

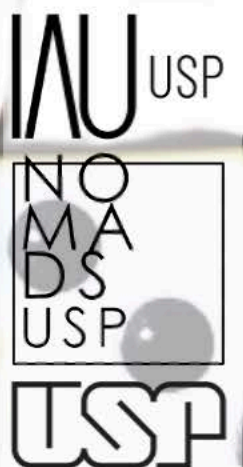
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**MULTILATERAL
DIALOGUES
PRAXIS
INTERLOCUTIONS
CONFRONTATIONS**

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MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUTIONS, AND CONFRONTATIONS
DIÁLOGOS MULTILATERAIS: PRÁXIS, INTERLOCUÇÕES E CONFRONTAÇÕES
DIÁLOGOS MULTILATERALES: PRAXIS, INTERLOCUCIONES Y CONFRONTACIONES

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BLACK PEOPLE AND A FIVE-HUNDRED-YEAR SILENCED DIALOGUE O POVO NEGRO E UM DIÁLOGO SILENCIADO DE QUINHENTOS ANOS EL PUEBLO NEGRO Y UN DIÁLOGO SILENCIADO DE QUINIENTOS AÑOS CASIMIRO LUMBANDANGA, MARCELO TRAMONTANO

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Marcelo Tramontano: It is a pleasure and an honor to engage in this dialogue with you, Casimiro. Among the essential multilateral dialogues that need to be established and cultivated in Brazil, Latin America, and beyond, one of the most urgent is undoubtedly the dialogue with Afro-diasporic peoples. I want to begin our conversation by addressing the history of this diaspora in Brazil, considering that it is often narrated from perspectives that do not fully represent the Black population's viewpoint. Where do you believe the beginning of this history lies—one that is marked by violence and subjugation but also by rebellion, struggle, and achievement?

Casimiro Lumbandanga: The Brazilian Black social movement has very deep roots. I begin our timeline with the arrival of the first slave ship in Brazil, as it marks the start of a revolutionary process of negation of the condition to which we have been historically subjected. Since the Black population began to be brought to Brazil and distributed on farms throughout the country to participate in the process of colonization and economic and cultural construction, we were, in a way, syncretized and transformed because we were not allowed to retain our identities as subjects originating from African countries. Upon arrival in Brazil, our ancestors were given new names assigned by slave owners.

Thus, a revolutionary process of resistance was consolidated in the slave quarters, centered around a powerful issue: the rejection of the condition of being a slave, not only in Brazil but anywhere. Numerous rebellions were staged throughout the period of slavery, many of which have been overlooked and omitted from official historiography. This neglect led to an ideological construct that falsely conveys the idea of passivity among enslaved people and acceptance of their condition. This understanding that this population was complacent and peaceful ended up being internalized by black people themselves after the abolition of slavery in 1888, even obscuring an entire history of revolts. In the official historical narrative, this Black being forcibly brought from Africa to colonize America only gains visibility, unfortunately, by means of the great revolts, such as that of Palmares. It is from this standpoint that a new mentality—of resistance—was built over centuries of slavery, and which was systematically erased by the dominant elites in an attempt to replace it with the acceptance of the slave-owning project, in Brazil and the world.

MT: One century after the beginning of slavery in Brazil, the Enlightenment in Europe formulated the scientific notion of race based on the superiority of the white European race over all other races on the planet, endorsing their subjugation, domination, and even extermination. It is important to remember this fact because the assumption of white supremacy underpinned the Brazilian abolitionist project, which did not include any legal support or social inclusion policies for formerly enslaved people. The connection between these two historical events may help to explain how black people continued to be perceived by the rest of society after the abolition of slavery in 1888.

CL: The place occupied by Black people in the universe of scientific knowledge production places the other – this subjugated Other, without culture, without knowledge, and without technology – in a position of inferiority. This is one of the crucial disturbances that the Black movement has worked on and continues to work on, and which, unfortunately, academia has reproduced. The way in which mechanisms for subjugating this other – this Other-animal, this Other-thing, which is the descendant of Africans – have historically been constructed is an aberration. Regrettably, such a theory gained strength and became legitimate throughout Europe, keeping us in this position of inferiority to this day. It is crucial to understand how subtle and cynical the theorization of racism was, which engendered the construction of this being inferiorized by slavery, a being supposedly without culture, without soul, and without knowledge. We were considered things; we were considered inferior, primitive beings deprived of all the social engineering of white European beings. And since primitives have no soul, the theory of race legitimized our domination and enslavement.

This process was long and intense, with academia playing a significant role, including in Brazil. It created discriminatory mechanisms that, even today, remain complex to deconstruct due to the effectiveness of the theories suggesting the inferiority of Black people compared to white European culture. Academia helped legitimize these theories, including the so-called cranial theory, which compared the shape and size of the Black skull with those of other peoples. It concluded that we lacked intelligence, reinforcing the idea that we were primitive and solidifying Europeans' position as the beings who think, create, and produce knowledge.

It is also noteworthy to emphasize that, in Brazil, both the Black movement and sociology discuss slavery and the Black experience within this three-hundred-year timeframe, between the 17th and 19th centuries. But civilization began in Africa, and by losing sight of that timeline, official historiography legitimizes a racist way of thinking, one of inferiorizing and denying

the humanity of an entire people, based on the examination of a time window of only three hundred years. Where is the black experience in this historiography? It is essential to reflect more deeply on which Black being we are talking about and in what historical period: these three hundred years? Since the assassination of Zumbi dos Palmares¹ in 1695? From the abolition in 1888? Or the centenary of abolition? And what does this time of slavery in Brazil or in the Western African civilizing process mean? The humanization of the Black being was achieved through many struggles after May 13, 1888, led by the Brazilian Black social movement, by Black movements in North America, by African voices, by researchers from Nigeria, Congo, Algeria, Ethiopia, or Senegal, who deconstructed Eurocentric thought, debating with academia the place of this new Black being who, in reality, had already been in the world for a long time. This whole process led us to an awakening of consciousness: "Wow, if we were liberated, then we had some humanity within us." Because if it were true that we lacked culture and technological knowledge, how could we have implemented the cultures of sugarcane, mining, and coffee and mastered the specific expertise they required?

Academia often defines this historical period solely in terms of the revolutionary processes Africans unleashed. However, it needs to remember the liberating forces of the African continent to build a new sociology, a new anthropology, and a new aesthetics of doing.

MT: It seems to me that the abolition of slavery in 1888 involves at least two issues that may interest us here. The first is linked to the fact that it coincided with the state policy of encouraging white immigration, influencing how Brazilian society continued to view the formerly enslaved people. The country's workforce thus became European, white, and Christian, as part of a project to whiten society. The other issue is that the abolition was signed by a princess, which influenced black social movements in the following decades, leading newly formed associations and cultural groups to declare themselves monarchists in a country that had just become a republic. How do you see this?

CL: This topic deserves a detailed discussion. Various sociological theories about the politics of whitening have fueled the fear of both Brazilian society and the state regarding the immense black population of African descent. When Princess Isabel signed the Golden Law² in 1888, she was not performing a humanitarian act. The law was enacted because the slave system was already exhausted. Given the broader context involving Brazil, neighboring countries, and Europe, it had become unacceptable to sustain slavery as it was still practiced here. Brazil was one of the last countries in the world to release slaves, after having circumvented all anti-trafficking laws until all possibilities of maintaining slavery were exhausted. Furthermore, there was a desire among the white population to break away from this situation, which was causing discomfort for the political class and Brazilian society as a whole.

The signing of the abolition decree, which, for us in the Black social movement, was a false abolition, did not foresee any mechanism for the social reintegration of the Black people taken from Africa and brought to build Brazil and America. Its main goal was to relieve the conscience of the white coffee-growing elite in Brazil, who did not want to take responsibility for the Black people who, until then, had built their entire economy and the entire project of that intellectual and economic elite. It resulted from a pact conceived in such a cynical, indecent way that it included neither reparations nor the integration of the Black population into the new economic landscape initiated with the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. Despite all the political debate and rebellions occurring throughout the country, the state shirked its responsibility, concluding the abolition process with the supposedly noble act of Princess Isabel signing a law. When asked, "What are we going to do with this mass of freed black people now?", the Brazilian state decided to leave them without any support, without land, and without work. The strategic solution it found was to open the country's doors to European immigration, also as part of a project of eugenics and whitening, given the prevailing fear stemming not only from the abolition process itself, but also from what was already happening in other societies, such as the Haitian Revolution. Out of fear, the Brazilian elites forged this pact, which relied on encouraging white immigration, thus inaugurating a strategy of not guaranteeing inclusion and citizenship in this country.

¹ On Zumbi dos Palmares: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zumbi>.

² On the Golden Law: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lei_Áurea.

All of this apparatus was meticulously conceived and constructed by the elites, and it persists to this day. This new type of slavery that we are experiencing in the 21st century is no different from what happened from May 13, 1888, onwards. We know where these descendants of freed slaves are today, how they live, and what treatment they receive from society and the state within the capitalist system, based on racial differences. If we examine the issue of post-abolition violence over the last three hundred years, we will see that this process is still ongoing: a process of extermination, dehumanization, and the ineffective inclusion of Black people in Brazilian society. Even knowing that the civilizing process of Humanity began in Africa, Europe was very effective in dehumanizing us in different ways, using its culture, its scientific knowledge, its religion, and, above all, the notion of race to distinguish the supposedly primitive being from the European human being. This logic continues to be reproduced by Western society, including Brazilian society, from the perspective of—I don't like to use the term invisibility—the dehumanization of the African-originated Black Brazilian people.

Even today, Brazil is very afraid to recognize the descendants of Africans as the true architects of this nation. And yet, it was the Black people who built the Brazilian economy, contributing their experience, relationship with others, construction techniques, as well as their religious, cultural, artistic, and political syncretisms. Fully recognizing the contributions of all the peoples who participated in this construction remains a significant challenge for Brazil. The politics of whitening or racial democracy arises from this perspective. Soon after the false abolition, the Brazilian state enacted laws such as the Vagrancy Law, according to which if two or three black individuals were found together in a public square, they could be arrested because they would be considered vagrants. Pay attention to this contradiction! Black people were enslaved for over three hundred years—and I return to this timeline because it is emblematic today for understanding what those three hundred years of slavery meant and still mean—but after abolition, freed people found in public spaces without engaging in any activity were considered vagrants by the state, the police, and the justice system.

It is crucial to understand how these nuances of the Brazilian state permeate its actions over time, right up to the present day. This state's desire to exterminate us was not extinguished by what official historiography describes as a noble gesture by Princess Isabel; quite the contrary. With this gesture, the state legitimized the building of policies of repression, erasure, and violence against our people. Over time, they have received peculiar, subtle, and cynical names such as whitening policy, racial democracy, cordial racism, among various other terms. We have been accustomed to hearing and reproducing them almost unconsciously, given the effectiveness of the social engineering that was built to subjugate us and designate us as inferior beings, without culture and without knowledge, therefore without the prospect of truly becoming citizens of this country.

MT: You mentioned cultural and artistic expressions and syncretism, which also encompasses religious expressions. During the period of slavery, there was an explicit reason to maintain these traditions, but after abolition, they merged with the need for Black people to integrate into society. Didn't the beginning of the 20th century also signify, in some way, a fading of African memories due to the desire to integrate, largely catalyzed by the very Black social movements that emerged, including the Brazilian Black Front³, and which had integration almost as a motto?

CL: Following abolition, the Black population sought to organize themselves in specific enclaves on the outskirts of cities, after leaving the farms and the condition of slavery. This process occurred throughout the country and the Americas. Initially, there was a denial attitude. According to the memories that my grandmother and my parents shared with me, Black people did not like to be identified as black, because the label "Black" was connected to all that past of violence, of slavery, of that non-being. Note that there was an attitude of racial denial among the freed blacks themselves, accentuated by the repressive state policy that classified as vagrants those who could not find work. Many black individuals would have preferred to return to the farms, even without financial reward, because they had no prospects, nowhere else to go. Even in the cities, they agreed to work under the same conditions imposed on them in the *Casa Grande*⁴. So I would say that, after the false liberation of May 13, 1888, the Brazilian state became the new *Casa Grande*.

³ On the Brazilian Black Front: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_Black_Front.

⁴ *Casa Grande* (literally the Big House) is the traditional Portuguese term for the plantation owner's house.

When the Brazilian Black Front began to expand and debate an emancipatory project demanding rights, the place of Black people in society, and the commitment of the Brazilian state to guarantee land and work for this population, what was the state's response? The repression and the extinction of any national social movement that had as its agenda the inclusion of this new "newly freed" being, who, until then, did not have – never had and to this day does not have – the prospect of an effective project of social integration. As the state realized that the Brazilian Black Front possessed such strength that it could become a political party and gather people to build a project in which Black people would have a voice to debate their future as beings endowed with rights, what was the Brazilian state's response other than to suffocate us? It was about eradicating any perspective that emerged in Brazilian society regarding the truly democratic construction of the inclusion of these people. All our political and ideological will was stifled by the state, not because we became complacent or lacked the competence to transform society or build a new project for the Brazilian nation. We only need to revisit the work of our Black sociologists to see the enormous contribution of the Black liberation movement in Brazil. People have no idea of the scale of our struggle, of the countless libertarian organizations of Black people that emerged throughout the country, nor that they were all stifled.

Conceiving this new project for the Brazilian nation remains the fundamental challenge. And the Black social movement came with force to reclaim, rebuild, rethink, and recover memory, like all libertarian social movements after May 13, 1888. It brought this legacy, but, over time, it transformed itself, until it came to say to the Brazilian state: "Look, this struggle is not just ours. If we are in this situation, if we have to be here demanding, fighting to build a new process of liberation for Black people, the blame lies with you." And then the state began to integrate this agenda, previously exclusive to social movements. But it enters the debate by crushing and dissolving the Brazilian Black Front during Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship⁵ in the 1930s.

These were the issues that the political and social movements after liberation began to debate. Not only the Black Front, but also various organizations, both religious and Black clubs in the interior of the country, became, so to speak, the new slave quarters. These organizations, these social movements that then erupted in Brazil and America, became centers of resistance and effective libertarian construction for Black people. They strategically and syncretically brought people together as a means of survival and as a political strategy to build a project for integrating this "newly freed" black person into society. In this strategy of constructing new slave quarters, the clubs established communication mechanisms to unite the Black community in creating spaces to organize the newly freed population.

We didn't have access to formal education, nor did we have a place in the new economy emerging with the arrival of immigrants. It therefore became necessary to develop cultural and educational training strategies to organize the community and bring the debate about what it meant to be Black in that post-abolition society into the heart of the clubs. We had no other option but to organize ourselves and stick together. Because this is one of the fundamental traditions of African culture: we like to be together. This is one of the fundamental pillars of our culture. It is a collective process in which everyone shares, listens to elders' experiences, and transmits them through our oral tradition – which was also, for a long time, a somewhat controversial issue in academia. Depending on the historical moment in which this Black person is situated, this being together also becomes a revolutionary process, articulated with other varied forms of organization, whether with literate people, such as Luiz Gama⁶, or with illiterate people, who equally participated in the numerous revolts that occurred in Brazil.

MT: The transformation of the Brazilian Black Front into a political party demonstrated the understanding, on the part of the Black population and its leaders, that it was necessary to structure a democratic, multilateral national dialogue aimed at the collective construction of a new societal project. The Vargas government refused dialogue, not only with the Front, but with all political parties, initiating a period of repression that would intensify after the Second World War, especially during the military dictatorship, starting in 1964. The military widely used the misleading slogan that Brazil was a racial democracy to demobilize protest movements of Afro-descendants and indigenous people and

⁵ On Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vargas_era.

⁶ On Luiz Gama: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luís_Gama.

authorize even more violent and repressive actions. Nevertheless, it was in this extremely unfavorable scenario that groups such as Palmares and the Unified Black Movement⁷ emerged.

CL: After the Estado Novo regime⁸ dissolved the Brazilian Black Front, the organized Black movement remained dormant for forty years. Its re-establishment only occurred with the creation of the Unified Black Movement (MNU⁹) in 1978, to resume a project of struggle and clearly state to Brazilian society that the fight against racism and exclusion was not and is not solely the domain of the Black movement. It rises against the white ideology engendered during slavery, which has been reproduced and shaped according to the interests of national, state, and municipal political compositions. This struggle is ongoing, not only for the formerly enslaved but for all segments of society that were not included in the republican project established in 1889. The MNU brought forth a discourse on the ethical and moral commitment of the Brazilian state to reintegrate this population that built Brazil and received neither reparations nor recognition for its contribution. This exclusionary project is still underway. We, black people, do not feel free from the shackles of this ideology.

The political act organized by the Unified Black Movement in 1978 on the steps of the Municipal Theater of São Paulo, denouncing the murder of the young black man Robson Silveira da Luz, was a historical landmark that inaugurated a new political moment and struggle for the black movement in Brazil. The MNU recovered the legacy of the Brazilian Black Front and several other black leaders who were silenced during the period of slavery, raising its voice and saying: "Whoever killed this young man is the same one who killed us three hundred years ago, when we were torn from Africa and brought here." The MNU thus became a more radical political movement, spreading throughout the country and reaching entities within the Black movement that had a more artistic and cultural perspective as a strategy of resistance to various forms of oppression and violence. These entities then shifted from a focus on the micro-scale of their cities to a broader, but also more careful, view of the state.

By identifying the hidden political agenda of artistic and cultural movements, the white elite—with its particularities in each city—began to co-opt the leaders of Black clubs and associations, seeking to remove from the clubs the young people who held more radical ideological positions, inspired by the libertarian and anti-colonial movements that were taking place in countries like South Africa and Haiti. Encouraged by the strength of the Unified Black Movement, social movements in the interior of the state of São Paulo began to draw inspiration from this new scenario, becoming politically and ideologically literate, redefining their profile, now openly political, and defending a discourse that would penetrate political parties situated, let's say, more to the left. This process motivated the creation of centers of thought and political debate that converged with the libertarian perspective of Brazilian Black people.

The Black movement then incorporated the discourse disseminated at the time by American civil rights movements, which echoed the agendas of the libertarian movements of Agostinho Neto in Angola and Samora Machel in Mozambique, acting fundamentally as a political movement. This shift created difficulties in dialogue with the traditional leadership of black student unions and clubs in the interior of São Paulo, further delaying the process of reintegrating the movement into political-party organizations. Before that, forty years had passed between the destruction of the Brazilian Black Front in 1938 and the creation of the Unified Black Movement in 1978. Here in São Carlos, only now, almost fifty years after the founding of the MNU, have we elected our first black female councilor. We no longer have that historical time. We can no longer wait forty or fifty years. We must have this real and effective abolition right now. The issues are numerous. The situation of black people has changed little since we arrived in America. We need to radicalize our political agendas to address the challenges we will face, for example, in municipal, state, and federal elections.

The greatest challenge in the current moment of Brazilian politics and the Black movement lies in managing to build a unified agenda. I feel there is a certain conformism among the black population. It is as if everything is fine, everything is in order, because the racial agenda is publicly addressed. On television, you see many black people not only in the roles of domestic

⁷ On the Unified Black Movement: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimento_Negro_Unificado.

⁸ On the Estado Novo: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estado_Novo_\(Brazil\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estado_Novo_(Brazil)).

⁹ MNU is the Portuguese acronym for Movimento Negro Unificado, or the Unified Black Movement.

workers or security guards; Our education-related agendas are being implemented; The official historiography of Black people in the world is being revised; Apartheid ended in South Africa, and a black president was elected in that racist society. All of this is due to the struggle of Black movements in Brazil and worldwide.

But racism remains among us. I know that education is fundamental to reversing it, but its implementation is very slow and timid. This new Black movement needs to radicalize and engage in confrontation within political party organizations. Black intellectuals must take this deconstruction to the extreme and decolonize the Eurocentric thinking embedded in academia, which reproduces the non-humanity and non-scientific capacity of the Black subject. By occupying these spaces, Black people must make this commitment, understanding that this struggle is an ongoing process that began with the arrival of the first slave ship in America. It is up to them now to assume the historical legacy of so many Black men and women who revolted, and of the many organizations and rebellions that took place. We need to organize new rebellions, not only in the slave quarters, but also in the *Casa Grande*, in academia, in parliament, and in every possible space. And the only possibility of transformation towards radicalism is through education. I believe in the revolutionary process through education, but with radicalism, because without it, we will never achieve true liberation.

I see that Brazil is heading towards a serious crossroads. What social movements and our ancestors bequeathed to us—their struggles and achievements—the contemporary Black movement has, in some way, managed to honor. The problem is what lies ahead. The challenges are profound, as are the mechanisms of exclusion. Education, by itself, will not solve them. I agree that it is necessary to invest in it, but there is a continuous process of exclusion that also involves knowledge. New technologies amplify barriers, and their effects reach not only the Black population but also all those who do not have access to quality education and the required technological literacy. We are facing doors that lead to a new generation of exclusion, a new version of this false abolition. We cannot delude ourselves: simply getting to university and earning a degree does not mean liberation. We may be entering another cycle of exclusion, in which the Brazilian state will continue to mock us. "You wanted education? Here's the education. There is no more racism. Public policies were created according to your demands." But the policy of extermination persists. It manifests itself in police violence, but also in the violence of knowledge and barriers to entry into the job market. The notion of racial democracy, always convenient for whites, continues to operate. Black people in universities—and our white allies—must commit to challenging this structure. The leadership of universities and their departments needs to be questioned. This space remains white, and reversing this situation requires radical action and firm discourse, with the production of meaning and the occupation of spaces.

MT: Entering the sphere of the ordinary citizen and organized society, what is needed for a large-scale national and multilateral dialogue to take place? The primary condition is that everyone is aware of the injustices of this historical process and the scars it has left, including on indigenous peoples, who were also brutally exterminated and continue to be victims of all kinds of violence. An important step was taken with the approval of laws 10.639 in 2003 and 11.645 in 2008. They made the study of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture mandatory in all public and private schools in Brazil, from elementary to high school, aiming to promote anti-racist awareness among future citizens and value the ethnic-racial formation of the country. Of course, this is far from being enough to overcome the many layers of false truths that have been ingrained in the non-Black and non-Indigenous population over centuries. My question is about how we can build this multifaceted understanding. How can we, as the Brazilian people, begin a process of listening to and valuing one another to erect a racially and socially just country together?

CL: I understand that this concern no longer falls solely on us, descendants of enslaved people. The main challenge for Brazilian society today is to face the truth and make it the axis of an effective process of building citizenship. I raise this point because, as a descendant of enslaved people, I carry a name—Casimiro Paschoal da Silva—that my parents gave me, but I still don't know which country I come from. The descendants of the other peoples who helped build this country know the citizenship of their ancestors: Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards, among others, were recognized as human beings since they arrived in Brazil. We only had our human condition recognized after abolition. Generically considering all enslaved people as Africans means encouraging the rest of society to keep associating our skin color with the African continent, as if it were homogeneous, when it is actually made up of fifty-four countries. We don't know which African country we came from, and this gap in our origin produces constant anguish.

The historiography of slavery in Brazil places Angola among the countries from which the most enslaved people were brought here. On my own initiative, I decided that, upon completing my cycle on this small planet called Earth and on this tiny grain of sand called São Carlos, I would like to reintegrate myself as a citizen linked to an African country. I went to Angola, visited a local village, was baptized there, and received the name Lumbandanga. Today, by signing my name Casimiro Paschoal Lumbandanga da Silva, I express not only the country that recognizes me as a descendant of Africans because of my skin color, but also a link I did not have before: that of my blackness connected to a concrete territory. Today, I am a citizen, someone whose origin is not limited to skin color. The greatest difficulty in establishing this dialogue with the other ethnic groups that built this country is, first and foremost, that of reconsidering the place of origin denied to Black people. If I hadn't received the name Lumbandanga, I would still be called simply Casimiro Paschoal da Silva, like so many other Brazilian Black people who bear names like Silva and Oliveira, which remain traces of the slave-owning heritage.

Therefore, building full citizenship, which is the basis of all dialogue, requires recovering the historical truth about the cruelty of slavery, about the false abolition, and about how the Brazilian state failed to lead a process of transforming the condition of the freed slaves, to cease to consider them as things or machines, and turn them into citizens. Citizenship is not just about fighting for land, but about achieving human dignity. It involves knowing where we come from and what country we represent. Brazilians of other ethnic descent apply for Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish citizenship, but I can't even apply for my African citizenship because I don't know which country I come from. We, descendants of slaves, descendants of Africans, have a very long historical path to cross. Perhaps future generations—my grandson or my great-grandson—will be able to gain a more civic perspective on the meaning of being Black in Brazil and in the world, thanks to the fruits of this intense struggle we are waging.

In Latin America and Brazil, the failure to recognize African citizens and their descendants generates profound contradictions. As a result, social movements, especially political ones, are developing specific agendas related to gender, race, and culture. These issues are brought into political parties, but are not considered in the formulation of a national project that articulates poverty, violence, racism, and gender identity as central elements of the country's development. I speak from experience, having participated in the drafting of many of these agendas within a left-wing party. What I perceive is the subordination of these issues, confined to internal sectors of the parties, almost like ghettos. By isolating these agendas, responsibility is transferred to groups considered minorities—Black people, the LGBT movement, Indigenous people—and the absence of a structural commitment is normalized.

There are also many talented Black Brazilian artists, yet few of them address the issue of racism. There is an evident discomfort in addressing this topic. What happens in Africa is different, where socio-political issues are clearly expressed in music, cuisine, clothing, and territorial struggles. Here, only a few artists and athletes speak openly about poverty, violence, and racism. Many others seem to avoid these topics when they reach prominent positions, fearing it will damage their careers. That's why I see hip-hop and rap as a particularly vigorous movement. Through their music, they denounce the exclusion experienced by Black people since abolition, a condition always marginalized by capitalism and forgotten by the state. This absence is also noticeable in political parties, which often appropriate agendas discursively but abandon them once they come to power. Discourses on racial democracy, cordial racism, or structural racism become traps, reproduced by academia and politics.

It is also necessary to revisit the contribution of African thinkers in all areas: Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Medicine, and the sciences. We must not forget that civilization was born in Africa. Mathematics, the pyramids of Cheops, all of that was built by African hands. But European civilization was highly efficient at erasing, stealing, and appropriating this knowledge to assert a planetary hegemonic project, according to which it was white people who built the civilizing process in the world.

As long as this truth is not taught to new generations, from childhood to university, we will continue to privilege European knowledge as synonymous with beauty, wealth, and humanity, and relegate non-white peoples to the status of non-human. The journey is long, and we will only face this challenge when we can forge a broad pact—in academia and in society—that admits this history. We will not make progress as long as popular artists — from samba to maracatu, carnival, and all artistic expressions — fail to speak out about this place of violence, oppression, and racism in which Black people live in Brazil to this day.

MT: Casimiro, we ask this last question to all our guests interviewed by the VIRUS Committee: does the future seem promising to you?

CL: You know, what strengthens me is realizing that I am closing a cycle in my life and that I have managed to establish myself as a descendant of Africans. As I mentioned before, I went to a village in Angola and received the name Lumbandanga. Back from there, I wrote twelve poems, and an extreme, inexplicable emotion accompanied each one. I cried while writing, as if accessing something very ancient. In one of them, I concluded that "now, I can die peacefully" because I was in Africa and had established myself as an African citizen in the world. When I arrived in Luanda, I experienced an unexpected sentiment, like a return to childhood: I looked around and saw only black people. This sense of belonging brought me both joy and tears. But it also brought contrast: I had left a country still consolidating its democracy and found another, riddled with profound adversity. There, I encountered the revolutionary process in the construction of socialism, the internal disputes, the violence, and how far they are from the prospect of a country with a high quality of life, with access to housing and infrastructure. They expelled those who were effectively their enemies, but then experienced another internal revolutionary process, with black people killing black people in the struggle for a project that could instead benefit Namibia, South Africa, or the United States.

What encourages me in envisioning a promising future is that, in the 1970s, when we started the Black movement here, the challenge was much greater. It was only possible to raise a few issues; there were few meeting spaces, and it was tough to address the concerns of the Black movement. Today, fifty years later, we have political representation at the municipal, state, and federal levels, in a growing process that is irreversible. We have moved beyond isolated struggles and are now engaging in dialogue with the whole of society. There is no turning back. The achievements accumulated over these fifty years will not be reversed. When I see young people like Flávio, from UNegro, occupying parliaments and voicing issues we have been denouncing since the 1930s, I see commitment, energy, and historical fidelity. I see our non-Black allies who also carry this banner, knowing the distance we still have to cross and demonstrating loyalty and commitment. This political awareness is what gives me hope.

That's why I say I can now die peacefully. I got to know Africa, reclaimed my identity, and re-established my connection with an African country. I know my body will be buried here, but my soul will return to that continent, along with the others that were torn from there. Many of them rest in the sea, others in São Carlos, in places we don't even know. But they all await this reunion—and I will go to meet them.