Self-affirming single identities become inadequate in this complex setting. On the contrary, multiple and unstable

identities are the ones that can reinstall the possibilities for singularization before contemporary fluid alliances, contacts and borders.

At the same time, it is upon the mass of black women from all over the world and, in particular, from those regions outside of the centers of speculative capital (such as Latin America and the Caribbean), that the impacts of economic changes will be fully realized. Such impacts can, in many instances, sharply strip away the minimal material conditions necessary for more organized and far-reaching political action.

In the face of the demands for new political discourses that move towards formulating future action plans to meet these global conditions, black women's movements stand in trepidation. On the one hand, their everyday practices prompt the maintenance of formulas and discourses that have been already tested, but which have become deficient to generate new interpretations about the world. It is clear that there is a need for new identity affirmations that can be both fluid and capable of establishing coalitions with other phenomena around the globe.

Nonetheless, black women's movements are short-changed due to their express absence from the new political fora of the globalized civil society. This is the result of material limitations (sometimes insurmountable ones). But it also results from the difficulty of bringing together their local and regional agendas—which privilege identity affirmation and the broadening of feminism and anti-racism agendas—with the new agendas set by international trade, intellectual property, new human rights features, and many other novelties brought up by the new contours of politics and the spread of economic paradigms imposed by the new character of Empire.

It should be noted that the difficulties of black women's organizations have similarities with those of other organizations, mostly those that represent other 'peripheral' subjects. The need to formulate action plans according to these new paradigms is at the core of the crisis of the main black women's organization in the region, the Network of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women (Red de Mujeres Afrolatinas e Afrocaribeñas).

The Network of Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean Women and its Future Challenges

The network was formed in 1992 and gathered black women from most countries in the region. Its main goal was to start the constitution of a black feminism based on black women's actions of identity self-affirmation, along with their anti-racist and anti-discrimination struggles.

Its encompassing demands have become too narrow for the implementation of a political agenda common to all black women in the region, which could function as a means to make them politically relevant actors at the

local, regional, and international levels. On the contrary, this network has not been capable of creating prompt strategies for common political actions and agenda-setting, which is verifiable in the unfocused and unstable ways in which its members develop their actions to confront racism and poverty in the region, to formulate and affirm new models for political action or governmental systems, and to promote everyday coalition-building and dialoguing.

Surprisingly, this network has been incapable of dealing with the differences and conflicts stemming from the need to state a more explicit political stance in front of the contemporary political and economic contexts imposed by the speculative and financial globalization process in course all over Latin America and the Caribbean. Its expansion has occurred in such intensive manner that it magnifies and gives new features to the exclusion promoted by racism and sexism.

The complexity of this situation calls for the consideration that certain forms of identity affirmation movements may have hidden conservative traces. These conventional elements can jeopardize these movements' ability to respond to the challenges posed by politically dense scenarios that require greater agility and a quick wit in order to move forward in the formulation of new ways of confronting the power emanating from this renewed capitalism.

It is important to remember that many of the impasses faced by black women's organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean are shared by the feminist movement as a whole, as well as by anti-racist and other social movements in the region and elsewhere. However, the international political arena has made it clear that an incisive agenda is needed and that it should serve for the proposing of and dispute about alternative models capable of delivering social justice—and the World Social Forum (WSF), with its multiple agendas, actors and alliances, has become an important example of such demand.

The urgency for black feminists to take a stand cannot be postponed. The many alternatives in front of them will make conflicts clear. The radicalization of political positions will most likely occur and fields of action and alliances will acquire new delimitations—a throwback to the 1970s (and later years) in what it can bring in terms of open differences and similarities that can push the political struggles forward, and as a consequent rupture with phoney brotherhoods and sisterhoods and inflexible identity models (those with clear authoritarian and fascist streaks).

At the same time, however, such processes can incorporate new characteristics, faces and diasporic representations rearranged by civil society¹¹ while networking to allow for established actors to manifest new possibilities of identities that need not refuse their own unique features. This can be true for both black women and other important groups.

The contemporary *Ialodês* face a challenge that, perhaps, can only be compared to the colonial and economic world enterprise that gave origin to the Diaspora by the way of the transatlantic slave trade. This new formulation of black womanhood will require urgent new approaches to confronting and formulating political strategies. What is needed, then, is for us to bring down the new rules of the new kingdom so that we can, once again, reclaim the power and the wealth demanded by Oxum.

NOTES

1. As stated by activist Pedrina de Deus and quoted by Lemos (2000).
2. As I recall from the words of indigenous activist Ailton Krenak. Any imprecision is my responsibility.
3. By 'weapon' I refer to several mechanisms and instruments of subjugation and annihilation, from symbolic, semiotic and cultural instruments to firearms and all firepower concentrated in the hands of certain nations and peoples.
4. *Arkhê* cultures, different from those founded in *logos*, refer to a cyclical time and to those forms of existence connected with the sacred. They acknowledge and share the mystery of existence phenomena and understand individuals as part of a larger community, a singular representation of the overall forces that constitute and give meaning to existence.
5. Maroon societies (*quilombos* in Portuguese) were territories of self-defense and freedom created by runaway enslaved Africans in Brazil. These settlements had several organizational forms, from temporary gatherings to the constitution of parallel states, as was the case of the *Palmares* Maroon society (*Quilombo dos Palmares*), which lasted over a hundred years.
6. The use of the term *holocaust*, borrowed from the tragedy endured by Jews in Europe, seeks to establish a closeness between different models and attempts to annihilate a people on a mass scale based on a perverse association of racism, economic interest and political domination. In this sense, the attacks on both Jews and blacks throughout the globe—especially those emanating from Europe—show similarities that, to this date, continue to demand political mobilization and open confrontation.
7. *Senzalas* in Portuguese.
8. A great deal of the African memory in Brazil, especially during the colonial and slavery periods, has been erased through both the burning of public records by the newly minted Republican government and the establishment of different strategies for erasing the African presence in Brazil as part of a eugenic policy of national whitening carried out by the Brazilian state from the early 20th century onward.
9. *Axé* means strength in the existential sense; *axé* is the basis of existence, what makes it move. *Axé* can also be defined as power of engendering and achievement. Without *axé*, existence would not be.
10. *Candomblé* is one of the African-origin religions created and in existence in Brazil; *ketu* refers to a religious stream which relates to one of the African

ethnic groups that came to Brazil and has as its patron the *orixá*/god *Oxóssi*, originated in the city of ancient *Ifé*.

11. This statement draws upon Stuart Hall (e.g. 2002), who points out changes in identities due to globalization, meaning greater fragmentation alongside greater possibilities of composing new identity affirmations, albeit temporary. Thus, in the current globalization context, new communities can be engendered beyond formal territories and can become new kinds of diasporas.

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