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6-1-2016

## Meridians 14:1

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### Recommended Citation

Alvarez, Sonia E. and Caldwell, Kia Lilly, "Meridians 14:1" (2016). *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. 15.

<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/meridians/15>

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# Promoting Feminist *Amefricanidade*: Bridging Black Feminist Cultures and Politics in the Americas

Coined by Lélia Gonzalez, one of the premier thinkers of Afro-Brazilian feminisms, the term *Amefricanidade* or “Amefricanity” references both the black diaspora and indigenous populations of the Americas, signaling their histories of resistance as colonized peoples. Like Gonzalez and contemporary black Brazilian feminist theorist Claudia Pons Cardoso, a contributor to this volume, we propose *Amefricanidade* as a privileged epistemology that enhances the visibility of Afro-descendant feminisms in Latin America, “thinks from within” those decolonial histories of struggle, and pursues “an interconnected approach to racism, colonialism, imperialism and its effects” (Cardoso 2014, 969–970).

In furthering this political-epistemic project, we are pleased to present Part I of a two-part special issue focusing on African descendant Feminisms in Latin America. This issue grew out of our shared intellectual and political concern that academics and activists in the U.S. lacked exposure to critical insights and innovations offered by black feminist thought and praxis developed in the “South” of the Americas. As researchers who have spent a combined total of several decades engaging with scholars and activists in Brazil and other parts of Latin America, we are painfully aware that language differences and the limited circulation of texts translated from Spanish and Portuguese into English constitute formidable

barriers. More often than not, the inequitable politics of translation—as theorized in *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas* (Alvarez et al. 2014; see also Caldwell 2001)—severely circumscribes the circulation of ideas and texts by black Latin American and Caribbean feminists among scholars and activists in the North.

Despite their relative invisibility in the U.S., Afro-descendant feminisms have advanced radical re-imaginings of not only “mainstream” or hegemonic Latin American feminisms, but also of race, gender, sexuality, democracy, health, development, cultural production, generation, citizenship, and other issues and ideas that are central to feminist theory. Given the power asymmetries governing the movements of people, ideas, and texts between the Global North and South, however, black feminist activists, researchers, theories, and texts more commonly travel from the U.S. to Latin America than in the reverse direction. Wishing to facilitate more bi/multi-directional flows of knowledge and political alliances, this two-part special issue seeks to encourage U.S. feminists, particularly black feminist scholars and other feminists of color, to engage with and incorporate ideas and texts developed by Afro-Latin American feminists into their research and teaching. We also hope that increased exposure to these texts will encourage scholars, students, and activists alike to think about African descendant feminisms within a broader, transnational frame.<sup>1</sup>

Given their immeasurable impact on the Latin American region as a whole, this first part of our special issue is dedicated exclusively to black Brazilian feminisms, in recognition of their leading role in the development of a race-conscious feminism that challenges the gendered ideology of racial democracy and Brazil’s version of post-racialism during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>2</sup> Brazil also merits special consideration as the country with the second largest population of African descent in the world, exceeded only by that of Nigeria. According to Brazil’s 2010 census, black women made up over 25 percent of the country’s population of nearly 200 million, which amounts to close 50 million women.<sup>3</sup> This is a little over twice the size of the black female population of the United States.

Black women participated in Brazil’s feminist movement from the time of its re-emergence in the late 1970s, joining a wide array of other

progressive movements that rose in opposition to the military authoritarian regime that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985. During the late 1980s, as Brazil transitioned back to civilian rule, black women formed autonomous groups and non-governmental organizations to focus on their needs and experiences. Black women's organizing was a response to the lack of attention to the intersection of race and gender within the (mostly white, left-identified, hegemonic) feminist movement, as well as within the (male dominated, also left-influenced) black movement. Afro-Brazilian feminists such as Beatriz Nascimento, Lélia Gonzalez, Sueli Carneiro, and Luiza Bairros—the latter two featured in this issue—were instrumental in making gender and black women's experiences central to discussions of race and racism, and race and racism crucial to debates surrounding gender. Unfortunately, many of their scholarly and political contributions have been silenced or undervalued in Brazil, particularly outside of activist circles, and they have yet to be widely known among U.S. activists or academics.

In some respects, the critiques that black Brazilian women articulated during the 1970s and 1980s mirrored those of African descendant feminists in the United States and the U.K., calling attention to the specificities of black women's experiences, identities, and struggles. Various dimensions of the trajectory of Afro-Brazilian feminisms are recounted in our assembled essays. Here, we wish to highlight two distinctive features. First, most Afro-Brazilian women's movement activists trace their political lineage more to the black movement than to the feminist movement and continue to engage in mixed-gender anti-racist movement activism. Second, though Afro-descendant Brazilian feminists were aware of developments in the U.S., in its origins it was largely "homegrown," less directly influenced by black feminisms in the U.S. or elsewhere in the diaspora.

Black Brazilian women have been at the forefront of feminist, anti-racist and human rights/social justice activism in Brazil, in Latin America, and across the globe. They developed innovative advocacy strategies and valiantly asserted their collective right to be heard in international policy arenas during national, regional, and global preparations for the Cairo Summit on Population and Development in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and played a leading role in proceedings of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, which took

place in Durban, South Africa. As early as 1985, Afro-descendant feminists demanded representation in Brazil's first federal government agency charged with women's policy and, in coalition with the broader black movement, by 2002–03, had persuaded the still-white-dominant political establishment of the first Workers' Party administration to create the Brazilian Secretariat of Public Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPPIR), the first cabinet-level government agency of its kind in Latin America. Most recently, black Brazilian women organized the *Marcha das Mulheres Negras contra o Racismo e a Violência e pelo Bem Viver* (March of Black Women against Racism and Violence and for Living Well), the culmination of an unprecedented nationwide mobilization, which took place in the capital of Brasília on November 18, 2015. This issue reproduces the *Marcha's* logo and its “call to action” Manifesto, released in July 2014, and features photographs taken at the event by feminist photographers Claudia Ferreira and Adriana Medeiros.

Part I of our special issue offers three essays, translated from Portuguese, by prominent Afro-Brazilian feminists. The first, a now classic essay by Sueli Carneiro, longtime black Brazilian feminist and director of *Geledés: The Black Women's Institute* in São Paulo, traces the dynamics of black women's organizing and their efforts to “blacken” Brazilian feminisms so as to integrate the “different expressions of feminism created in multiracial and multicultural societies.” A second piece, by Claudia Pons Cardoso, draws on interviews with 22 Afro-descendant women activists to explore distinctively black Brazilian feminist identities and discourses. A translated interview with Luiza Bairros, veteran feminist and antiracist activist and former Minister of SEPPPIR, zeroes in on the tensions and the points of (mis)encounter between anti-racist struggles and feminisms in Brazil, mapping out the paths through which questions relating to race and racism have circulated within the diverse spaces of feminism, and vice versa.

Following texts, images and photos of the recent Black Women's March on Brasília and powerful poems by one of Brazil's most accomplished and beloved African descended feminist poet-novelists, Conceição Evaristo, we close Part I of the issue with three essays by black feminist scholars based in the U.S. Drawing on years of extended fieldwork (Caldwell and Perry) and research-cum-lived experience (in the case of Afro-descended Brazilian Araújo), their articles explore the leadership of poor black

women as activists and political theorists in urban land struggles (Perry), Afro-Brazilian feminist interventions in HIV/AIDS (Caldwell), and black Brazilian women's literature, bodies, and subjectivity (Araújo).

This two-part special issue was inspired by an April 2010 international Symposium on Black/Afro-descendant Feminisms in the Americas, organized by the Afro-Latino Diasporas: Black Politics and Racial Cultures Research Group at the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies (CLACLS) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. CLACLS director, Sonia Alvarez, along with the research group's co-coordinator, Professor Agustín Lao-Montes, planned and organized that event, along with then-Visiting Researcher at CLACLS and former Minister of SEPPIR, Matilde Ribeiro, and graduate students Aurora Vergara Figueroa, Carlos Alberto Valderama, Cruz Caridad Bueno, Flávia Araújo, and Carmen Cosme. Lao-Montes, especially, along with Figueroa, and Bueno, were involved in the early stages of soliciting and assembling essays to be submitted for publication. We are indebted to them and to all of those who presented papers or served as discussants in the Symposium, including Kiran Asher, Whitney Battle-Baptiste, Mirangela Buggs, Ochy Curiel, Odette Casamayor, Alexandrina Deschamps, Anilyn Díaz, Aurora Figueroa, Vicenta Moreno Hurtado, Ana Irma Rivera Lassen, Kym Morrison, Manuela Picq, and Kimberly Simmons. In closing, we also wish to extend our appreciation to Alissa Maraj Grahame and Martha Balaguera for their assistance in the preparation of essays in Parts I and II for submission to *Meridians*; to Miriam Adelman and Regina Camargo for their translations from the Portuguese; and to Layla Carvalho, for research assistance to the editors in the final stages of production of Part I. We thank CLACLS for essential infra-structural support for this project, the Horwitz Endowment for underwriting RAs and translations, and Paula Giddings and *Meridians* staff for their support.

We dedicate this special issue to the memory of Luiza Helena Bairros, who passed away as this volume was going to press. *Salve a Igualdade Racial! Salve Luiza Bairros!*

#### NOTES

1. Between 1525 and 1866, in the entire history of the slave trade to the New World, 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the New World, according to the

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. 10.7 million survived the Middle Passage, disembarking in North America, the Caribbean and South America. Of these, only about 388,000 were sent to the U.S. The overwhelming majority of the African slaves were shipped directly to the Caribbean and South America; Brazil alone received 4.86 million Africans. Afro-Latin American populations have been estimated to number at least 150 million, with women comprising over half of this number. Given the sheer size, not to mention political, cultural and economic significance, of these populations, African descendant women's activism offers a singular lens through which to re(en)vision the role of Afro-Latin communities in their home countries, as well as among Latinas/os in the U.S.

2. For English-language analyses of Afro-Brazilian feminisms, see Caldwell 2001, 2007, 2009, 2010, and forthcoming; Carneiro 1999; Lebon 2007; McCallum 2007; Perry 2008; Reis 2007.
3. Of 191 million Brazilians counted in the 2010 census, 91 million self-classified as *branco* or white, 15 million as black or *preto*, and 82 million as *pardos* (mixed-race or brown). Afro-descendant movement activists and, increasingly, government agencies and ordinary citizens join together the latter two categories and designate both under the term *negros*, a more positively valenced term akin to black or African-American (instead of "colored," and, in Brazil, historically, *preto* and *multato*) in the U.S. context. Blacks thus "officially" became the majority in 2010, representing 50.7 percent of the population.

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