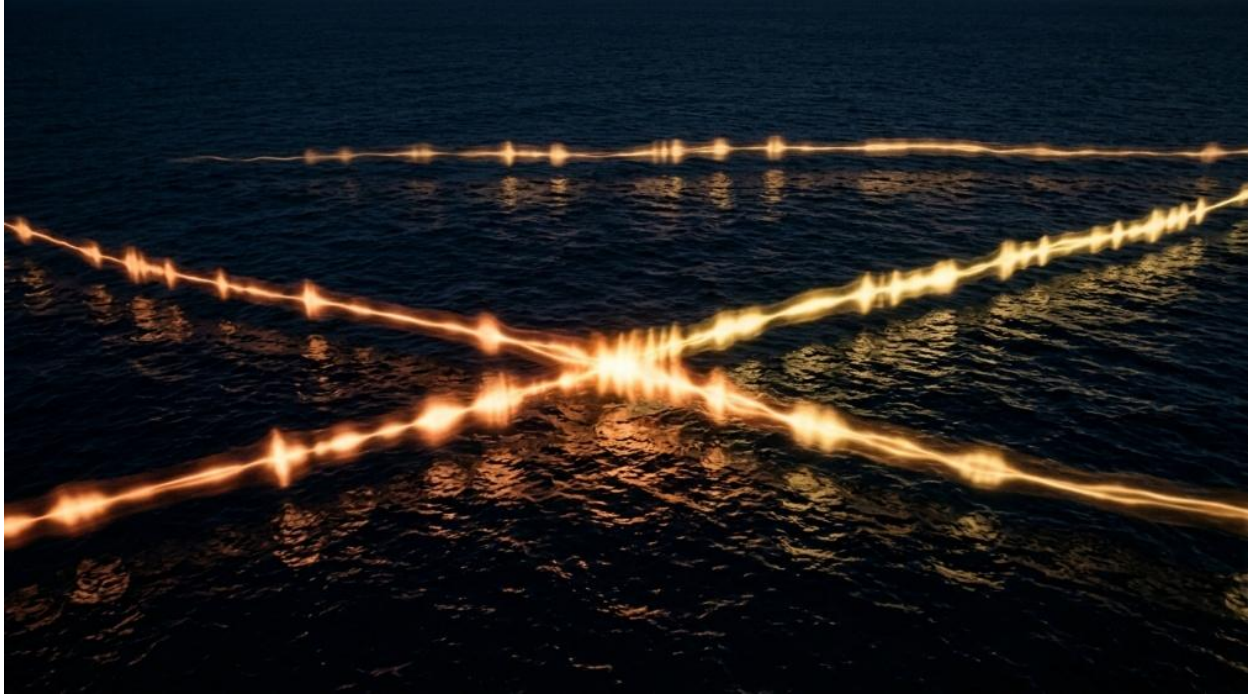


When the Struggle Rhymes: Solidarity Across the Atlantic World



The First Echo

In October 1968, on a podium in Mexico City, Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists. The Black Power salute - delivered on the world's stage, at the Olympic Games, before cameras that broadcast the image to every shore the diaspora touched - was not a single moment. It was an echo. Smith and Carlos stood on a podium, but they stood on the shoulders of movements that stretched across the Atlantic world: the Civil Rights Movement that had shaken the American South, the Black Power movement that was rising in cities across the United States, the anti-apartheid struggle that was intensifying in South Africa, the Movimento Negro that was organizing in Brazil, the Black Power movement that was emerging in Britain.

When Smith and Carlos raised their fists, the fist was recognized in Kingston and in Salvador and in London and in Soweto - not because the gesture had been transmitted through a coordinated campaign but because the family recognized its own. The fist said: we are fighting. And the family on every shore heard: we are fighting too. The echo was not planned. It was remembered.

This essay follows that echo. It traces the rhyme across the Atlantic world - from the Haitian Revolution to the Pan-African Congresses, from the Civil Rights Movement to the anti-apartheid struggle, from the Movimento Negro to Black Lives Matter - and it argues that the family's

movements for freedom are themselves a form of kinship. When a community fights for dignity on one shore, it is fighting for the dignity of the whole family. And when it recognizes the echo in another shore's struggle, it is recognizing a sibling.

The Rhyme Across the Water

The movements for dignity and justice across the Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin, Black British, and wider Atlantic worlds echo one another - not because they were coordinated, though some were, but because they grew from the same ground. The ground is the family. The ground is the shared experience of being carried across the water, of being un-named by the ledger, of being taught to forget - and of refusing the lesson. Every shore that received the family also received the family's refusal. And the refusal, in each soil, took a form that rhymed with the others.

C.L.R. James, in *The Black Jacobins* (1938), demonstrates that the Haitian Revolution was not an isolated event but an eruption of the same contradictions that produced the French and American Revolutions. Toussaint Louverture's army of formerly enslaved people was fighting for the same liberty that Paris declared - only more honestly, because they were fighting for their own. The Haitian Revolution was not a footnote to the Age of Revolution. It was the Age of Revolution's most rigorous test, the moment when the universal language of liberty was confronted by the people it was designed to exclude - and the people won. James shows that the struggle for Black freedom is not peripheral to modernity. It is central to it. Haiti's revolution was the first time the enslaved seized the language of the Enlightenment and forced it to mean what it said, and the echo of that seizure traveled across the Atlantic to every shore where the family fought for freedom afterward.

The Pan-African movement, from Henry Sylvester Williams's 1900 Pan-African Conference in London through W.E.B. Du Bois's Pan-African Congresses to the independence movements of the mid-twentieth century, was an explicit attempt to recognize the family across the water. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and throughout his career, argued that the color line was global - that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the relation between darker and lighter races, and that the relation spanned the Atlantic. Du Bois did not see Black struggle as a national phenomenon. He saw it as a world-historical force - one family's fight for recognition, carried on every shore the ocean touched, requiring worldwide solidarity to meet a worldwide oppression. The Pan-African Congresses were the institutional form of this recognition: the family gathering, across borders and languages, to name itself as one body and to strategize as one body. The conferences were imperfect, limited by class, gender, and geography. But they were the first sustained attempt to build political solidarity among scattered communities based on shared origin and shared interest - to make the family's kinship operative in the political sphere.

The echo continues into the present. The Movimento Negro in Brazil fights against racial democracy's erasure of anti-Black violence - the fiction that Brazil is a harmonious multiracial

society where racism does not exist, a fiction that serves the same function as every colonial narrative: to deny the family's suffering and to prevent the family from recognizing its own oppression as shared. The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States resonated with anti-racist movements in Britain, France, Brazil, and across the diaspora - not as imitation but as recognition. When a community in São Paulo says "Vidas Negras Importam" and a community in London says, "Black Lives Matter," they are not copying each other. They are echoing. They are recognizing. They are saying, in different languages, on different soils, in different colonial grammars, the same thing: our lives matter, and the refusal to honor them is the same refusal on every shore.

Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), provides the framework for understanding why the echo exists and what it means. Fanon, writing from Algeria but thinking across the Black Atlantic, understood that the colonized subject's liberation is not an individual or national achievement but a shared struggle. The liberation of one community is connected to the liberation of all - not because the communities are identical but because the system that oppresses them is interconnected. The colonialism that took the family from West Africa was one system. The racism that the family fights on every shore is one system. And the liberation that the family pursues on every shore is one liberation, fought on many fronts, in many languages, with many strategies, built on the same horizon: the restoration of dignity to a people who were taught they had none.

The echo is not coincidence. It is kinship made audible. When the family fights, it fights the same fight - not because the fight is the same in every soil but because the family is the same in every soil, and the family's refusal to accept its own degradation is a refusal that crosses water.

What They Gain When They Recognize the Echo

What the movements gain when they recognize the echo is not merely solidarity. It is strategy.

When a movement in one shore learns from a movement in another - when the Civil Rights Movement's tactical nonviolence informs the anti-apartheid struggle, when the Black Power movement's community programs inform the Movimento Negro's organizing, when Haitian revolutionary history informs Pan-African thought, when the Brazilian Black movement's concept of *ação afirmativa* informs the global debate on affirmative action - the family is sharing knowledge across the water. The ocean that scattered the family also gave them different vantage points, different experiences, different lessons. Each shore learned something the others did not, because each shore faced a different form of the same system. When they share those lessons, the whole family grows stronger.

Consider the specific exchanges. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit to Ghana in 1957, for the country's independence celebration, shaped his understanding of the Black struggle as global. The anti-apartheid movement's international solidarity campaign, which built boycotts and divestment movements across Europe and North America, was sustained by Black communities

who recognized the struggle as their own. The Black Panther Party's community programs - free breakfast, free clinics, community policing - were studied and adapted by Black organizations in Britain and Brazil. The Movimento Negro's organizing in Brazil drew from African American civil rights strategy while developing its own analysis of racial democracy's specific forms of erasure. Each exchange was reciprocal. Each shore gave and received. The knowledge flowed in both directions - not because anyone designed it that way, but because the family's shared ground made the exchange natural. Kin share what they know.

Fanon's framework of liberation as shared and interconnected is essential here. Fanon argues that the colonized subject cannot achieve liberation in isolation - that the liberation of one community is bound to the liberation of all, because the system of colonization is itself interconnected. The family's movements gain strength by recognizing their shared struggle because the struggle is, in fact, shared. It is not a metaphor. The same system that enslaved the family in West Africa is the same system that colonized the Caribbean, the same system that segregated the American South, the same system that imposed racial democracy in Brazil, the same system that policed Black communities in London. The system is one system, and the fight against it is one fight, and the family that recognizes this - that sees its struggles as one struggle fought on many fronts - is the family that can coordinate, share, and win.

Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), extends this argument into the cultural sphere. The political movements echo each other because the cultures that produce them are connected - the same Atlantic that carried the family also carried the family's ideas, its music, its strategies, its dreams of freedom. Gilroy's black Atlantic is not only a space of cultural connection. It is a space of political connection - the medium through which the family's movements learned from each other, inspired each other, and built solidarity across the water.

Link to Movement Five's wider argument: the coalition is not invented. It is remembered. The family that fought together did not discover, in the twentieth century, that it had common interests. It remembered that it had always had common interests - that the same ocean took the same family, that the same system oppressed the same family on every shore, and that the family's strength has always lain in its recognition of itself as one body. The Pan-African Congresses were not a new idea. They were an old recognition - the family remembering what the borders tried to make it forget.

Reciprocity and the Echo Made Mutual

Reciprocity names the shape this kinship must take. Reciprocity is the ethic of mutual obligation - the understanding that what is owed flows in both directions.

When one shore's movement inspires another, the inspiration must be reciprocal - not extractive, not one-directional. The Civil Rights Movement drew from Gandhian thought and from South African resistance and from Pan-African theory. The anti-apartheid movement drew from African independence movements and from African American organizing. The Black Power

movement in Britain drew from the American Black Power movement but adapted it to the specific conditions of British racism. The Movimento Negro in Brazil drew from African American civil rights strategy but developed its own analysis of racial democracy. The exchange was not one-way. It was mutual. That mutuality is reciprocity in action.

The distinction between extraction and reciprocity is essential. Extraction is what the colonial system did: it took from the family without giving back, it extracted labor and knowledge and life and gave nothing in return but the fiction of inferiority. Reciprocity is the opposite: it gives as it receives, it lends as it borrows, it acknowledges that the relationship between kin is not transactional but covenantal. The movement that extracts from another shore's struggle without giving back - without listening, without adapting, without honoring the specific soil that produced the strategy - is repeating the colonial pattern, not breaking it. The movement that receives and gives, that learns and teaches, that borrows and returns - that movement is practicing reciprocity. That movement is acting as kin.

A family reunited is not merely a comfort. It is a covenant. To recognize your kin across the water is to accept a debt of care - to answer their call as you would want yours answered, to lend your strength to their struggle and to receive theirs in return. The movements that recognized this - that built genuine reciprocal relationships rather than extracting from each other - were the movements that endured. The Pan-African movement, for all its limitations, lasted because it was built on reciprocal exchange. The anti-apartheid solidarity movement lasted because the relationship between South African resistance and global solidarity was reciprocal - each gave and received, each inspired and was inspired, each strengthened and was strengthened. The Black Lives Matter movement's global resonance was not extraction - it was recognition, the family hearing its own voice in another shore's cry and answering.

Ubuntu supports here with precision. A person is a person through other persons - and a movement is a movement through other movements. The strength of one shore's struggle is amplified by the recognition that it is not alone, that the same fight is being fought on other shores, that the family stands together even when the shores are apart. Ubuntu does not require that the movements be identical. It requires only that they recognize each other as kin - that the Civil Rights worker in Selma and the anti-apartheid activist in Soweto and the Movimento Negro organizer in São Paulo see each other not as foreigners fighting foreign battles but as siblings fighting the same battle in different rooms of the same house.

Why This Matters for Those Who Build

For organizers and community leaders: the echo is not a coincidence to be admired. It is a resource to be organized.

When movements recognize that they are echoing each other, they can coordinate, share tactics, lend credibility, and build coalitions that span the Atlantic. The family that fights together is stronger than the family that fights alone - and the family that knows it is fighting together is the

family that can win. The organizer who understands that the community in São Paulo and the community in Kingston and the community in London are fighting the same fight, on different soils, against different forms of the same system, is an organizer who can build a coalition that holds. Not a coalition of convenience, where groups ally because their interests temporarily align. A coalition of kinship, where groups ally because they are family, and family fights for each other.

The strategic insight is concrete. When movements share knowledge across the water, they multiply their strength. The tactic that worked in one shore can be adapted to another - not copied, because the soils differ, but translated, because the ground is shared. The narrative that succeeded in one context can be reframed for another. The lesson that was learned the hard way in one movement does not need to be learned the hard way in another - if the movements are talking to each other, if the family is sharing what it knows. The family that recognizes its own echo is the family that can learn from itself, teach itself, and build a collective intelligence that no single shore could develop alone.

We must hold this without flattening. The Civil Rights Movement is not the Movimento Negro is not the Black British struggle is not the anti-apartheid movement. Each movement grew from its own soil, fought its own colonial grammar, faced its own specific structures of oppression. The Civil Rights Movement confronted Jim Crow segregation in the context of a constitutional democracy that claimed to guarantee equality. The Movimento Negro confronted racial democracy - the fiction that racism did not exist in Brazil - in a context where the state denied the very category of race. The Black British movement confronted policing housing discrimination in a context where “race” was coded as immigration and the family was told it did not belong. The anti-apartheid movement confronted a legal system that classified people by race and assigned them to homelands, in a context where segregation was not de facto but de jure. To trace the echo without erasing the distinct struggle - that is the discipline. Each carries its own weather, its own accent, its own soil. Difference and kinship rest together in the same open hand.

From the Echo to the Language

Return now to the echo - to the raised fist in Mexico City, to the Pan-African Congresses in London and Manchester, to the “Vidas Negras Importam” of São Paulo and the “Black Lives Matter” of London, to every moment when one shore’s struggle rang out and another shore recognized the sound.

The echo is real. The family’s movements rhyme because the family is one family, and the fight for dignity is one fight, and the refusal to accept degradation is one refusal, carried on every shore the ocean touched. But the echo suggests something deeper than strategy. If the movements rhyme, the reason must lie deeper than shared tactics or shared interests. The echo suggests a shared language - a grammar of kinship beneath the local accents, a common way of gathering, grieving, celebrating, and caring that the family carried across the water and rebuilt in every soil.

The movements echo because the family that produces them speaks the same language, even when the words are different.

The next essay follows that language. It traces the shared gestures, foodways, sayings, and forms of gathering that reveal a common family grammar beneath many shores - the grandmother in Salvador who stirs her pot the way the grandmother in Kingston stirs hers, the community that gathers in a circle in Brazil and in Jamaica and in Nigeria, the call-and-response that structures a sermon in Alabama and a ceremony in Havana and a song in Bahia. The grammar is the proof beneath the echo. The movements rhyme because the family speaks the same language. And the language is older than any border that tried to silence it.

The cloth is still being woven, and your thread is already among the many.

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