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Intro to Black Feminisms
Final project
December 12th, 2023

9raxis

9raxis features 9 photos, each varying in attire and theme. Each theme functions as an emblem of my Black feminist identity. Specifically, how Black feminist praxis (practice) is intrinsic to my lifestyle. 9raxis was inspired by my final project for the course, Intro to Black Feminisms, taught by Dr. Marcellite Failla. Dr. Failla strongly encouraged us to stray away from writing a paper. She instead wanted us to create a public-friendly project based on a unit that inspired us. At the time (and still now), I was interested in how I make my opposition to oppression actionable. Thus, after some time, I landed on the idea of 9raxis.

9raxis is a combination of the term ‘praxis’ and the number ‘9’. I chose the word praxis because of its intrinsic relationship to Black feminist thought. According to Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins, Black feminist thought does several things. First and foremost, Black feminism is an oppositional framework. In challenging oppression it creates an informational cycle between activism, Black feminist theory, and praxis. In understanding the intersection of oppression for marginalized identities (i.e. race and gender), Black feminists use shared experiences to empower collective standpoints, as well as exercise coalition building. In Black feminism ‘the personal is political’, and thus ALL oppressed people must be free.

Black lesbian feminist scholar Audre Lorde is well known for her call to exercising true Black feminist praxis via the reclamation of the erotic (creative power). Specifically in her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”, she calls attention to the importance of deconstructing hegemonic ideologies in order for this reclamation to happen. She urges one to truly make the personal political by looking inward to the source of our own creative power, unpolluted by White supremacist ideologies. Lorde says, “Possibility is neither forever nor instant” (1984). Thus, we must be comfortable with always being in process,

On this note I want to draw attention to the last photo, 9raxis: sweat glistens on my partially lit forehead. The rest of my head is nearly shrouded in darkness. My nose, mouth, eyelashes, and hair create an ambiguous shape. I like to call this last photo “Future” because of its dark ambiguity. Here, I use darkness not to necessarily insinuate impurity or fear. Instead, I embrace darkness as the space for infinite light and illumination. As I continue on my Black feminist journey, I’m ready for my praxis to expand, evolve, and/or completely change. This is why, with exception to the “Future”, the naming of my photos follow no particular order/value system. Rather, I encourage one to focus on their visual interpretations of each photo.

However, I do feel compelled to describe two photos. I highlight that their contexts may help illuminate themes in the others. In P2axis, my spine curved in a perfect arc as I swung my

flesh around me, amused and in awe by the shapes it made. My gold pleated pants adorned my long legs. My green net top rested on my body, leaving my arms bare. Feeling liberated, my flesh filled my kinesphere. I chose the colors gold, black, and green to represent the Jamaican flag. On the flag, green represents the vegetation of the island. Gold represents the wealth and warmth of the land. And black represents the people. I swing the black cloth around me letting it curl, wave, and fill with air to represent my liberated body, as well as the flesh of my ancestors. I like to think it also represents the fluidity of my gender, sexuality, and being.

In Pr5xis, my hair whirled, poked, and reached around my head as I walked across the space, bouncing and swinging my arms. “Stand up” by reggae artists Kabaka Pyramid and Nathalia blasted throughout the Schwartz studio. My heart ached as I internalized the meaning of each word. Like hip-hop, reggae represents conscious movers of a conscious movement. Over the years, reggae music has become intrinsically tied to rastafarians: members of an apolitical, social, and spiritual movement that originated in Jamaica. Rastafarianism, like Black feminism, vouches for the self-governing, actualization, and freedom of all oppressed people; including displaced Africans. I find it important to center this music, as the validity of its messages constantly ring true, regardless of the time period.

One may notice that 9raxis features themes of culture, gender, sexuality, and race amongst other things. I ask that you both acknowledge these themes and appreciate the dynamics, depth, and feeling of each photo to reach beyond them. Find new meanings and your own praxis.