THE BODY, THE HOUSE AND THE CITY: THE TERRITORIALITIES OF BLACK WOMEN IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

This article presents a discussion on the relationship between territoriality and intersectionality based on the experience of Black Brazilian women throughout the historical process that has triggered a long trajectory of struggle against racism and sexism. Bibliographical and documentary research has been used in order to discuss the territories of the body, the house and the city, understood as spaces of oppression and resistance. While these analytical categories have received considerable attention, especially within the Black feminist movement itself, few studies have explicitly or thoroughly addressed the relationship between intersectionality and territoriality based on an expanded conception of territory that goes from the body through to the city. Reflecting upon these concepts as a collective unit and through a multi-scalar perspective may help to provide greater visibility to the protagonist spaces of Black Brazilian women in their struggle for reparation, recognition and the right to exist.

Keywords

Black Women; Diaspora; Intersectionality; Racism; Sexism; Territory; Territoriality.

O CORPO, A CASA E A CIDADE: TERRITORIALIDADES DE MULHERES NEGRAS NO BRASIL

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Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma discussão sobre a relação entre territorialidade e interseccionalidade com base na experiência da mulher negra brasileira, no decorrer do processo histórico que desencadeou uma longa trajetória de luta contra o racismo e o sexismo. Foi utilizada pesquisa bibliográfica e documental para discorrer sobre os territórios do corpo, da casa e da cidade, entendidos como espaços de opressão e de resistência. Essas categorias de análise têm recebido bastante atenção, especialmente dentro do movimento feminista negro, porém poucos estudos abordam de maneira explícita e aprofundada a relação entre interseccionalidade e territorialidade ancorada numa concepção ampliada do território que vai do corpo até a cidade. Pensar esses conceitos em conjunto e de forma multiescalar pode contribuir para dar maior visibilidade aos espaços de protagonismo das mulheres negras brasileiras na luta pela reparação, pelo reconhecimento e pelo direito de existir.

Palavras-chave

Mulheres Negras; Diáspora; Interseccionalidade; Racismo; Sexismo; Território; Territorialidade.

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Introduction

In this article, we discuss the territorialities of Black Brazilian women on the scale of the body, the house and the city, from the feminist perspective of intersectionality. We use the identity category "Black woman" to represent a heterogeneous group of women who historically, have been differentiated and subalternized based on gender and skin color. In the case of Latin America, the subalternity of Black women may be understood as a "coloniality of power", which, according to Quijano (2000), is the globally hegemonic model of power, of colonial origin and character, whose fundamental axis is the social classification of the world's population based on race. The coloniality of power is constituted by modern Eurocentric thinking, and implies the imposition of a sexual and racial division of labor as a foundation for the reproduction and expansion of the capitalist system and the unequal power relations that constitute it.

Since the category "Black woman" is a social construction of colonial/hegemonic power that hierarchizes society based on sex and race, it is used by these women as a strategy to reframe this term for emancipatory purposes. As highlighted by the African American feminist theorist, bell hooks (2013, p. 113), "Looked at from a sympathetic standpoint, the assertion of an excluding essentialism on the part of [...] marginalized groups can be a strategic response to domination and to colonization, a survival strategy [...]"[1]. However, in doing so, it is important to caution on the

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1. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of HOOKS, B. *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom.* New York: Routledge, 1944, 83.

risk of inadvertently reproducing an essentialization and/or homogenization of the subjective indeterminacies and heterogeneities they represent. The category of Black women, like any other, does not account for the complexity, plurality and specificity of other Black female subjectivities that perhaps do not feel properly represented by this name. We are aware of this limitation and the risks that its use may provoke, but we understand that its emancipatory character compensates for such restrictions, whenever it is used with the necessary concreteness.

The trajectory of the struggle of Black women in Brazil is historically intertwined with the formation of the African diaspora, which, in the perspective of Paul Gilroy (2012), is not only the result of a movement involving the displacement and dispersion of the African people, as in the commonest sense of the word. It also expresses the transcultural and cosmopolitical dimension of the creation of a black identity outside the African continent, an approach that proposes to "rewrite the history of Black Brazilian insurgent cultures, their battles against slavery and the extensive contributions to translocal cultures opposing the mechanisms of racial hierarchy"[2] (GILROY, 2012, p. 14). This approach also helps us to conceive territorialities and territories beyond the nation-State, nationalisms, kinships and ideals of belonging that may lead to essentialist identities, fixed in the past. "By adhering to diaspora, identity may instead be driven towards contingency, indeterminacy and conflict" (GILROY, 2012, p. 19). From this perspective, diasporic territories have no fixed borders, although they are also not only the result of movements concerning deterritorialization and reterritorialization – because in them "questions concerning life and death are at stake" (GILROY, 2012, p. 22).

In Brazil, the African diaspora is the result of the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans that occurred during the colonial period, resulting not only in the tearing apart of entire families and communities, but also in imposing sub-human living conditions and day-to-day violence, which led to numerous early deaths in the new territory. This dispersion of African peoples did not just signify forced immigration, but also the construction of a "new subject" and a new place for that subject – the place of non-existence, accompanied by the erasure of a past, a history, a memory. The "new subject" was also constituted by the erasure of its multiplicity and specificity, passing through various reductionist symbolic transformations: from Bantu (for example) to African, from African to slave, and from slave to black (MEDEIROS, 2018).

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2. This and all non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the author. In this particular case, these 3 consecutive citations have been extracted from the Preface which appeared only in the Brazilian Portuguese translation.

The various circumstances of violence suffered throughout history have always been fought against by Black women, both individually and collectively, who have stood up against the oppressive regime either in an isolated or precise manner, as in the case of poisoning their masters, suicides or individual escapes, or joint actions, such as insurrections and fleeing en masse to the quilombos[3] (LEITE, 2000; NASCIMENTO, 1985; REIS, 1996). Other everyday forms of resistance, more subtle and cloaked, were also used, such as small acts of sabotage at work and zeal for individual and collective care practices not provided for by the (post) slavery regime, such as alternative healing methods and health practices (WEDIG; RAMOS, 2020), spiritual guidance and mutual care with children and elders, based on extended kinship networks (MOMBELLI; ALMEIDA, 2016). Until today, many other small and large movements and political, cultural and artistic practices have become instruments or spaces of struggle for these women, such as, among others, *candomblé terreiros*[4] [houses], quilombos, capoeira, hip hop culture, as well as the various movements that fight for the right to health, education, security, decent employment and housing conditions, the city, land, territory and life (CARNEIRO, 2003; REIS, 2007; GOMES, 2017).

The role of Black women as a workforce, in the field and in the city, in public and private spaces, was a fundamental element in the construction of Brazil, and continues to sustain the (re)productive base of current Brazilian society. In a capitalist, heteronormative, post-slavery, patriarchal society, Black women remained in subalternity through the dual oppression of race and gender, which inevitably became configured within a class differentiation. This is not to mention the Black women who suffer from other forms of discrimination related to sexual orientation, physical disabilities, religious beliefs, and age, among other markers of social differentiation.

The participation of Black women in the struggle for emancipation in Brazil may be observed in the leading role taken on by emblematic historical figures, such as Dandara dos Palmares, Anastácia, Luísa Mahín, Teresa de Benguela, Aqualtune, Maria Felipa de Oliveira, Adelina, the Charuteira, among many others, who promoted actions to free enslaved people in different parts of Brazil. Recognition of the participation of these women in the struggle for freedom and citizenship has occurred at different moments throughout history, and each was relevant in

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3. The name given to the communities of slaves who managed escape. Many quilombo communities have survived until today.

4. *Candomblé* is an African diasporic religion that developed in Brazil during the nineteenth century, and *terreiros* are the buildings where the religion is practiced, which can range from a house to a large compound.

the conquest of space within society. Thus, it is important to emphasize that, in different ways, Black women are, and have always been, involved in the struggle against the exploitation and oppression that they have suffered for more than four centuries. Therefore, an intersectional examination of black territorialities must be accompanied by a counter-hegemonic historical perspective, committed to searching for and retrieving erased memories and silenced histories.

In Brazil, the Black Women's Movement (known as MMN) emerged during the 1970s, during the military dictatorship, in the midst of the resurgence of both feminist and anti-racist struggles, demanding agendas that involved the joint categories of gender and race. Black feminism then gained strength from the 1980s onwards, with the 1st National Meeting of Black Women held in Valença (in the state of Rio de Janeiro), in 1988, and with the increasingly expressive participation of Black women in the National Feminist Meetings (ENF), at the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters and at the Women's World Conference. These national and international events leveraged the MMN, and demonstrated the importance of spotlighting its "specificity", a precursor term for the use of the concept of intersectionality in Brazil. This was used at the time to designate the particular character of the oppression of Black women, which differentiates them from other women by race and from Black men by gender, and to explain a specific organizational process and political awareness (RIBEIRO, 1995).

The Black feminist movement made a scathing critique of both the masculinization of the Black movement and the whitening of the feminist movement. In criticizing the Brazilian feminist movement, Lélia Gonzalez (1935-1994) (1988a) indicated its Eurocentric bias, omitting the centrality of the racial issue in gender hierarchies and universalizing the values of Western culture for all women. The anthropologist also emphasized the denial of an entire history of resistance and struggles based on an ancestral, dynamic cultural memory. In the case of the *Black movement against racism*, she signaled the sexist practices of fellow struggle members, who excluded them from the movement's decision-making spaces. Within this context, as Sueli Carneiro (2003) declared, Black women have sought to blacken feminism and feminize the Black movement from the perspective of revealing their particular positionality and highlighting the need for a differentiated struggle.

The Brazilian feminist and anti-racist struggle was also configured as a cultural-historical statement based on recognizing the presence and power of an Africanity throughout the American continent, which Lélia Gonzalez (1988b) called "Amefricanity". This identity category is conceived as a "historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation and creation of new forms)" (GONZALEZ, 1988b, p. 76), which articulates elements of Amerindian

and African culture and ancestry manifested in languages, music, dances, belief systems etc. from several countries in the Americas, with emphasis on the centrality of the black contribution and its historical cover-up by the whitening ideology.

Within this perspective, this article aims to analyze the experiences, struggles and achievements of Black women in three types of territory and territoriality: the body, the house and the city. This multidimensional, multiscalar examination of the territorialities of Black women enables us to account for intersectional issues that are often treated separately, in different disciplinary fields. The body tends to be the focus of feminist and cultural studies that prioritize issues of health and sexuality. The scope of the house tends to be the object of studies that focus on labor relations, while territorialities at the scale of the city are generally addressed in the field of urban geography and urban and regional planning. Few studies have addressed intersectionality anchored in a territorial perspective, also intersectional, on these three spheres of life.

The discussions developed in this article are the result of a bibliographical review of books, articles and essays on Black feminism in Brazil, and of a territorial and intersectional analysis of the trajectory of the struggle of Black women in Brazil, within the scope of the body, the house and the city. The purpose of this is to obtain a clearer understanding of how they have built their symbolic and material territorialities in Brazil, in the face of structural racism (ALMEIDA, 2019) through an anti-colonial feminist approach committed to the fight against black and female epistemicide.

The article is divided into four sections, in addition to this first introductory part, which ends here, in which the trajectory of the struggle of Black women in Brazil is historically contextualized and in which the article is positioned within its more comprehensive theoretical framework. The first section presents a theoretical, conceptual discussion on intersectionality and territorialities. The second, third and fourth sections address the Black territorialities of the body, the house and the city, respectively. The article closes with some final considerations regarding the importance of an intersectional examination of the diasporic territories of Black resistance, which implies constructing an anti-colonial epistemology committed to the tangible struggle of social movements against multiple forms, structures and spaces of oppression.

1. Intersectionality and territorialities

In order to understand the struggles of Black women in the territories of the body, the house and the city, it is first necessary to understand the concept of intersectionality. This term was coined by the American intellectual Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989, to describe the intersecting oppressions of African-American

women, also conceptualized as systems or discriminatory axes (racism, patriarchy, class oppression, etc.) that intercross. Crenshaw (1989, p. 149) used a spatial metaphor – the highway intersection – to account for the interconnection or junction between the various forms of oppression experienced by specific subjects/groups:

> The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. [...] Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

Another African American feminist who has also contributed significantly to the debate on intersectionality is the sociologist Patricia Collins. In her most recent book dealing with the topic (COLLINS, 2019, p. 48), she highlights four premises that practitioners of intersectionality generally assume:

> (1) race, class, and gender referenced not singular but intersecting systems of power; (2) specific social inequalities reflect these power relations from one setting to the next; (3) individual and collective (group) identities of race, gender, class, and sexuality are socially constructed within multiple systems of power; and (4) social problems and their remedies are similarly intersecting phenomena.

Thus, it may be observed that intersectionality is a *relational* approach, focusing on the links between different axes of oppression and their symbolic, material implications in terms of the (re)production of unequal power dynamics and structures. This approach is also *situated*, in order to understand the experiences of certain subjects or social groups in their specific historical, geographic and cultural contexts. The particular positionalities of victimized subjects offer a differentiated and "privileged" perspective of the "outsider within" (COLLINS, 1986) on the world[5]. Lastly, this approach is *transformative* since it aims to use the intersectional stance in the sense of building relationships of solidarity between a diversity of groups of the oppressed, and their allies, for emancipatory purposes.

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5. This perspective is also known as the "feminist standpoint theory", according to which the particular position of oppressed or marginalized individuals or groups creates a "double vision" regarding reality, which allows the world to be seen from both a dominant class perspective and from its own (subaltern) perspective.

In Brazil, Black feminists such as Lélia Gonzalez had addressed these issues before this concept was coined by Crenshaw. When discussing the condition of Black women in Brazilian society through the notions of mulatto, housemaid and Black mother, Gonzalez (1984, p. 224) stated:

> The *place* in which we are located will determine our interpretation of the dual phenomenon of *racism* and sexism. For us, racism is the *symptom* that characterizes *Brazilian cultural neurosis*. Thus, we observe that its links with sexism produces violent effects on Black women in particular.

Another Black Brazilian feminist who also left her mark on theoretical discussions regarding intersectionality and public policies aimed at racial and gender equality was Luiza Bairros (1953-2016). In her texts, she emphasizes the importance of understanding race, gender, social class and sexual orientation as a mosaic, due to its multidimensionality, and as historically and socially determined subjective experiences (BAIRROS, 1995). Furthermore, she highlights.

How the intersectionality of oppression has negative effects for Black men who equally experience race through gender, without however realizing the oppressive effects of sexism on their own condition. For example, the unemployed Black man is seen as lazy and unsuccessful, and the young Black man as aggressive and deserving of police brutality (BAIRROS, 1995). This also applies to white women who do not realize the extent to which racism affects their subjugation as a woman, often represented as fragile, pure, and childish. In other words, intersectionality demonstrates how the part of subjectivity that is related to the dominant identity (being a man or being white), by being conceived as a universal identity, is presented as being external to these processes of oppression.

With the contribution of this theoretical framework, how may we consider intersectionality in its territorial dimension? How does it manifest itself in the territories of the body, the house and the Brazilian city? How may the struggles for the (re)appropriation of these female, Black territories be implemented?

In order to understand the territorial dimension of intersectionality, it is necessary to distinguish the concepts of territory, territorialization and territoriality. To account for the specificity of each of these spatial imaginaries, we use the conceptions of various geography theorists.

For Haesbaert (2007), territory, in any sense, is related to power, but not only to the political power of the State (a more concrete, functional relationship of domination), but also in the sense of its more subjective, cultural and symbolic appropriation (society-space relationship).

Souza (2009), based on a concept of power that encompasses heteronomous and autonomous relations, demonstrated how territorialization may be conceived as "an exercise of control over a space", while the territorialized space (the territory) becomes an "instrument for exercising power" (SOUZA, 2009, p. 87). In other words, territorialization (which emphasizes movement, dynamics) refers to the process of governing, dominating or influencing space, in the sense of its use, occupation, appropriation, production, transformation, etc., while territory is the result (always unstable and unfinished) of this process.

Territoriality, in turn, concerns the practices and strategies used by different subjects and social groups to create, maintain or transform the lived space. It is related to the power relations involved in the organization, access, use and way of bringing significance to the lived space (SACK, 1986; HAESBAERT, 2007). Territoriality includes constant movements of deterritorialization and (re)territorialization, movements and counter-movements that must be understood as an inseparable part of the same process. Territoriality focuses on the plurality of socio-spatial and socio-environmental practices, of relationships and subjects involved in the (re)production of territories, both in their symbolic and material forms. Saquet (2009, p. 88) highlighted how the concept of territoriality is based on a historically and geographically situated perspective: "In territorialities, there are continuities and discontinuities in time and space; territorialities are intimately linked to each place: they give it identity and are influenced by the historical and geographical conditions of each place".

We share the idea of territory as a field of power configured, symbolically and materially, through disputes and negotiations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic groups on multiple scales. Seen from an intersectional viewpoint, territorialities are composed of processes and practices of (re)appropriation, (re) signification and (re)construction of inclusive, plural and democratic living spaces; spaces for the positivization of subalternized difference. These territorialities are configured through conflicts, contradictions and asymmetrical relationships between the different social groups and the political subjects that produce them.

This conceptual framework enables us to understand the territorialities of Brazilian Black women as practices of resistance and struggle for the (re) appropriation of different spaces in which they have resignified their own trajectories, building new subjectivities and positionalities, thus becoming an inspiration and horizon for other women. These territorialities, in relation to the decision-making power over their own bodies, the politicization of their place in the private space of the house as heads of the household, domestic workers, educators, as well as their leading historical role in Brazilian cities, have still

served, albeit slowly, to reposition Black women in spaces, functions and positions that were previously alien to them.

2. The territory of the body

Black, decolonial feminism has emphatically contributed to understanding the Black woman's body as a territory onto which colonial powers imposed their brutal regimes of conquest and domination. In her book *Memórias da Plantação* [Plantation Memories], Grada Kilomba (2020) reported how it was common practice to tie the mouth of an enslaved person with the *mask of speechlessness*, an instrument with a piece of metal used by the white slave masters to control the enslaved bodies, implementing a sense of muteness and fear. According to the author, this instrument for containing the black body became a part of the European colonial project, since there was "an apprehensive fear that if the colonial subject speaks, the colonizer will have to listen. She/he would be forced into an uncomfortable confrontation with 'Other' truths. Truths that have been denied, repressed and kept quiet, as secrets" (KILOMBA, 2020, p. 41)[6]. The reasons for applying punishments of this nature were often related to the political activism of these women, such as helping other enslaved persons to escape, and also resisting the sexual advances of the white slave masters, to the jealousy of the mistress, who were wary of the beauty of the enslaved women, or to the healing powers that many of them possessed (KILOMBA, 2020; SANTOS, 2018).

The example presented demonstrates how the body of Black women has historically been subjugated, constituted as a controlled, conquerable territory, but also as a disposable object from the moment it was put on display to be sold in public spaces, as merchandise. Black women have suffered physical and psychological violations for over four centuries, directly associated with the significance of their bodies as a territory circumscribed to rape and forced labor.

During the period of colonial slavery, the Black woman's body was used as a source of food for the slave master's children, i.e., as raw material capable of ensuring the reproduction of the material bases of the ruling class. "*Mucamas*" [Maidservants] – Black lactating women, known as "wet nurses", "milk mothers" or "black mothers" – were hired and had to stop breastfeeding their own children in order to breastfeed the mistress's children (TELLES, 2018). In addition, many women were sexually abused by the masters and were also required for the sexual initiation of the young master (GONZALEZ, 1982). Thus, the mulattoes

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6. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of KILOMBA G. *Plantation Memories – Episodes of Everyday Racism*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2021 p. 19. Kindle Edition.

appeared, sons and daughters of black women, many of them raped. As reported by Nascimento (2008, p. 57):

> In the first moment of exile, her body is seen as a working instrument – or better, as a tool, or better still, as a beast of burden –, as well as an object that contained a cavity where a more than civilized, civilizing lord would penetrate it with one, among countless, instruments of submission.

Even with the "liberation" of slavery, Black women did not cease to bear the stereotypes that related their color and gender to a hyper-sexualization of their body. This representation took place more specifically in relation to the figure of the female mulatto, represented as a sexual object, an image that has lasted until today. These images have been systematically reproduced by exposure in the media, in advertisements or events that eroticize the black female body, images sold and associated with the trafficking of Black women in different countries around the world. This type of objectification of the black body is also manifested in the contemporary context of sex tourism in Brazil, where the reading of native femininities made by tourists is marked by color, a "brown" color, associated with Brazil and with the "best women" – more "fiery" and "sensual" (PISCITELLI, 2007). It is a practice imposed by the economically precarious conditions in which the vast majority of the Black population live in Brazil, forcing many of these women to submit to it, thereby perpetuating the image of the Black woman's body as a commodity.

Facts such as these, together with others, have an influence over the number of pregnancies, and raise questions concerning the reproductive and sexual rights of Black women. It is a woman's right to decide how to use her body, and that includes the right to have children as well as the right to abortion and to safe contraception. These rights have been historically violated by birth control measures instituted by government, such as induced, involuntary or compulsory sterilization, when women have been forced in sterilization for causes that have exerted direct or indirect pressure on their will, such as the discourse that "the poor should not have children"; employer imposition that requires a sterilization certificate in order to obtain employment, despite being a crime in Brazil; a lack of knowledge or difficulty in obtaining reversible contraceptive methods; social pressure in the area of maternity (lack of day care centers and other social facilities that reduce the double workload for women); health problems; or when people or governments force a woman to be sterilized against her will and even without her consent, whether for health problems or not (OLIVEIRA, 2002). As Sueli Carneiro stated (2003, p. 124),

> Sterilization occupied a privileged position for years on the political agenda of Black women who formed campaigns against the sterilization of women due to the high rates that this phenomenon had reached in Brazil, mainly among low-income women (most women who are sterilized have done so because they do not find the offer and diversity of reversible contraceptive methods in the health system that would allow them to avoid the radical option of not being able to have children anymore). This theme was also the object of legislative proposals, in partnership between parliamentarians and feminist activists that culminated in the draft Law No. 209/91, which regulated the use of sterilization.

Another aspect related to the Black woman's body, which deserves mention in this discussion, is related to the "dictatorship of beauty", concerning the standards imposed by the media, by which she is directly affected and that determines the ideal aesthetic standard, thereby pressuring her to purchase products that lighten the skin and straighten the hair. Given this media appeal, some physical characteristics are adapted to the hegemonic model of white beauty, which leads some people to undergo reparatory plastic surgery in order to reduce the size of the nose and lips, and undergo facial harmonization, thereby de-characterizing their ancestral identity.

Bell hooks (2005) illustrates how the obsessive relationship that Black women have with their hair reflects an ongoing struggle with self-esteem and self-fulfillment. She reports that Black women perceive their hair as an enemy, as a problem needing to be solved, as a territory that must be conquered or as a part of the body that must be brought under control (HOOKS, 2005, p. 4).

The white supremacist representation of Afro-textured hair as being something shameful, did not take hold without contestation. The aesthetics of the black body has proved central to the expressiveness of the African diaspora since the beginning of the slave trade, with aesthetic manifestations of the enslaved people who retrieved and preserved cultural practices related to hair. Perhaps one of the most powerful expressions of Black resistance regarding the territoriality of the body may be represented by the use of braids (some of them also known as "Nagô[7] braids"), in Brazil and in other Latin American countries, such as Colombia, where they served as a means of communication between enslaved people in drawing maps to indicate escape routes towards the quilombos (VARGAS, 2003; DABIRI, 2019). Today, given the black representation existing in various spaces, the

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7. A member of a Yoruba people inhabiting the coastal areas of modern-day Nigeria and Benin.

resignification of Afro-textured hair continues to grow, through capillary transition, with the abandonment of chemical products used to straighten hair.

Currently, Brazilian Black women are able to denounce this type of racial discrimination, based on Law No. 7,716/89 (BRASIL, 1989) that covers crimes resulting from prejudice or discrimination on grounds of race, color, ethnicity, religion or national origin, which constitutes a great achievement, although the difficulty of legally gauging the stigma still constitutes an obstacle for its effectuation.

Contemplating the struggles of Black women with regard to their bodies as territoriality enables us to understand how different power relations are disputed in this most intimate space of their existence, due to the fact that their subalternity is directly associated with their black, feminine corporeality. Considering the body as territory makes it possible to consider the intersectionality of race, gender and class in their bodily materiality, as a locus of oppression, but also of resistance. Thinking about the territorialities of Black women on the scale of the body signifies breaking with the dichotomy between public and private space, reaffirming the powerful feminist motto: the personal is always political.

3. The territory of the house

In this section, we discuss the intersectionality of race, class and gender in territorialities related to the scope of the house. In Brazil, in the social division of labor, the figure of the Black woman has historically been associated with domestic chores as the main structuring of the "*casa-grande*"[8]. In the period after abolition, the relations between former masters and former slaves were maintained through social rearrangements that allowed the most devalued services to remain linked to historically subalternized subjects. As reported by Pereira (2011, p. 4):

> Working as a house maid was recurrent in the lives of Black women, which did not configure, in some cases, as a mere gateway to the labor market, but as the only possible form of occupation offered to these women. Historically, there is a structural precariousness of domestic work in Brazil, with female workers who became immersed into the extreme proletariat, outside the State wage regulations.

In order to understand the role of Black women within the private space of the house, it is first necessary to understand the significance and value of women's

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8. "*Casa-grande*" [Plantation House] was the term used to designate the family home of the great rural landowners, the center par excellence of the patriarchal way of life of the Brazilian slave system. While the slave masters and their families lived in the *casa-grande*, the slaves lived in the "*senzala*" [slave quarters], which was precarious housing with few resources and no comfort.

work as a colonial legacy and basis of globalized capitalism. According to Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2011, p. 1):

> The devalorization of domestic work as feminized and racialized work emerges from within a logic, in which this work is socially and culturally coded as "unproductive". Hence, the attribution of low wages to domestic work is not accidental. The classification of this work as "less valorized" is linked to a social process of the production of significance. The social value attributed to domestic work is, therefore, a result of the hegemonic struggle.

Discussing the territory of the house, from the perspective of the Black woman, goes back to the scope of the territory of the *casa-grande* during the slavery period. To a certain extent, this space was actually aspired to by some of the enslaved Black women, since the others were subjected to much heavier farming work. Because these Black women lived in the *casa-grande*, certain activities were attributed to them, mainly those related to taking care of the house and its residents. The tasks ranged from helping to bath the baby of the house, providing water, cooking, tidying the house, in addition to washing, ironing, serving as a wet nurse and even satisfying the master's sexual desire.

On the other hand, Black women have managed to create other "houses" without the daily presence of the oppressor, such as the *candomblé terreiros*[9], which were places of refuge and protagonism, historically constituted as counter-hegemonic territories. In the African-based religions in Brazil, the Black woman plays a more prominent role, with the title of *ialorixá*, or *mãe de santo*[10]. The women's position of leadership in these hybrid territories (semi-private and semi-public) may have been one of the factors that made these houses places where many women were able to seek physical and spiritual shelter, in addition to being more representative than in other spaces.

The worship of ancestrality in many African cultures is conducted in a public space. However, in Brazil, its aspects were modified as a form of protection in a context of constant persecution and repression. Thus, the *terreiros* are made up of small groups, which integrate communities in which everyone knows and interacts with everyone else, supported by a strong sense of belonging (PRANDI, 2004).

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9. It is important to emphasize that there are many other forms of houses that were historically managed by black women in Brazil besides the *terreiro*, such as *zungus* and *taguás* (clandestine spaces that welcomed free and enslaved blacks from Brazil and the world), room rentals and houses of the samba aunts.

10. *ialorixá* is a word from the Yoruba language given to female priestesses of the African religion, which was translated into Portuguese as "*mãe de santo*" – "mother of the saints".

However, these territories are also configured by unequal social relations and power disputes in which the unconscious desire of the oppressed to occupy the oppressor's place of power and privilege (FANON, 2020) sometimes materializes in relations of domination/subjugation within an internalized social hierarchy. As such, these territories of resistance are still permeated by hegemonic norms and values (PILE, 2009, p. 4) that coexist with subversive practices in a more or less harmonious or conflicting manner, as evidenced by the historical presence of Catholicism within the religious spaces of the African matrix. Oliveira, M., Oliveira, O. and Bartholo (2010, p. 32-33) portray these multiple territorialities within the territory of Candomblé as follows:

> These civil associations of a religious nature, despite their connection with Catholicism, constituted spaces for holding meetings and political articulation against slavery, serving, at the same time, to preserve African traditions, and also disguising the organization of candomblés. The "brotherhoods of color" thus became, at the same time, a support for the Catholic acculturation process and an expressive channel for the countercultural reaction, which, even later, was a path that contributed to the process of developing Brazilian popular Catholicism.

Both in the *casa-grande* (either the original or in its modern version) and in the *terreiros*, or other popular dwellings where Black women are the head of the family and community leadership, the dimension of affection occupies a central position, although with different meanings and effects. The affective relationship in the first space is based on coexistence, supported by oppression, domination and exploitation, while in the second, affection is mobilized on the basis of care and solidarity for emancipatory purposes.

In the case of domestic work undertaken by Black women, Pereira (2011) highlights that its functionality was strongly rooted in relationships of favor or of godparenting with strong affective appeal, plus a false idea of belonging, which naturalizes and perpetuates practices of subordination and stratified dependence, perceived as inherent to Black women.

Affective relationships based on the exploitation of the workforce, for these women, are configured in territories of non-belonging, with a lack of rights, of not "being a person", i.e., in spaces of invisibility and disempowerment. This is what Teixeira, Saraiva and Carrieri (2015, p. 17) have stated: "Thus, in the relationship established between employers and employees there is a physical proximity and a sharing of certain places that is accompanied, however, by a symbolic distance".

There are markers that materialize the non-belonging of the maid to the family for whom she works (even today, often in an informal, underpaid manner); these

include, for example, the use of a maid's uniform, access, sometimes exclusively, to specific spaces in the house (bathroom and maid's room) and a lack of access to spaces of family living (such as during meals). As Luiza Brito, president of the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenatrad), pointed out in an interview conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding the relationship between domestic workers and their employers:

> Often, she only discovers that she is not family when she has already become ill, when she gets old and can no longer work and is unable to retire. She gets a little gift here, a little gift there, and feels flattered, but it doesn't take care of the main item, which is the INSS, the FGTS[11]. When she decides to go ahead with the process, she becomes embarrassed, she hears from her bosses: "You've worked so long at my house, you ate the same food". (GONZALEZ, 2021, n.p.)

Within this oppressive coexistence, a remnant of slavery that continues to this day in Brazil, Black women made use of affection as a powerful instrument for territorializing their knowledge and their ancestral memories. The spread of *"pretogues"* (GONZALEZ, 1988b)[12] by the *mucamas* and, later, by the domestic workers who mothered and educated the children of whites, was one of the ways in which linguistic signs and *Amefrican* values were transmitted for generations. This demonstrates the role of these women not only as servants, but also as intellectuals of Brazilian society (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 68).

4. The territory of the city

The first cities in Brazil emerged during the colonial period and acted as one of the means by which the Portuguese spread their culture and domain. Largely built along the coastline, their economic vocation was focused on mercantilism. There, everything was sold and everything was bought. They provided the space for the huge export trade of colony goods and for importing enslaved peoples. These subjects worked in the cities in the most varied types of trade. "Earning on the streets, mainly through small businesses, Black women occupied a prominent position in the urban labor market" (SOARES, 1996, p. 57).

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11. INSS is the social security system and FGTS is the employee severance fund, calculated on the time of service.

12. Lélia Gonzalez coined the term *Português* [literally "Blackoguese" – a Brazilian Portuguese equivalent of "Ebonics"], "which is nothing more than the mark of Africanization in the Portuguese spoken in Brazil […]. The tonal and rhythmic character of African languages brought to the New World, in addition to the absence of certain consonants (such as the *l* or the *r*, for example), indicate an underexplored aspect of Black influence in the historical-cultural formation of the continent as a whole." (GONZALEZ, 1988b, p. 70)

The presence and the central role played by Black women in the city aroused the attention of the US researcher and anthropologist, Ruth Landes ([1947] 2006), who called Salvador, the capital of Bahia, the "city of women", because she realized that, despite (or because of) the existing racism in Brazil, the presence of Black women in public and sacred spaces was notorious, unlike that observed in the United States at the time:

> Negro women were everywhere, in colorful skirts and turbans and white blouses reflecting the sun. Usually they were older women, powerful in appearance and self-confident, and keenly interested in the work at hand. They managed the butcher shops, the vegetable stalls, the candy and flower bars, and the stands selling spices, soaps, beads, and other specialties imported from the west coast of Africa. (LANDES, [1947] 2006, n.p.)

The presence of Black women on the streets and in public squares, however, did not translate into greater freedom and equal living conditions. Due to the invisible centrality of the role of Black women in all spheres of private and public life, their existence was systematically relegated to the margins. The Black feminist bell hooks (1984, p. ix;)[13] conceived the margin as a territory historically imposed onto Black women:

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. [...] Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.

In Brazil, Black women are also found on the margins of the city and citizenship, subjected to demeaning conditions of survival, when confronted with a colonial, capitalist and patriarchal model of unequal urbanization, in which their right to have rights is systematically denied. Lélia Gonzalez (1982, p. 15) described the place of white and black men and women in Brazilian cities as follows:

> The natural place of the dominant white group has been in healthy dwellings, located in the most beautiful areas of the city or

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13. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of HOOKS, B. Feminist Theory from margin to center. Boston, South End Press. 1984, p. ix.

countryside and duly protected by different forms of policing ranging from overseers, bush captains, thugs, etc., to the formally constituted police. From the *casa-grande* and the town house to the current beautiful buildings and residences, the criterion has remained the same. The natural place of black people is, of course, the opposite: from the slave quarters to the favelas, tenements, invasions, flooded areas and "housing" complexes [...] today, the criterion has been symmetrically the same: the racial division of space.

Black women in Brazil have historically occupied the various territories of the city, while white women, "protected" by machismo and whiteness, have found themselves leading the spatial self-segregation, hiding away in the "safe" spaces of the *casa-grandes* of yesterday and the gated communities of today. According to Carneiro (2001, p. 1):

When we talk about the myth of female fragility, which historically justified men's paternalistic protection over women, which women are we actually talking about? We Black women are part of a contingent of women, probably the majority, who have never recognized this myth in themselves, because we have never been treated as fragile. We are part of a contingent of women who have worked for centuries as slaves in the fields, or on the streets as sellers, confectioners, prostitutes... Women who understood nothing when feminists said that women should take to the streets and work!

Today, most of these women are responsible for supporting a large family, whose income is generally less than the minimum wage, and who live in small rooms in a precarious residence, lacking basic sanitation. This "racial division of space" was historically effectuated by the systematic expropriation of the black population from their place of residence, since their capture on the African continent, and later by the Land Law of 1850, responsible for the institution of land as private property. With its implementation, Blacks and indigenous peoples were prevented from accessing it. Today, the expropriation of the Black population persists with land grabbing by farmers, landowners and businessmen, both in the countryside and in the city, the repossessions promoted by the neoliberal state in favor of major urbanization and revitalization projects, which favor the real estate market and remove the most precarious inhabitants to places increasingly further away from the city, and the daily repressive intervention of the police and State regulatory bodies, which create spaces of confinement, incarceration and black extermination in prisons and asylums and on the peripheries of the city. Thus, within this context, "the simple act of appropriating space to live in came to mean an act of struggle, of war" (LEITE, 2000, p. 335).

Brazilian necropolitics[14] manifests itself emblematically in the lives of Black women, as mother, sister, daughter or wife of Black people murdered daily by police violence. As Marta Argolo (2018, p. 31) described:

> The lethal violence practiced by agents representing the State, which transforms young Blacks into fatal victims, places women/mothers into a story that, although unnarrated, has been inscribed in the records of the police and legal systems, and has begun to compose the social memory, over which the veil of invisibility is drawn. This experience marks the entry of women into a set of new relationships with the police system and the legal system, relationships that will be shaped by the discursive productions on gender that permeate these institutions. Unsurprisingly, these discourses are anchored in stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination.

The extermination of Black youth destabilizes and disrupts poor, Black families, deepening the precariousness of their lives, especially those of Black women, directly affected by this type of structural violence. However, as Kilomba highlights (2020, p. 68), "the margin should not only be seen as a peripheral space, a space of loss and deprivation, but rather a space of resistance and possibility."[15] It is through and despite the unparalleled suffering of losing a child that Black women have placed themselves at the forefront of the fight against the genocide of Black people (ARGOLO, 2018). It is on the margin as "spaces of radical opening" (HOOKS, 1989) that the struggles for the right to the city, for the right to decent housing and for the right to life have been led by Black women who are part of social movements, networks, articulations, sisterhoods and collectives acting in multiple spheres and scales, both in social networks and in the media, as well as in the streets, squares and institutional spheres. The *ialodês*[16] have claimed their rights and reverberated their denunciations against the actions and omissions of the neoliberal, patriarchal, racist State through various languages and resistance strategies (VALE; ARAS 2015; RIBEIRO; AVILA, 2019).

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14. Achille Mbembe (2019, p. 92) uses the term "necropolitics" to describe "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" and how, within this context, the "killable" body is the racialized body, imagined as a threat to society as a whole. MBEMBE, A. *Necropolitics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019, Translated by Steven Corcoran.

15. N.B. - For direct citations, the English version was used of KILOMBA G. (2021 p.35).

16. The concept of *ialodê*, a word from the African Yoruba language, refers to the cultural and political dimension of women's actions, especially attributes of female political leadership and representation of fundamentally urban action (WERNECK, 2009, p. 157). WERNECK, J. *Nossos passos vêm de longe! Movimentos de mulheres negras e estratégias políticas contra o sexismo e o racismo* [Our steps have come from afar! Black women's movements and political strategies against sexism and racism]. In: VERSCHUUR, C. Vents d'Est, vents d'Ouest: Mouvements de femmes et feminismes anticoloniaux [on line]. Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, p. 151-163, 2009.

The defense of territory and the constitution of Black territorialities imply the defense of other ways of seeing, being and relating to oneself (self-acceptance and self-assertion) and to "Others", human and non-human, thereby destabilizing the dichotomous and hierarchical relationships, which have founded coloniality/modernity between white/black, man/woman, society/nature, public/private, among many others. A recent emblematic example of these colonial territorialities was the first March of Black Women against Racism, Violence and for Good Living, held in Brasília, in November 2015, and which brought together 60 thousand Black women from all over the country. In addition to denouncing the racism and violence that afflict them in their daily lives, they revealed their survival strategies, appropriating the indigenous concept and practices of "*buen vivir*" (good living)[17], adapting them to their histories, cultures and particular realities. This good living, which we could call "Amefrican", following Lélia Gonzalez (1988b), is based on ancestral wisdom that links indigenous and African traditions, reinvented and reinterpreted daily within the diasporic context. Among the claims called for in the March manifesto were the "entitlement and guarantee of quilombola lands [...] from which we earn our livelihood and remain linked to our ancestry" (MANIFESTO DA MARCHA DAS MULHERES NEGRAS, 2015, n.p.).

Amefrican good living has been based on "Afro-Brazilian civilizing values" such as circularity, orality, vital energy (*Axé*), corporeality, musicality, ludicity, cooperativity/communitarianism, memory, religiosity and ancestry (TRINDADE, 2010). These values may be understood as principles and norms that embody and territorialize feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist Afro-Brazilian ways of being and existing in the world, which permeate the relations between human beings and between humans and non-humans. In the words of Azoilda da Trindade (2010, p. 14):

> We recognize the importance of *Axé*, VITAL ENERGY, the potency of life present in each living being, so that, in a movement of CIRCULARITY, this energy circulates, renews, moves, expands, transcends and does not hierarchize the differences recognized in the CORPOREITY of the visible and the invisible. Vital energy is circular and materializes in bodies, not only in humans, but in living beings in general, in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms [...] If we are constantly *becoming*, becoming a being, it is essential to preserve the MEMORY and respect for those who came before, those who survived. It is important to respect ANCESTRALITY, which is

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17. According to Alberto Acosta (2019, p. 24-25): "Good Living is, essentially, a process originating from the community matrix of people who live in harmony with Nature [...] In other words, it is about living well together in community and in Nature". ACOSTA, A. *O Bem Viver:* uma oportunidade para imaginar outros mundos [Good Living: an opportunity to imagine other worlds]. São Paulo: Elephant, 2019.

also present in the world of different territories (TERRITORIALITY). Sacred territories (RELIGIOSITY) because places of memory, ancestral memory, memories to be preserved as relics, common, collective memories, are woven and shared by processes of COOPERATION and COMMUNITY, by ORALITIES, by word, by diverse, singular and plural bodies (CORPOREITIES), for the music (MUSICALITY) and, above all, why not(?), for the pleasure of living – LUDICITY.

Candomblé terreiros, urban quilombos, traditional communities, land occupations and popular settlements have been constituted in urban territories of *Amefrican* good living in which Black women continue to be the protagonists in the struggle for emancipation, environmental justice and the right to rethink, reinvent and "quilombize" the city. According to Bárbara Souza (2008, p. 106), the movement to become "quilombized" has been a continuous action of resistance throughout the country's history, which brings with it the fundamental right of the autonomous existence of the Afro-descendants, with their habits and customs. Thus, *Amefrican* good living has the particularity of breaking out against the current system, from the perspective of guaranteeing the right to exist physically, socially, culturally and historically.

Final considerations

The main proposal of this article has been to contextualize historically, politically and culturally the territorialities of Brazilian Black women in the struggle for emancipation, recognition and the right to a dignified life. The daily struggle of Black women against exclusion, domination and exploitation permeates the territories of the body, the house and the city in the intersection between various axes of oppression that mutually constitute and reinforce it. This intersectional examination of the diasporic territories of the struggle of Black women reveals both old and new practices of oppression and resistance, which indicate possible avenues of joint actions against patriarchal, heteronormative, (neo)colonial and capitalist regimes of oppression, present at the root of these unequal social relationships and dynamics.

In terms of the body, the territorialities of Black women have become manifested in their mouths, that have refused to remain silent, since the time of the silencing masks; in the milk-filled breasts, rented out to breastfeed the children of the mistress, and which have served as a link for transmitting "Ebonics" and the Afro-Brazilian culture; in the Nagô braids used as maps to guide fugitives to the quilombos and in the capillary transition of today's Black youth; in their struggle to defend the reproductive and sexual rights of thousands of women who still suffer

from sexual abuse, a lack of access to education, information and health, in order to be able to decide about their own bodies. The female, Black body also resists when it has been affirmatively inserted into places where it has historically been prohibited from going – in universities, on airplanes, in hotels, and in any position of power or elitist space.

Within the house, the territoriality of Black women was materialized in the condition of domestic servant, mother, head of family, educator and into political-religious leadership of alternative dwellings. Affectivity has permeated these dimensions of the work and of the care of Black women both in the oppressive coexistence within the *casa-grande*, and in the place of spiritual and collective refuge provided by the African-based religion. The newly acquired labor rights of domestic servants, and the presence of places of refuge, solidarity and shelter led by Black women in *terreiros*, movements, neighborhoods and communities are achievements that have transformed and expanded the meaning of "house", going beyond the borders of conventional private space.

Within the city, the territorialities of Black women have always been a constituent part of space and public life, through their language, their art, commerce, food, festivities and struggles, although with subalternity and invisibility. Black territorialities continue to materialize in the urban space due to their daily role in city life, and in their struggle for the right to the city. The struggle for the right to the city of Black people also presupposes the right to become *quilombized* as a result of *Amefrican* good living, based on respect for life, in its broadest sense, which necessarily implies respect and care for the various "Others", the humans and non-humans of this planet. Thus, in addition to creating spaces of cultural and political resistance, Black territorialities subvert modern dichotomous, anthropocentric thinking, which separates nature from culture and legitimizes the perpetuation of violent practices of exploitation and destruction of the environment. The historical relationship of Black women with nature constitutes yet another axis of Black, female oppression and resistance. Thus, from the perspective of intersectionality, the struggle against the exploitation of nature is inseparable from the struggle against racism, patriarchy and capitalism.

Today, the production of these spaces of resistance led by Black women is the result of struggles waged by feminist and anti-racist collectives that make up social movements, organizations and entities with a local, national or international outreach, such as the Rede de Mulheres Negras, As Sete Mulheres, Blogueiras Negras, Criola, Centro de Cultura Negra (Cecune), Centro de Articulação das Populações Marginalizadas, Coletivo Feminino Aldeia Itapuã, Geledés, Maria Mulher, TamoJuntas, Articulação de Organizações de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras (AMNB),

Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador, among many others. They have, in their different manners, faced, and continue to face, the problem of racism and other forms of oppression, exerting public pressure, which has resulted in numerous achievements. Without the existence of these various social movements, it would have been impossible to undertake certain actions, such as the institution of reparatory quota policies, the criminalization of racist acts and the defense of the right to land, to decent housing and to the territories of the city. However, feminist and anti-racist measures need to stop being an eminently black and feminine policy and become a struggle for all.

Brazilian Black feminism has managed to become increasingly more visible through communication technologies and the multiplication of digital platforms (blogs and websites such as Geledés, Black Bloggers, Que Nega é Essa?, and discussions on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, on YouTube, etc.), which have enabled the dissemination of narratives by Black women, especially young Black women, on the racism and sexism they experience on a daily basis. Hence, social networks have also become a space for activism, enabling the expansion and consolidation of Black feminist awareness, through which Black women become agents of transformation and territorialize their concerns, interests, perspectives and complaints. Virtual interactions have provided and strengthened face-to-face meetings and concrete actions, such as acts, marches and protests, stimulating new territorialities and enhancing the formation of collectives, organizations and social movements with a broader range of action. In some situations, this has enabled a global outreach of feminist and anti-racist struggles, as in the case of *Black Lives Matter* in the United States and the feminist collective *Las Tesis* in Chile. On the other hand, there is still huge inequality in accessing the means of communication and information technologies, thus mobilization in the social networks tend to reach a mostly middle-class audience, thereby perpetuating the exclusion of the most precarized Black population.

Lastly, analyzing and problematizing the ways in which interlocking regimes of oppression, which specifically affect Black Brazilian women, historically manifested in the territories of the body, the house and the city, has helped us to understand the different dimensions and scales in which racism and sexism are structured and become materialized, in addition to disseminating the strategies and practices that contribute to the possibility of overcoming them. Contemplating the existence and resistance of Black women in terms of territoriality and intersectionality helps to make the anti-racist and anti-capitalist feminist struggle more visible and tangible in its historical, spatial, cultural and environmental specificities, inserting itself into the collective, autonomous construction of an "other" way of existing, based on territorial and intersectional practices of solidarity and emancipation.

Acknowledgements

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