

# Brazilian Black Feminism in Rural and Urban Spaces<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Brazilian Black feminism has changed and grown more influential and diverse in the past two decades. One of the major challenges is to understand what these changes mean for women's agency in the different contexts in which they emerge, both rural and urban. To examine the transformations of Black feminism in Brazil, this article investigates three generations of activists over the periods of re-democratization, democratic expansion and crisis of democracy, bringing focus to Black women in the quilombola movement, young Black feminists on the Internet and intersectional feminism. The article analyses traditional and new activist networks that claim multiple identities for themselves, as well as public status as collective action strategies to seize traditional spaces for political activism, grounding themselves in feminism and anti-racism against the multiple forms of oppression in urban and rural spaces.

## Keywords

Brazil, Black feminism, race, gender and generation, inequality and democracy

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## Introduction

The autonomous mobilization of Black women emerged at the end of the military dictatorship, especially in major cities in the southeast and northeast Brazil amidst protests for the return to the democratic regime, which subsequently expanded across all regions of the country, including the countryside as it gained traction within quilombola organizations. This period is known as one of ‘re-democratization’, especially in the 1980s during the mobilizations for constitutional reforms (Rios, 2017). It is important to note at the outset that this movement emerged in dialogue with both the Black movement and the feminist movement (Rodrigues & Prado, 2010) within an activism network that shared action repertoires, even if we find innovations in the political language of Black feminism (Tarrow, 2013).

Nationwide, this activism called itself the Black women’s movement, and in its local and commonplace expressions took the form of Black women’s collectives, although some of these activists were involved in the Brazilian press and central feminist or anti-racist organizations. This also sought to form dense international networks (Ribeiro, 1995), with an emphasis on Latin America (Gonzalez, 2017).

In both cases, they preserved an autonomous collective identity from feminism and the Black movement. However, they maintained a strong political interdependence with feminist and anti-racist organizations, in addition to other grassroots movements, such as religious, labor and community organizations. Within this Black women’s movement, which we shall call ‘classic’, the emphasis was on the fight for civil citizenship grounded in the struggle for social rights, social guarantees for the freedom and equality of women in their diverse ethnic and class backgrounds, in addition to a strong anti-colonial stance. In the understanding of its main public intellectual, Gonzalez (1988) said, ‘feminism should relinquish Eurocentrism in favor of a greater entrenchment in Amerindian realities’.<sup>2</sup>

The main demands from the most organized and influential sectors called for the reduction of the fierce and persistent race and gender inequalities afflicting non-White women across different sectors of social life, particularly in work, education and health. Within this context, conflicts with the feminist movement stemmed from the latter’s uncritical adherence to the myth of ‘racial democracy’, a socio-political and cultural ideology of domination which hindered an ethnic–racial political engagement. In its struggle to construct other representations of women, therein included racial differences and the legacy of resistance against

slavery, Black feminism consolidated in its favor the image of the warrior woman, strong and brave, opposing the conservative image of the weaker sex associated with White women.

Despite contrast identities and conflicts, a consensus existed among Black feminists that the country's democracy could be rebuilt by tackling race and gender inequalities, which demanded political alliances with feminist as well as community, quilombola and Black social movements in addition to labor unions and even party organizations. After all, while the dispute was against society's dominant collective representations, seen as traditionalist, patriarchal, classist and racist, there was also the understanding that the paths to social transformation called for state action. This engendered a process by which these organizations gained strength within the civil sphere, with greater adherence to institutional practices and interactions with the state sphere.

During the 1990s, this activism experienced the formalization of its civil organizations, often supported by international organizations. Furthermore, there was significant progress with the formation of transnational networks and their connections with the state, especially through the creation of the special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (*Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial*—SEPPIR) and the Secretariat for Policies for Women (*Secretaria de Políticas para Mulheres*—SPM), both founded in 2003. As social movements were becoming increasingly formalized and institutionalized in both civil and state spheres, leaderships engaged in the Black women's movement successfully presented themselves as legitimate representatives in executive and advisory spaces within the federal government in the first decade of the twenty-first century, operating in specific and sectorial councils in more strategic and permeable areas to the demands for racial and gender equality.

With the political crisis and subsequent overthrow, in 2016, of President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*—PT), a grassroots-based government with close ties to social movements, Black women hitherto engaged in traditional or classic activism, as well as many other types of activism, lost ground at the federal government level, but sought to preserve anti-racist and feminist activities in local spheres. Within civil society, they operated in specific as well as mixed organizations, comprising partisan and/or social-state spaces, particularly in state-level and municipal spheres. In the northeastern state of Maranhão, for example, a leadership of the organization *Mãe Andreza* presides over the State Council for Women; in

the nearby state of Bahia, one of the members of the Black Women's Forum was appointed State Secretary for Policies for Women.

In addition, Black women activists continue to operate in transnational networks or in international human rights organizations, for example, a leader of the *Criola* organization, a renowned non-governmental organization (NGO) from Rio de Janeiro, currently serves as a director at Amnesty International. Additionally, national and transnational activism networks, such as the Articulation of Brazilian Black Women (*Articulação de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras*) and the Afro-Latin American and Caribbean Network, are prominent both in articulating public mobilizations as well as institutionalized collective actions. The political activities of these women embrace the issues of racial and gender violence, delivery of public services, health and public security and religious intolerance, in addition to feminist agendas fighting against the setbacks underway in the country since the 2016 parliamentary coup.

Beyond their long-standing and solid organizational work, the commitment of these women to attracting and training new generations of activists, especially in the inter-generational transfer of the legacy of Black feminist activism, is worth to note. It is no accident, therefore, that we find the presence and participation of these generations in several spaces for political mobilization, whether in the streets or in more circumscribed events, such as in the Young Black Feminist meetings which took place in Salvador and São Paulo, in 2009 and 2017, respectively, where the founders and representatives of traditional Black women's organizations, such as *Geledés*, *Criola*, *Coisa de Mulher*, among others, were present.

In a recent interview regarding the contrast between the new and older generations of Black feminism in Brazil, an interviewer (Santana, 1917) from *Revista Cult* asked the following question to Sueli Carneiro, philosopher and founder of *Geledés-Instituto da Mulher Negra* (Institute of the Black Woman, São Paulo): 'who are these young Black women?' Her reply showed simultaneously an understanding of her time in relation to the time lived by young militants. Carneiro could name a dozen young feminists who had taken the responsibility of promoting Black feminism (in *ibid.*, our translation):

Until a decade ago, we old feminists would get together and ask: where are the young girls? Where are they? I even wrote an article in which I offer to pass our baton, but I had no idea to whom to pass it at that moment. I looked back and saw the same old comrade. The young women today took the baton and they are out there in the world. It is a very exciting thing.

In this light, this article investigates the underlying reasons in the formation and collective action repertoire of Black women activists who make use of multiple social identities, whether in urban peripheries or in rural communities. This study includes Black women collectives and organizations, such as *Geledés*, whose activities date to the period of democratization in Brazil. The first case study is that of the National Coordination of Articulation of Quilombos (*Coordenação Nacional de Articulação de Quilombos*—CONAQ), the political organization of Black and quilombola rural populations, which prioritizes the voice of women in their struggles for the right to land. The second is the formation of a network of young Black feminists since the 2000s, exemplified by the ramifications of the First and Second Meetings of Young Black Feminists and the work of the Association Women of Odun (*Associação Mulheres de Odun*—AMO). As a counterpoint, this study will also analyze the formation of a community of intersectional activists and their First Intersectional Feminism Camp, as these activists, in addition to the dimensions of gender and race, also lay greater emphasis on the dimension of sexuality and the urban periphery as a ‘place’ of politics.

Since the focus is on a more recent process of political mobilization, with novel dimensions in Brazil, it seems wise to compare the action and discourse repertoires of the new generation of activists against the more established forms of Black feminism, formed amidst mobilizations against the military regime, as well as the Black feminism fashioned during the re-democratization period. We will, therefore, focus on three distinct political cycles, re-democratization, democratic consolidation and the crisis of democracy, and consider these political configurations as frames in which specific anti-racist and feminist modes of thought and political actions emerged in connection with each other.

Black Women and the Quilombola Issue: Community, Land and Rights.

In Brazil, quilombolas became legal subjects during the country’s re-democratization process, especially amidst the struggles that resulted in the 1988 constitutional reform. Until then, quilombos and the lands of Black people were unknown to a large share of the Brazilian population, regarded as no more than historical references to the colonial struggles between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries or during the nineteenth-century monarchy. The situation gradually changed as researchers and intellectuals began, in the second quarter of the twentieth century, to methodically investigate the realities of rural communities in the country, mostly comprised Black and *cabocla* populations.

In the 1970s, researcher Beatriz Nascimento dedicated much of her studies to unveil the reality of these rural communities, trying to define them not only through their historical dimension, but also by their African matrix and their contemporary struggles for the construction of Black identities. Hence, for her, the quilombo ‘translated an instability that is inherent to the slave system’ (Nascimento, *apud* Ratts, 2017, p. 117, *our translation*), in addition to being a ‘reaction to colonialism’ (*ibid.*, p. 122) in urban and rural areas. As for its transatlantic origins, the author adds: ‘if we look at the interrelation between Brazil and Angola in the slave trade, it is not difficult to establish a connection between the history of this institution in Africa (Angola) and over here (Brazil)’ (*ibid.*, p. 119, *our translation*).

In the 1980s, debates concerning the concept of quilombo became increasingly public and transcended the boundaries of the academic world. Concurrently, rural communities themselves, especially in the north and northeast regions of the country, underwent a vigorous self-organization process, thereby obtaining the granting of legal protection for such communities in the 1988 constitutional reform. To ensure the success of this process, the Black parliamentarian Benedita da Silva, from the Black women’s and favela movements in the city of Rio de Janeiro, served as the main articulator for the agendas of quilombo communities in institutional arenas (Rios, 2020). This solid articulation resulted in Article 68 of the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act (Art. 68-ADCT), which determined that: ‘[t]o the remaining persons from quilombo communities that are occupying their lands, their definitive property is recognized, obliging the state to issue them their respective titles’ (*our translation*).

As elucidated by anthropologist Arruti (2000), the constitutional provision drafted in Article 68 would only be adequately enforced after the political mobilization of 1995, at which time a major mobilization took place celebrating the 300 years of Zumbi dos Palmares, hero of the main quilombo resistance in South America, called *Quilombo dos Palmares*. In that year of remembrance of Zumbi’s death, thousands of protesters from rural and urban areas marched to the country’s capital demanding rights, and this colonial-era quilombo leader officially became a national hero by presidential decree. In an interview with Givânia Maria da Silva, a quilombo leader from the northeastern state Pernambuco, it was affirmed that quilombo leaders and residents devoted a great deal of effort to travel to Brasília to demand racial equality and rights for the quilombo population.<sup>3</sup> Da Silva herself took part in this great march, even though she lacked the resources to travel to Brazil’s capital in the

midwest region, which reveals both the effort and protagonism of young women in rural communities, as well as their understanding of their role in the national articulation of rights for their regions.

The large-scale mobilization behind this activist movement was vital to further the quilombola agenda within the constitutional sphere, which is no longer a mere written document, but has obtained concrete rights for the population by way of land regularization policies for new subjects. As Arruti (2000, p. 107, *our translation*) emphasizes, it is from 1995,

[t]hat a discussion regarding the regulation of the article begins, leading to further visibility of the debate and wide-ranging repercussions, including a booming expansion in the amount of Quilombo Remnant Communities known at the time. Over the course of the second half of the 1990s, such ‘remnant communities’ transcended the boundaries of the states of Maranhão and Pará and reached the most unlikely states, such as Rio Grande do Sul or São Paulo.

The struggle has been incessant since then, with rural quilombola communities beginning to organize themselves nationally, not just at state and regional levels. Thus emerged the First National Meeting of Rural Black Quilombola Communities, which took place during the Zumbi dos Palmares March, concomitant with the enactment of the Provisional National Commission for Rural Black Quilombola Communities. At the time, activist movements were conscious of the existence of 412 communities throughout the national territory. The number gradually increased, as the organization gained legitimacy and spread its activities across several Brazilian states. According to a national quilombola organization, during the March of Zumbi dos Palmares, all efforts were focused on ensuring the legal provisions for the effective regulation of the communities, as shown below:

[w]ithin this context the quilombola issue gained further prominence on the national agenda. The legal acknowledgement of specific rights, regarding land titling of quilombola communities, gave rise to new demands, which spawned legislative proposals at the federal and state levels, promoting the issuing of ordinances and administrative procedures for formulating policies to ensure the rights of quilombola communities.<sup>4</sup>

Quilombola organizations multiplied across Brazil throughout the post-democratic transition period. Important events took place, such as a meeting in Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia, which mobilized not only rural organizations, but also urban Black movements. This

organization strengthened the CONAQ, which represents the interests of local, state and regional quilombola organizations, ensuring the dissemination of the demands of these collectives and their struggles for rights, recognition and especially land regularization.

Two dimensions stand out in this organizational process: the intent to ensure a leading participatory role for women; and the effort to promote and amplify the objectives of the quilombola struggle. Regarding the first, the efforts strive for an increased participation of women in both national political actions and in the everyday organization of local communities, in recognition of their central role:

[w]e are aware that we, quilombola women, have amassed throughout our lives the functions of being a mother or not, being responsible for the household, tending to the farm, the animals, be it breaking coconuts, toasting flour or making charcoal, in the daily chores, taking care of the family, working in trade, health, education, studying. In all, accumulating functions in the daily task that is to be a woman.<sup>5</sup>

This protagonism of quilombola women was confirmed in an interview with Dorinete Serejo Morais, a quilombola leader from the Alcântara region of Maranhão. Morais affirms that women are intensely active in her region, occupying spaces such as association presidents, movement coordinators and union delegates, assuming 'their roles in fact and in right'.<sup>6</sup> We may infer that the terms for valuing women in quilombola communities are broader than those found in urban areas. To this effect, the relationship with the land and the place gains a centrality not directly perceived in the urban world.

Moreover, quilombola women tend to consider certain experiences outside their communities as possibilities for continuing their struggle for rights, in view of the collective understanding that guides their trajectories. Maryellen Crisóstomo, when asked about a central aspect in her political learning and activities, emphasized an important characteristic of the new generations, namely university access by way of affirmative actions for Black students and students from public schools. This was the central issue of Afro-descendant activism since the United Nations Conference Against Racism held in 2001, in Durban, South Africa. In her words:

[t]his means the empowering of my quilombo, my people, my parents. To enroll and graduate from a federal university with a degree also means a lot to me. I can now help them without intimidating them with a higher education diploma, because I have always been with them and they with me, we are not



separate. This factor makes my knowledge and their knowledge complementary and not overlapping. I know a bit about something and they know plenty about many other things.<sup>7</sup>

The second dimension concerns the amplification of the quilombola struggle and the efforts of CONAQ seek to nationalize the struggle for legal recognition and land titling. Currently, the organization has approximately 3500 quilombola communities in 17 states across all five Brazilian regions. To this effect, five national meetings of quilombola organizations have already taken place: in Brasília in 1995, Salvador in 2000, Recife in 2003, Rio de Janeiro in 2011 and Belém in 2016. These spaces are vital for the articulation and dissemination of political demands common to quilombola communities across the country, such as the longstanding issue of land regularization. It is important to note that national events have become increasingly difficult to organize as the country endures one of the most unstable political moments in its recent history, especially following the 2016 parliamentary coup against President Dilma Rousseff, which culminated in the coming to power of the far-right in the 2018 elections, won by Jair Bolsonaro.

When we look at the process for the legal recognition of quilombola lands by governments during this period, we find a very dramatic reality. According to *Fundação Cultural Palmares*, a Brazilian government agency, during the Bolsonaro administration (2019–present), only 75 quilombola communities were certified, against 298 certifications in the 2 years before the far-right government came to power. During the PT administrations, which lasted 12 years, more than 2000 quilombola lands were certified. It is important to recall that certification is only one stage of recognition, which is concluded with the titling of the territory, this being a more difficult stage, particularly in view of the actions of the rural agribusiness lobby within the public administration. In both Lula administrations (2004–11), only 16 quilombola territories were titled and in the period when Dilma Rousseff was in power, another 16 were titled, amounting to only 32 titles over the course of the PT administrations out of the 120 throughout the history of the quilombola lands in Brazil (Arruti & Held, 2020).

If the struggles for land-titling procedures within the institutional arena are extremely complex and unfavorable to the quilombola population, this correlation of forces gains extremely violent contours in the countryside. CONAQ has been monitoring violence against quilombo communities by publishing periodic reports, which denounces conflicts and systematic violence against leaderships and other members in

Brazilian rural Black communities. Cultural relations, identities and conflicts assumed a central role in the resistance and survival processes that have emerged and developed in the quilombos, under constant threat by the illegitimate and unconstitutional interests of farmers and land grabbers vying for the land. Quilombolas have endured countless types of violence, in addition to an alarming amount of murders. In 2004–2017, 39 quilombolas were murdered, with an average of two deaths per year; this was an already dire situation that radically changed in 2017, when 18 quilombolas were murdered that year alone. Givânia Maria da Silva, one of our interviewees, also reported having faced several death threats in her lifetime, revealing that the political experience of women is also marked by the patriarchal actions of major White landowners, who openly operate against the political organization and representation of quilombola communities and, to this end, not only threaten, but are willing to exterminate the lives of people to force their permanent subjugation. A report produced by Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada [IPEA] (2020, p. 39, *our translation*) shows that ‘the homicide rate in rural municipalities tends to be higher, the greater the agricultural GDP, which raises the hypothesis that the incentive to use violence tends to be higher, the greater the economic value at stake’. In a further escalation, in March 2020, the federal government announced the removal of 30 quilombo communities in the Alcântara region of Maranhão to accommodate the expansion of the Alcântara Space Launch Center. The perception of some quilombola leaders is that the Brazilian federal government is ‘trying to destroy’ quilombola communities.<sup>8</sup>

Within this process, women are the backbone of the struggles for quilombola rights, and therefore subjected to all sorts of violence erupting from the territorial disputes in a far-right political milieu. The repudiation of quilombola rights has been systematic in the Bolsonaro administration himself having insisted since the 2018 electoral campaign on disqualifying, ridiculing and questioning the legitimacy of quilombola rights. Notwithstanding this powerful onslaught of both political and economic power, quilombola political activism has presented itself as one of the most expressive struggles for rights in Brazil. A striking example is the manner in which this national organization has contributed to building a new and larger organization for racial equality in Brazil, the *Black Coalition for Rights*,<sup>9</sup> a diverse entity with the solid participation of women, demonstrating an interconnection between rural and urban struggles in the country, between Black feminisms and the struggles of Black women from different territorialities and even displaying generational renewal.

## Young Black Feminists and Black Women Activists on the Internet

The First Meeting of Young Black Feminists, held in 2009 in Salvador, expressed a social and political context, with—relatively consolidated—government structures responsible for including racial and women's issues on the national agenda. The creation of the SEPIIR and SPM, as well as the National Youth Council (*Conselho Nacional de Juventude*) at the federal level, meant, for this generation of feminists, a set of political opportunities that allowed young Black women to put forth several demands. For Allyne Andrade e Silva, an organizer of the First Meeting, the political scenario even favored a dialogue with the agenda of government organizations when constructing the activities of the event.<sup>10</sup> This interconnection also made sense because, according to Andrade e Silva, the Salvador meeting hoped to promote local mobilization actions, albeit in the interest of implementing public policies led by state federal agencies.

Hence, this group of young Black women emerged on the public scene as a new political subject, as Brazil became increasingly open to the demands of different social movements, particularly youth movements. The growing political openness and articulation from the beginning of the 2000s, a period in which the federal government was widely incorporating social demands, bestowed this generation of activists with very peculiar characteristics: young university students belonging to the first group of affirmative action graduates<sup>11</sup>; originating from different peri-urban or suburban territories; seeking to demarcate their ground alongside the activism of Black women; and, consequently, gain recognition by occupying strategic positions within the government and academia. By summarizing the importance of this political activity, the newspaper of this First Meeting emphasized that (Guimarães, 2009, p. 17, *our translation*):

[t]he political stance based on autonomy and confrontation adopted by Black Youths at the First National Meeting of Young Feminists created tensions that challenged the young feminists to reflect upon the diversity and inequalities of the feminist and youth movement. The Young Black Women brought provocative elements to the debate that revealed the historic omission of feminism in the fight against racism, demanding a different attitude and relationship between women, grounded on solidarity and responsibility with the liberation of all women, as the feminist struggle for emancipation of women is and must be a fight against any form of oppression that limits women's freedom and autonomy.

Thus, the Salvador meeting, in addition to debating generational and regional shortcomings and inequalities, hoped to promote practices to strengthen the feminist struggle, stemming from the references of a new generation strongly influenced by the state. Furthermore, the actions from this event in the capital of Bahia has had repercussions beyond that particular period, or the generation therein gathered, and expressed themselves through autonomous civil initiatives, such as those undertaken by AMO, an organization of young Black women from different parts of the country, headquartered in São Paulo.

The organization develops collective education projects regarding issues of race, gender and sexuality, such as the distance learning course titled, ‘The Intellectual Production of Black Women’, whose objective is to narrate and popularize the struggles and challenges of Black women throughout Brazil’s historical and social development. Created in 2010, AMO mostly focuses on developing strategies for ‘empowering Black women’ and their experiences across different areas of social life. In the words of the Association itself, its mission is:

Build paths for accessing cultural goods through the empowerment and instrumentalization of Black women for devising and developing strategic actions and methodologies to provide better living conditions for the Black population, inspired by feminist principles of equity, plurality, and solidarity.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the generation of Black women activists who have organized themselves since the mid-2000s hold collective political formation as an indispensable tool for the construction of their struggles. This is perhaps the main binding element for this group of women and thus the educational issue—seen as a strategic axis—aims to aggregate the personal trajectory of each member to their formal educational trajectory. As a result, meetings, gathering and courses become exchange processes for collective strengthening.

In this sense, the interests and objectives of AMO, especially when proposing and implementing the course on ‘The Intellectual Production of Black Women’—which has been promoting similar work since 2010—are guided by the discussions resulting from the First Meeting of Young Black Feminists: questioning the historically destined place for Black women within everyday narratives and practices and the construction of new reference points for political practice, grounded in feminist and anti-racist thought, the legal achievements of social movements and the appraisal of knowledge produced inside and outside academia, such as *terreiros* (sanctuaries of Afro-Brazilian religions), traditional communities and other knowledge produced in non-hegemonic spaces.

The third edition of the course, in 2015, received over 5000 applications. The online nature of the course may be an important indicator of the high demand, for although it was offered only in the state of São Paulo, it received applications from various regions of the country. It seems, however, that the central point consists of the objectives of the course, which drew the attention of applicants interested in the opportunity to discuss the trajectory of Black women, made invisible by official history. Formulated in its 2009 pilot edition, the course objectives were gradually broadened and gained the reinforcement of new biographical references in the 2015 edition, which also emphasized the need for course participants to reflect on their own realities in light of the analyzed trajectories.

In terms of content, the course began with a discussion regarding the grandeur and importance of African queens, of the Black women who strengthened the quilombola struggle, of women who used religious spaces to preserve ancestral beliefs and knowledge and of women who through different ways transformed labor into tools for fighting for a dignified life. The course then addressed some particular dimensions of Brazilian history, discussing, for example, the struggle for the survival of Black women within the post-abolition period, emphasizing how these women performed numerous roles in domestic work, how some challenged the values and constraints of their time and occupied spaces exclusively dominated by men. Another significant moment in the course's approach was the emphasis given to the Black women's struggles in their organization process—via their own spaces—as they contested the indifference of feminist and Black organizations to their particularities. Each of these moments underlined the life experience and intellectual production of Black women, not always present in the official versions of the history of Brazil. Implemented on the *Moodle* distance education platform, the 2015 edition selected 600 participants from a total of 5115 applications, distributed across 12 classrooms and monitored daily by 6 tutors.

When we analyze the profile of the course applicants (Table 1), we notice that over 86% were women, 71.45% declared themselves heterosexual, 47.50% were Black and 82.17% were studying or had a higher education diploma.

In the analysis of the open questions, most applicants wrote that they learned about the course via social networks or websites belonging to cultural or educational organizations. In any case, the Internet was the main tool for disseminating the course which, when analyzed alongside its remote format, reinforces our understanding that the main struggle of

**Table 1.** Applicants for the Course 'The Intellectual Production of Black Women'

Location	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Education
São Paulo, 2194	Men, 403	Heterosexual, 3655	White, 984	Higher Education, 4203
Other states, 2921	Women, 4439	Bisexual, 500	Black, <sup>a</sup> 2930	Technical Degree, 148
Total, 5115	Other, 15	Homosexual, 42	Brown, 770	Secondary School, 459
		Lesbian, 121	Other, 126	Basic Education, 27
		Gay, 22		Other, 3
		Other, 192		

**Source:** Prepared by the authors from the database of the AMO (2014–2015).

**Notes:** Note that not all applicants answered every question on the form, and therefore, the total of some categories differs from the overall total of applicants.

<sup>a</sup>Black was a category adopted by the course organizers in the application questionnaire and does not necessarily correspond to the sum of classifications (Black and brown) as formulated by the official Brazilian censuses and surveys, nor can they be understood exclusively as people who self-declared to be Black in the standard questionnaires in Brazil.

Note that all categories presented in the table are identical to those formulated by the course organizers.

Black women's organizations in Brazil—the fight against racism and sexism—has, since the last decade, made use of strategies able to be formulated and consolidated by way of new information technologies, with a particular emphasis on social media.

The actions by AMO within the so-called new communication and interaction networks can be seen, like other collectives and organizations, as alternative ways for expanding their visibility and actions. We should perhaps emphasize that the Internet can become a tool for mobilization and action not only because it 'offers' itself for such purpose, but also due to the fact that the cultural and political contexts of contemporary societies demands new ways for social movements to sustain and strengthen themselves, even if many of the demands remain the same as in past decades.

Thus, what summarizes the activities within the scope of the First Meeting of Young Black Feminists in 2009, and the actions of AMO since 2010, is a space strategically built by these young Black women between the legacy of classic Black feminism—expanding achievements within the field of public policies—and the contemporary generation as it organizes diversified agendas and makes use of social networks as a privileged setting for its visibility and edification. Therefore, the women of the second generation, when trying to demarcate their performance, did not ignore the conditions of their time nor the advances closely tied to the actions and disputes undertaken in previous decades. At the same time, it is this second generation, self-declared feminist, that paved the way for expanding the use of virtual tools in the struggles involving issues of gender, race and generation gaps.

## **Social Networks and Intersectional Feminism**

Intersectionality is not merely a political tool or a valuable concept within the social and legal sciences. It is, in fact, a category increasingly used by social agents to designate their public presentation. As a collective identity, it emerged in Brazil alongside the new anti-racist and feminist collectives operating between digital networks and the streets. It is not uncommon in contemporary Brazil for peri-urban feminist or university collectives to adhere to intersectionality as a social name. For analytical purposes, we shall employ an ethnography of the First Intersectional Feminism Camp as a reference to analyze the discourses and practices of these activists.

Convened in São Paulo in 2015, the meeting was attended by approximately 300 women and was organized by an activist network that labelled itself as ‘intersectional feminism’, mostly comprised young Black women, between 20 and 30 years of age. It is, in general, a group of young feminists with a large presence in social networks, which serves as a community space for the exchange of experiences, information and ideas, thus becoming an environment for establishing a collective identity as well as a tool for projecting objectives and building new forms for political action. While the base of this network exists in the virtual environment, the activists also promote in-person meetings, such as the aforementioned event, where they discuss issues pertaining to racism, sexism, homophobia and especially transphobia and the issue of lesbian visibility.

In their first nationwide activity, the activists defined themselves as follows:

[w]e are an action front of women who are mothers, Black, indigenous, lesbians, bisexuals, peripheral, academics, organized and autonomous as we champion intersectional feminism, which stems from the complexity of reflecting about women from gender, race, class, and sexual orientation.<sup>13</sup>

The main practical and theoretical references of intersectional feminist activism emerge from the activism of Black Brazilian women and, especially, from North American Black feminism, in addition to post-structuralist studies, particularly the work of Judith Butler, the latter especially referenced when it comes to the theme of gender performance. Taking inspiration from the traditions of the northern hemisphere as well as the tropics, the intersectional network stems from the legacy of establishing a political identity based on the intersection of race and gender, focusing on giving further visibility to Black women as collective subjects of rights, ensuring political space and voice for lesbian and transsexual women, without excluding White women. Regarding sexuality, in addition to the thematic emphasis, they promote the visibility and consecration of homo-affective women, traversing not only multiple gender identities, but also relating them to the language and political performance of contemporary feminism.

Public visibility and the struggle for recognition (Fraser, 2001) is one of items on the agenda shared by both the older generation and the most recent generation of Black feminists. As such, one of the debate panels in the intersectional camp counted with the participation of Sueli Carneiro and Djamilá Ribeiro.<sup>14</sup> The former discoursed on the



intellectual and political experiences and legacies of her generation to the new activists, whereas the latter discussed her academic studies on Black-and-White intellectuals who produce critical reflections on feminism, especially related to race and sexuality. Furthermore, the latter emphasized her personal trajectory and experiences, in contrast to the almost always collective references of the former: on the one hand, the use of plural first-person pronouns ('we'); on the other hand, the use of the singular first person (personal pronoun 'I'). For Carneiro's generation, speaking in the singular would not be sufficient to encompass the Black women's collective and organizational construction; for Ribeiro's generation, however, writing in the first person, although singularizing her individuality, also becomes a way for expressing a collective experience. In any case, our interest lies not in an evaluative perspective of the resources used in their discursive presentations, but in how their different argumentative styles seem to represent one of the main differences between these two generations of public intellectuals.

In addition to the distinctions between the traditional and more recent generations of Black feminism and their public performance, we should also note their conflicted relationship with what they call 'White feminism'. Despite their differences, contemporary Black feminists champion the classic guidelines of feminism in Brazil, such as the legalization of abortion and other sexual and reproductive rights, but, within this agenda, they also undertake the political and discursive particularities of Black women, emphasizing the inequalities faced by this population segment across different parts of their lives, such as health, in which they receive unequal treatment both in access and care in basic health units.

Given the rejection of Eurocentrism in feminist thought and their intellectual silencing in universities, Black feminists have been striving to increase the visibility of the works of Brazilian intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez, Beatriz Nascimento and Sueli Carneiro. In turn, when it comes to American feminism, intersectional feminists value the works and writings of Sojourner Truth, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis. However, the most central authors in the production of these activists seem to be Audre Lorde and Kimberlé Crenshaw. From the former, they take inspiration from the dimension of sexuality, in particular, non-heteronormative identities, whereas the latter inspires the concept of intersectionality, for whom such notion could be defined as follows (Crenshaw, 2000, p. 10):

[t]he idea of 'intersectionality' seeks to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of

discrimination or systems of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, economic disadvantages and the other discriminatory systems contribute to create layers of inequality that structures the relative positions of women and men, races and other groups. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these intersecting axes contributing actively to create a dynamic of disempowerment.

However, the axes of oppression are not only discursive topics of intersectional feminists, but, above all, a dimension for collective identity as well. In this regard, intersectionality in this feminist network is directly related to identity construction. Significantly, this network is concerned with restoring the legacy of prior feminist movements in national culture from some decades ago, focusing on Brazilian and North American feminism, to establish a dialogue with lesbian and transsexual women groups, in addition to fostering a greater presence in peri-urban communities and spaces. One of the important highpoints of the intersectional camp was the debate panel with Amara Moira, who addressed the challenges of public gender identities in institutional spaces such as the academy. An argumentative logic echoed in the rhetoric of that collectivity, namely that the intersectional dimension of the relations of social oppression should be emphasized without subordinating its main axes: race, class, gender, sexuality and peripheral condition (the latter understood as territoriality).

Jéssica Ipólito, an organizer of the First Intersectional Feminist Camp, when asked to define the group to which she belongs, stated that they are 'Black feminists with an intersectional practice', as they fight against racism, against patriarchy and for the protagonism of Black women, constantly heedful of the issue of sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Focused on the need for the emancipation of Black women, the activists' action repertoire stems from a point of view that considers intersectionality as a tool for incorporating neglected demands, or insufficiently considered by previous generations. One could not say, however, that such practices are divorced from other issues explored by feminists belonging to prior generations or different perspectives. For example, when addressing her own trajectory in feminist activism, Ipólito underlined both the importance of integrating groups from the so-called White feminism, as well as the practical experience of building organization spaces, such as the Women's March Global and the November 20th Black Consciousness celebrations in Brazil, or even the Black Women's National March.

The development of intersectional feminism networks, such as the one analyzed hereby, certainly demands an attentive look at the different mobilization waves of Black women activists in Brazil. Some segments of Black feminism seem to find in intersectionality a path not only for the incorporation of other axes of oppression, but also a space for their members to transit within a political context that harbors different perspectives for characterizing the mobilization of Black women. Medeiros (2016, p. 26, *our translation*), when investigating feminist groups in the East Zone of the city of São Paulo, emphasizes the centrality of the racial issue and the conceptual and political diversity in these new spaces, many of which created after the so-called June 2013 mass demonstrations:

[o]ur analysis of the interviews with youth collectives showed how their discourses and practices conceive or conceptualize the connection between gender, race, and class: whether in the theoretical refusal of feminism in favor of African womanism, or in the defense of a Black feminism with theoretical foundations (such as intersectionality), whether in championing a Black feminism grounded on the actual experiences of Black women, or even in the broad devising of a peripheral feminism which, even without seeking ruptures with the traditional feminist movement, no longer makes invisible the racial issue within the social situation of peripheral women.

For Medeiros, the way in which the racial issue comes to integrate all these spaces is striking, making itself present not only in Black women's collectives, but also in mixed and non-Black collectives. Furthermore, her work emphasizes the link between issues such as periphery, raciality and feminism. We would also add, based on her investigation and our discussion above, that the racial issue gains a central role not only because it integrates the agendas of groups through different perspectives, but also because it is directly related to the collective construction of the women who lead these movements, that is, through the researcher's lens, Black women have built their identities in the peripheries by way of their places of residence and sociability, and not only in proximity with university centers, as we would often find in the previous feminist cycles. Even if we recall the efforts of Black women's collectives during the democratization period, such as *Nzinga*, who had a strong presence in peri-urban territories, such as favelas.

During the interviews conducted for this study, when asked about the contrasts between more recent generations of Black and/or intersectional feminists who comprised the First and Second Meeting of Young Black

Feminists (2009 and 2017, respectively), young women resent the sparse presence of famous digital activists in the collective construction of the marches, meetings and Black organizations, or even political collectives. Furthermore, they reiterate that new demands have emerged among the new generations, which were less relevant in previous agendas. For them, the demands for debate on topics such as affectivity, colorism, sexuality and new forms of care and self-presentation (such as the debate on fragility against the subjective construction of the strength of Black women, or even the consolidation of feminism as a public status for collective identity) seem to mark a new turn in contemporary Black subjectivities, relatively foreign and even contrasting with the two prior generations.

### **Black Feminism in Contrast: Concluding Remarks**

The emergence and development of Black feminism during the democratization period is widely known within the academic literature (Caldwell, 2007). However, the literature has rarely addressed the civil and state-level developments of this activism since the turn of the twenty-first century. Nor has it explored the new generations of Black women on the move and in networks. Lastly, no scholarly work in Brazil has articulated these generations and their different political activism across various political cycles, namely re-democratization, democratic consolidation and the crisis of democracy. The contemporary scholarship either naturalizes the political continuities or tends towards a drastic rupture between second- and third-generation feminism and the new intersectional collectivities, and commonly omits the reality of Black women in the rural world. In an attempt to explore the changes and continuities of Black feminism, and remedying these shortcoming in the academic literature, this article sought to analyze the trajectories, discourses, profiles and fundamental tensions in these political and cultural expressions of the Brazilian public scene, identifying its main advances, challenges and urban and territorial conflicts, especially in rural regions.

Classic Black feminism remains active in the Brazilian public sphere, influencing public opinion and disputing political narratives. One of the main examples of this activity is perhaps the online portal of the organization *Geledés*, where we may identify the three generations of activists, with writings on art, politics, literary criticism, personal

narratives (especially in cases of violence or how to experience sexualities with or without identity labels) and so on.

It is also true that the discursive legacy of ‘the personal is political’, from the second wave of global feminism, makes itself present in the form and content of the textual and image production of Black feminists belonging to the newest generation. This is even more pronounced today than in the past when the texts of traditional Black feminists took on an analytical dimension for denouncing inequalities expressed through statistics or in public case narratives, since only rarely were personal cases narrated in the first person singular in the Black press, or even in feminist or Black feminist newspapers.<sup>16</sup>

We could reasonably presume that the greater adherence to personal narratives among the younger generations results from, at least partially, the influence of North American Black feminism, in which autobiographical narratives have been part of their written tradition at least since the abolitionist period. The same applies to the influence of social networks, which convey personal language as a dominant characteristic when conferring discursive authenticity and status of truth before other members in virtual communities. Not to mention, in more general terms, the impact of the demands for further subjectivity, ascertained by the centrality conferred by the new generations to affectivity as a central component in the political economy.<sup>17</sup>

As we detailed above, a new cycle of activism emerged during the institutionalization of Brazilian Black feminism, spearheaded by the presence of young Black feminists operating in an articulated effort with foreign organizations as well as state organizations associated with gender, race and youth equality. These young feminists were already using the Internet as a means for organizing and mobilizing themselves. However, their operational profile did not vary widely from the activism of Black women during the democratization period, since they still preserved a large share of their discursive repertoire and moved in political spaces—by way of NGOs, conferences and socio-state mediation spaces—built by the Black women movement organized before them. In summary, the institutionalist nature of the social movements emerging from that context prevailed in them, as well as a subjectivity founded on the ‘warrior ethos’ of Black women. However, young activists introduced the generational dimension as an identity component, hitherto absent in classic Black women’s activism.

Another striking characteristic of young Black feminists is their connection with private and public universities in Brazil, wherein lies the

social base of their political activity. Thus, to a certain extent, the emergence of this movement can also be explained by the democratization of access to higher education, which changed the profile of the student body, particularly after the implementation of racial quotas in public institutions and entrance and permanence scholarships in private institutions. In this context, we find the emergence of the category of youth as an identity strongly associated with state agencies. For these reasons, it is possible to speak of an intergenerational transmission of Black feminism, as thought by Gonçalves (2016) when addressing this phenomenon within the feminist field.

In the third and newest generation of activism, in which we find the emergence of Black and intersectional feminism as interchangeable collective identities, especially with the pivotal role of social networks amidst the major mobilizations that took place in Brazil in June 2013, a new activist network gains traction, with a predilection for the Internet as a tool for sharing information and collectively organizing themselves against situations of violence (physical or symbolic) that largely involve dimensions of race, gender and sexuality. It should be noted that references to the periphery gain further prominence in the organization of these women, as noted by Medeiros (2016), as well as the centrality of race in the perceptions of gender inequalities, as indicated by Alvarez (2014), who emphasized the greater influence of Black feminism among feminist discourses when compared to previous generations.

Despite these achievements, the contemporary challenges for feminism lie in the brazen conservative reactions against the expansion of rights for women and Black people in contemporary Brazil, an even more dramatic reality for Black and indigenous populations in rural areas undergoing land conflicts. Sueli Carneiro, when characterizing the contemporary context of the new generations of Black activists, notes as a dominant feature of the current state of affairs the loss of hegemony of cordial racism in social relations, on the one hand, and a condemnation of the forms of political representation inherited from the political cycle of re-democratization, on the other hand (Carneiro in Santana, 2017, *our translation*):

[r]acial relations are no longer protected by the etiquette that has governed them under the paradigm of the racial democracy myth. The worsening of this scenario towards an increasingly explicit and violent racism, a situation emerging on the horizon for the new generations, will demand new proposals from political organizations for fighting it, in an adverse scenario in which the more traditional forms of political organization have lost credibility.

The contemporary criticism to classic organizational forms results in latent tensions and conflicts in Black feminism. If digital networks have been a space for experimenting with a new kind of activism, which disputes and rejects traditional stereotypes and seeks more diverse forms of self-representation, it runs into difficulties to create more solid organizational forms or more institutionally crystallized social solidarity networks. They tend to form media agents, but with little compliance to old or new forms of political organization. Paradoxically, social media personalities, influencers, or digital activists forge new forms of activism premised on likes and followers, with little or no leeway for constructing collective grassroots organizations and common projects, necessary requirements for political projects targeting social transformation.

In turn, as an achievement of the coexistence of these feminisms throughout and between times, we find a clear dissemination of anti-racist and feminist discourse, which has increasingly gained traction and strength through an intense activism, whose actions have since expanded from alternative public spheres associated with social movements; having undergone an institutionalization process via the state—especially in the 1990s and most notably after the Durban Conference in 2001—and has now reached further spaces in the market, especially in the media, mainly due to the action repertoire and style of the youngest generation. Perhaps, therein lies one of its unprecedented challenges.

This new generation seems to cause a greater impact on the market and consumer relations than the previous generations, given their greater potential to influence opinions, lifestyles and behaviors. One example is how companies and media outlets have displayed images of famous activists on social networks, associated with products and services related to the world of tourism, fashion, beauty and so on. Seemingly, one such novelty is the construction of ‘Black celebrities’ through their credibility and legitimacy within the world of activism networks and not the other way around.<sup>18</sup> Not only are certain personalities appropriated by the market, but certain types of aesthetic expressions, preferences and lifestyles are also converted into marketing forms, which ultimately results in the creation and expansion of the consumer market for original political commodities, now transformed into advertising pieces that secure some market sectors and, in part, alter the preferences aimed almost exclusively at the White audience.

The political legacy of classic Black feminism hangs over this brand-new generation, as well as the new structure of the organized right and other conservative forces openly fighting to halt the social achievements and advances of social and educational democratization accomplished

by the country in the past two decades, all of which Black women's activism played a significant role.

As we have seen, the analysis gains even more complex undertones when we include the role of Black women within the quilombola social struggles in Brazil. Equally enduring the various ongoing conservative manifestations, and with a leading role in these struggles, quilombola women demarcate the existing gap between their reality and the different struggles of Black feminist organizations in the urban world by stating that '[t]he Black feminism of urban women does not include rural Black quilombola women. The political concerns may be similar, but their meaning varies for urban and rural areas. Quilombola women fight for respect for their own, for a space for their own'.<sup>19</sup> As such, these women signpost that the land, the locality and the perception of community life are departure points for their struggle, especially considering the demands of our times.

However, to conclude, we should note that the analytical division between three generations of activists, as well as the activism of Black women in the rural world, does not necessarily oppose these women's struggles. On the contrary, what we find are certain political, economic and cultural configurations from which different profiles and styles of activism emerge, which clash and recognize themselves within the public sphere amidst a country in a context of crisis.

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1. Some of the ideas presented here have appeared in Portuguese in ‘Feminismo Negro Brasileiro em Três Tempos: Mulheres Negras, Negras Jovens Feministas e Feministas Interseccionais’, *Labrys: Études Féministes*, 1, pp. 120–40, 2018.
2. For more information on the thought and relevance of Lélia Gonzalez, see Rios (2019).
3. Interview conducted in January 2020, in Harare, Zimbabwe, during the SMAIAS/ASN Summer School. Da Silva was born in the quilombo *Conceição das Crioulas*, in Salgueiro, Pernambuco. According to the oral narratives of the community, the quilombo was founded by women who arrived in the Pernambuco hinterlands in the eighteenth century. Da Silva is one of the founders of CONAQ, has been a teacher dedicated to quilombola education and has served as city councilor for two terms for the Workers’ Party in her city. She also served as the National Secretary for Policies for Traditional Communities at SEPPIR during two terms (2007–2008 and 2015–2016) and is also member of the Directing Council of the NGO *Terra de Direitos* and member of the Black Women Committee towards a 50–50 Planet in 2030.
4. *Our translation*; see <http://conaq.org.br/nossa-historia/>, accessed on 2 August 2020.
5. *Our translation*; see ‘O protagonismo das mulheres quilombolas’, <http://conaq.org.br/coletivo/mulheres/>, accessed on 2 August 2020.
6. Interview conducted on 14 May 2020. Moraes belongs to the *Canelatiua* quilombola community in Alcântara and serves as the coordinator of Movement of People Affected by the Alcântara Space Base (*Movimento dos Atingidos pela Base Espacial de Alcântara*).
7. Interview conducted on 7 May 2020. Crisóstomo belongs to the *Baião* quilombo, located in Almas in the northern state of Tocantins and is a member of the communication department at CONAQ and State Coordination of Quilombola Communities in Tocantins (*Coordenação Estadual das Comunidades Quilombolas do Tocantins*).
8. Interview with Dorinete Serejo Moraes, 14 May 2020.
9. See <https://coalizaonegrapordireitos.org.br/>, accessed on 2 August 2020.
10. Interview with Allyne Andrade e Silva, 15 November 2017.
11. Affirmative actions were first implemented in Brazil’s higher education system from 2002 for some state universities, and from 2004 for federal university institutions.
12. *Our translation*; see <https://comunicaamo.wordpress.com/about/>, accessed 2 March 2021.
13. *Our translation*; folder of the Intersectional Feminism Camp, 19–20 September 2015.
14. As previously stated, Sueli Carneiro is a philosopher and founder of the organization *Geledés—Instituto da Mulher Negra*; Djamilá Ribeiro is a

- researcher in the field of Political Philosophy and a feminist, with a strong presence in social networks.
15. Interview with Jéssica Ipólito, 16 May 2017.
  16. As found in the main newspapers of the Black press, such as *Afro-Latin-America Column* (of the newspaper *Versus*, 1975–1979), the newspaper *Tiçãõ*, or in feminist newspapers such as *Mulherio Feministas*, or in the Black Feminist press such as *Nzinga* (1985–1989).
  17. In the book *O que é lugar de fala?* Djamila Ribeiro (2017) champions this point of view. To a certain extent, the use of the first person as a discursive strategy uses patterns and structures of shared feelings and experiences, such as typical situations of racial and gender discrimination, or even the feeling of displacement in university environments, the latter marked by a majority of White male authors who reproduce Eurocentric and heteronormative knowledge, according to the reading of these activists. These are some of the many shared experiences, which when spoken about in the first person, do not result in an individualization of situations, but in the sharing of potentially common subjective experiences. On the other hand, albeit not in opposition, this argumentative choice can be interpreted as a rebuttal to an allegedly universalist discourse, distanced from the academic world. This could have led these young feminists to seek in their common experiences the narrative matrices to speak about themselves as subjects of knowledge, refusing the position of object. The refusal to inhabit a place of object is a longstanding theme and tradition among Black intellectuals, such as Clóvis Moura, Guerreiro Ramos, Edson Carneiro, Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira, Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, among others.
  18. Also notable is the feminist and anti-racist engagement of famous artists in Brazil's political and cultural scene. However, this is not exactly a novelty, since both feminism as well as anti-racism experienced different cycles with the open participation of actors, actresses, musicians and some celebrities from the world of arts.
  19. Interview with Maryellen Crisóstomo, 7 May 2020.

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