

## Hey Progressives and Anti-racists, For Real: How About Broadening the Debate?

*Made up of Black leaders, the Bancada Preta movement, born in São Paulo in 2019, proposes the creation of a unified agenda for the peripheries of the city*

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| Brazil |

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**B**ancada Preta (the Black Caucus) has sought, since its foundation, to combat social inequalities and structural racism in Brazil, as well as to support the emancipation of social groups in situations of inequality through the social technology of transformative communication. Through the use of social media, Bancada Preta brings light to the debate on the construction of an anti-racist, anti-misogynist, and anti-LGBTphobic city.

Based in this reality of suburban inequality and a dearth of privileges, we can say that the “moral” platform, on one end, signifies a combination of values and notions that are “right or wrong,” or “prohibited and permitted,” within a certain community or tradition.

The positive praxis of this moral signaling is important for us to be able to live in the fullness of the reconstruction of a new and renewed “Palmares,”<sup>1</sup> A 17th century self-sustaining kingdom of runaway slaves in Brazil’s Northeast. strengthening more and more

the alliances that guarantee the radicalization of democracy. We can, from the outset, analyze our context of chaos and struggles for attending to diverse subjectivities in the discourse of unity, collectivity, sorority, among other jargon — even those that are unsustainable.

The most varied traditional and political expressions possess diverse moral systems for the organization of life in society. The proof of this lies in the varied readings of the world that exist in the same context of deprivation of rights, even those that verge on “reactionary.” I seek to always keep in mind that “moral,” as the fruit of collective consciousness of a certain society and culture, can vary over the course of time and over the historic construction mediated by contradictions and narratives that seek, in sum, to promote existential conflicts already written into the imposed social contracts negotiated by capitalism.

Based on the idea that the “moral” is constructed culturally, certain “visions of the world” gain a status of truth among social groups, and for this reason, are often “normalized.” Thus, one consistent worry in the debate over ethics and morals comes about in the question of violations in all of its possible expressions (physical, psychic and epistemological), as well as social chaos. Ethical values offer themselves up, therefore, as an expression and guarantee of our condition as human beings, rational subjects, free agents, morally prohibiting violence and favoring social cohesion — that is, the “connection,” the *aquilombamento*<sup>2</sup> A play on the word *quilombo*, or a self-sustaining community of fugitive slaves and/or their ancestors. *Aquilombamento*: the act of becoming/creating a *quilombo*. *Quilombismo*, coined by famed Afro-Brazilian scholar Abdias Nascimento, refers to the philosophy — set within Pan-Africanism — of constructing a new society based in the history of Brazilian *quilombos* and African cultural tradition between people in community.

Thus, the notion of violation, discrimination, and the expansion of prejudice varies, both in the values of virtue, fundamental to a ethical life and to avoiding violence, as well as in immoral or anti-ethical acts. The notion of good and bad or good and evil is fundamental for us to calculate a way of fleeing suffering and pain and reaching happiness in a collectivized form and engaging sectors and broadening this reflection.

However, it is important to remember that ethical ends require ethical processes, which leads us to deduce that the famous expression “the ends justify the means,” is invalid. If, in our ethical and moral discourse, we consider racism to be something immoral, then it would be an unjustifiable means of achieving anything, even if done in the name of some moral value. The simple existence of a moral does not signify the explicit presence of an ethic, understood as a moral philosophy — that is, a reflection that discusses, problematizes, and interprets its moral values over generations, allowing for generalized acceptance of capitalism and racism, and that these and other things, are potentialized and normalized.

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We are reaping the fruits of the “Letter to the Brazilian People,” published in July 2002, in the context of the Workers’ Party (PT) electoral campaign for their candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, for that year’s presidential race. As a sort of Letter of Compromise with big capital (big, speculative, and exploitative of workers), the letter came about as a representative political indication of what the PT had become and sought to put into practice if elected. With a strong emphasis on the need for immediate change in the Brazilian political scenario at the time, the document spoke of the importance of considering an economic change based on grand structural reforms, keeping unity around growth and national development as its core principle.

Differentiating itself from, and, in grand style, contradicting the party’s foundational manifesto, published in the *Diario Oficial* Bulletin on October 21, 1980, in which the party positioned itself on the side of workers and the exploited, calling for the masses to organize themselves “so that the social and political situation might be a tool for the construction of a just, solidary, educational, socialist society in principle and one that responds to the interests of workers and other sectors exploited by capitalism,” the *Carta aos Brasileiros* presented us with a conciliatory policy, one unaligned with the radicalization of democracy, in which agrobusiness, banks, large companies, the media (supporters of coups) and the bourgeoisie would live alongside, supposedly, community banks, family agriculture, and *quilombos*, and that small businesses would coexist like sisters.

But the issue is not about the abandonment of the economic platform, but about the

necessary rupture with the lack of awareness among the masses.

The refusal to recognize the error, something that the progressive camp (that is, the left) insisted upon for so long, paralyzes debate about ethical and moral values as strategies for the humanization of relations. This is a debate to be confronted in the moral arena, not abstaining from historical contradictions — that is, not sweeping under the carpet this idea of class conciliation — in order to advance to the next cycle with its goals and objectives.

What is lesson number one of this scenario from 2002 to 2020? Lesson number one is, “let’s talk about the economy,” “let’s remember when the people were happier, when there was more money and you could buy chicken and a fridge...” The whole formative debate was swept under the carpet and the great snakeoil sale is, still, in full operation. It was not taken up and defended by the broad majority of people, much less portrayed as an urgent need. In the long run, in order to potentialize this moral crossroads, there is a need to amplify and demand courage and coherence to take up that which we say we defend.

In reflecting, we can take note of certain social technologies that value this conception of the development of narratives that are Afrocentric and plural-party, ones that unify the potentialities that support knowledge and action in the development of just, solidary, and educative communities: Bancada Preta stimulates the praxis rooted in principles that date back, in contemporaneity, to the Ubuntu philosophy as a guiding light.

For Bancada Preta, the experience, the daily and revolutionary praxis, solidarity, collectivity, Afrocentrism, and *quilombismo* are the sentiments that still move us. But in many aspects they are stolen from us. The act of dreaming, fighting, and believing that we can build something better for us and for the next generations suffers a defeat every day as the revolutionary praxis is tested in the collective.

As descendents of a people that has suffered and has been active in the field of resistance for ages, we fight, to this day, against the descendents of kidnappers, rapists, exploiters, invaders that want to take our “experience” and, in the project defended by the supposedly progressive camp, would coexist in peace, in the politics of “earn and let earn.” We have

fought against the enslavement of our bodies and minds for more than four centuries; in this process, we construct alternatives of sociability.

Bancada Preta is a concrete experience that demonstrates in practice that it is possible to construct a different society — one that is more human, more just, solidary, educative and environmentally viable and self-sustaining. It is the result of daring, of the acumen of a people that does not shrink from the difficulties and barriers presented to them.

The challenges and difficulties do not end with access to spaces of decision and power; on the contrary, they take on new forms. The struggle turns to one of survival, to attempts of integrating plans, projects, and planning in the social, economic, cultural fields, and for the right to exist, both physically and psychologically.

We have lived through so many ends of the world, so many pandemics. It is the bullet in the chest of one of ours, it is the lynching in the supermarkets, the abandonment that guarantees the strength of the on-days/off-days of trash collection, stoplights and overcrowded private-public transportation; it is the successive routine of violence and armed war in the territories, favelas, corners, alleys, and systems.

Covid-19 is just one of the catastrophes that we have lived through in this age, consequences of tragedies such as the invasion of Africa and the kidnapping of its sons and daughters, the upsurge of capitalism and its tentacles, racism, the Christian religion, and heteronormativity.

Unfortunately many of us will be dragged down by a “if there’s little to go around then serve me first” type logic, and this is not the fault of one situation or another. Rather it is the effect of history. Every day that white, capitalist, western men and women build their world, we dig another hole.

It is no less true that the extermination of Black youth, which today in Brazil reaches more than 30,000 deaths per year, kills less than the virus. Nor has any other effort to postpone the end of the world — the capitalist, white, neocolonial world — meant any improvement

for us.

Since having its world restored, the neocolonial “demonocracy” has been quick to point its weapons toward Black, poor, favela, and peripheral bodies: a mass that must be contained, an enemy that must be exterminated. At its foundation, it is a basic calculus: 90% of the world’s population sustains 1%, and, together we consume what is the equivalent of 150% of the resources of this same population.

We tend to contemplate the end of racism not as coming from a transition, but from a rupture with the system of oppression and exploitation; we imagine a break that never occurs. We are always bragging to ourselves of our technological aspects, of the technologies that we develop and place at the service of the nation and at the service of white people. To what end?

All great inventions are always used for the same goal: war, manipulation, and profits. This is a path that has been trod for ages, traveled every day by the people that rise unhappily from their beds, and that accept their bread through submission. It is difficult to speak about this in a country that still lives in the shadow of hunger, thirst, and cold. And what about when we stop fearing, suffering from hunger, thirst, and cold? What will we do? Die, then, from eating and drinking, looking to our peers through a classist lens and detaching from them? At the end of the day, it will be the moral and ethical values that we have constructed that will give us our answer.

I never thought that they would be able to kill, in minutes, million-year-old rivers. For me, these rivers were already done for, and we are invited, constantly to their funeral. The river, water, the source of life, contaminated with mercury, blood, and iron, follows the same ancient methodology. Environmental racism. That image of the Brumadinho dam breaking will not leave my head, and it is an example of what they (fascists, bourgeoisie, capitalists) want with Brazil. And Latin America, an Afro-Indigenous space, has been tossed into a great hole, just as they have sought since they arrived here.

The end of the experience stretches on, and it will not be quick. The transformation will not

be quick. Everything will be slow like the pace of the earth and, more importantly, like the pace of understanding. At the beginning, we were one sole continent. At the beginning, we were Pangea. I can't forget this beautiful image: the contact of the two hemispheres, of such a new phase, still hurt, still injured by this separation.

It is time to remember. When the colonial regime abandoned Brazil in the image of colonizing whiteness and Portugal was left to its own luck, the Black star of Zumbi shined in the sky, showing our people the way. This is a type of consciousness that we must awaken now for us to confront the destruction, a consciousness that is *aquilombante*.

It is in the *quilombo* that, today, the Bancada Preta, us, the Black population of the Americas, will raise the walls of ideas that can shelter our creative, collective, and life-collectivized potencies — potencies as persistent as the saga of our genocide, the machine that grinds Black flesh: modernity. In order to *aquilombar* in these times of the end of the world, it is necessary first to create the *quilombo* within oneself. Exercise the mind and body for new ideas.

We have passed through a moment of profound difficulty, one with a lack of work and few alternatives for income generation. Those that are able to sell their labor are forced to spend long hours on public/private transportation, and often have no one to leave their children with, owing to the lack of spaces for early education. In territories in which we live, there is much lacking: crowded schools, shortages of medication at health posts, a lack of cultural and leisure spaces. We feel insecure, even in the presence of those who are meant to protect us.

The daily massacre makes us appear — and often we truly are — weak, impotent, incapable of changing the ways of our desolate lives. This brings with it the need to always seek some comfort, some lullaby, something that boosts our spirits to continue the day. This search is collective, not individual. It is in these difficult moments that we look to rescue the strength of our ancestors.

Bancada Preta, above all, looks to nurture itself from ancestrality, understanding the

technologies and methods that we have built through the ages that brought us to where we are now. This belonging and this identity are fundamental for us to perceive that we are not alone and that we must remain united, acting collectively and strategically. However, it is because of Black people that we are here, once again writing what has already been written, exhaustively, by so many of us.

Bancada Preta seeks to establish self-care, to construct collective nurturing spaces, welcoming spaces, spaces for listening, sociability, of collective feeling, of bond-strengthening, spaces for memories and the constitution of identities.

Bancada Preta is an organization. It is the construction of spaces in which we can reflect upon and act on our reality, questioning that which oppresses us and constructing demand, concrete actions, and placing ourselves in movement in order to change our realities.

Bancada Preta looks to understand our history, our origins, our culture, rescuing our memories and remembering the past in order to understand the present and build the future. This leads us to realize just how much cultural and political action go hand-in-hand, and form a powerful technology for social organization and intervention, in which ethical and moral values embrace one another in the day-to-day of the construction of a community.

Bancada Preta is about doing, communicating with one another, organizing concepts, building fundamentals and narratives, and establishing dialogue with the rest of society, in addition to decolonizing bodies, minds, and systems.

Bancada Preta is about tactical and strategic *aquilombamento*. It is a historic need. It is a call: the call to reconnect with our ancestrality to act in the present, to build our experience and strength and to dream of leaving a better future!

For real, and with our peers. What do you say, for real, let's do it?



