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## South-to-South dialogues between Brazilian and Kenyan artists: decolonial and intersectional feminist perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyze experiences in which Brazilian and Kenyan artists (artists who are activists) used animation to challenge colonial hierarchies that devalue Global Southern knowledges, histories, and stories. We draw from ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and artists' experiences in two animation workshops: (a) Portrait of Marielle, produced with Kenyan artists in Nairobi; (b) Homage to Wangari Maathai, produced with Brazilian artists in Salvador. We ask: how can artist creative practices be used as tools for global movement building, contesting the colonial legacy of fragmented relationships between Global South peoples? We evoke decolonial and standpoint intersectional feminist perspectives to propose an understanding of activism that considers the specificities of Global South contexts, connecting it to two axes: (a) establishing dialogical spaces and (b) mobilizing memories and histories. Our understanding of South-to-South activist dialogues results from the ways in which notions of "pluriversality," "incompleteness" and "humility," which stem from Latin American and African scholarship are intertwined. When marginalized groups exchange "situated knowledges" and express themselves through activism from "intersectional standpoints" or "lugares de fala," this can have a binding nature, creating transformative connections between Global South peoples.

### Diálogos Sul-a-Sul entre artistas brasileiros e quenianos: perspectivas decoloniais e interseccionais

#### RESUMO

Neste artigo, analisamos experiências de artistas (artistas que são ativistas) brasileiros e quenianos que utilizaram a linguagem da animação para desafiar hierarquias coloniais que desvalorizam saberes, histórias pessoais e histórias do Sul Global. Nossa abordagem metodológica toma como base observações

### KEYWORDS

South-to south dialogues; activism; Global South; decolonial theory and practice; feminism

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Diálogos Sul-Sul; ativismo; Sul Global; teoria e prática decolonial; feminismo

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Diálogos Sur-Sur; activismo; Sur Global; teoría y práctica decolonial; feminismo

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etnográficas, entrevistas em profundidade e experiências de artistas em duas oficinas de animação: (a) Retrato de Marielle, produzido com artistas quenianos em Nairobi; (b) Homenagem a Wangari Maathai, produzida com artistas brasileiros em Salvador. Um de nossos principais questionamentos é: como práticas criativas artistas podem ser usadas como ferramentas para a construção de movimentos globais, contestando o legado colonial de relações fragmentadas entre os povos do Sul Global? Evocamos perspectivas feministas decoloniais e interseccionais para propor uma compreensão do ativismo que considere as especificidades dos contextos do Sul Global, conectando-o a dois eixos: (a) estabelecer espaços dialógicos e (b) mobilizar memórias e histórias. Nossa compreensão dos diálogos artistas Sul-Sul resulta de um entrelace entre as noções de “pluriversidade,” “incompletude” e “humildade,” provenientes de estudos latino-americanos e africanos. Quando grupos marginalizados trocam “saberes situados” e se expressam por meio do ativismo, a partir de “pontos de vista interseccionais” ou “lugares de fala,” isso pode ter um caráter vinculante, criando conexões transformadoras entre os povos do Sul Global.

## **Diálogos Sur-a-Sur entre artistas brasileños y kenianos: perspectivas decoloniales e interseccionales**

### **RESUMEN**

En este artículo analizamos experiencias en las que “artistas” (activistas-artistas) brasileñas y kenianas utilizaron la animación digital para desafiar las jerarquías coloniales que devalúan los conocimientos, las historias y los cuentos del Sur Global. Nos basamos en observaciones etnográficas, entrevistas profundas cualitativas y experiencias de “artistas” en dos talleres de animación: (a) Retrato de Marielle, producido con “artistas” de Kenia en Nairobi; (b) Homenaje a Wangari Maathai, producido con “artistas” brasileñas en Salvador. Nos preguntamos: ¿cómo se pueden utilizar las prácticas creativas “artistas” como herramientas para la construcción de un movimiento global, cuestionando el legado colonial de relaciones fragmentadas entre los pueblos del Sur Global? Presentamos perspectivas feministas interseccionales y decoloniales para proponer un entendimiento del “activismo” que considera las particularidades de los contextos del Sur Global, conectándolo a dos ejes: (a) establecer espacios dialógicos y (b) movilizar memorias e historias. Nuestra comprensión de los diálogos “artistas” de Sur a Sur emergen desde las nociones de “pluriversidad,” “incompletitud” y “humildad,” que nacen desde el conocimiento latinoamericano y africano que están entrelazados. Cuando los grupos marginados intercambian “conocimiento situado” y se expresan a través del “activismo” desde “puntos de vista interseccionales” o “lugares de fala,” crean vínculos y conexiones transformadoras entre los pueblos del Sur Global.

## **1. Introduction: plural Souths, dialogues, and activisms**

This article aims to establish South-to-South conceptual and empirical dialogues between Latin American and African theoretical and activist perspectives, focusing on Brazilian and

Kenyan initiatives. Our research offers a contribution to understanding how activist initiatives in one context learn and feed into those of another context, particularly in the Global South. We ask: how can activist (artistic + activist) creative practices be used as tools for global movement building, contesting the colonial legacy of fragmented relationships between Global South peoples? Our ideas and findings stem from the “eVoices Redressing Marginality” Project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC UK). The aim was to gather communication scholars and practitioners, media activists, “artists,” and members of civil society organizations to analyze uses of digital media to fight marginalization in the Global South. For this article, we focus on the exchanges between marginalized groups in Latin America, Brazil, and Africa, Kenya. Obviously, these are very distinct historical, social, and cultural contexts. However, cities such as Nairobi and Rio, where we conducted the research, share common traits. Both are marked by social inequalities and social conflict. Additionally, in both contexts, the media portrayals of the urban poor are characterized by binary oppositions: the “formal” versus the “informal” city, the “good citizen” versus the “criminal person.” These are then used to marginalize poverty and normalize daily killings. With this discourse, “those who are named as *bandidos* in Brazil or *thugs* in Kenya, can and should die” (Villalobos 2019).

Two acknowledgements need to be made here. First, the “Global South” does not constitute a simple geographic location. Rather, these plural “South(s)” feature as metaphors for oppression and human suffering under capitalism (Santos 2016; Mignolo 2008). In other words, we can find Global South(s) in Global North countries and vice-versa. Second, the term “Global South” is both problematic and helpful. It is problematic because it lumps together a number of distinct socio-cultural contexts, reinforcing the othering of “Non-Western”/“Non-Northern” others. At the same time, the term “Global South” can be strategic by connecting marginalized realities even if they are very different. It enables us to start important conversations about oppression so that those who are oppressed (Freire 1972) can get together and fight inequalities. Specifically, if we embrace decolonial perspectives, the term communicates the idea that former colonies, which were subjected to legacies of violence and injustice, can form alliances and support each other in a political solidarity project. Thus, the concept of “Global South” is intertwined with the concept of “dialogue” in a sense that both refer to a willingness to explore mutuality through conversation. As we will demonstrate in this article, ideally, with dialogue, the “I” of the private self-interests can be reconceptualized as a “we”s that can make common action and movement building for social change.

Embracing an ethnographic inspiration and drawing from in-depth interviews with activists in Brazil and Kenya, we focus on two dialogical animation workshops in Nairobi (August 2018) and in Salvador (December 2018) to honor two remarkable women: Marielle Franco and Wangari Maathai. Wangari Maathai led a life-long campaign for environmental health as an inalienable human right, which earned her international recognition. In 2004, she was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace. At the same time, Wangari’s environmental and political activism has also meant that she has been subject to considerable violence, suffering persecution from the Kenyan Government that included being arrested and beaten (Mulvaney 2011, 225).

Marielle Franco was a favela born human rights activist and the only black woman serving as a Rio de Janeiro city councilor at the time of her assassination, in March

2018, whilst heading home in her car after a gathering called “Black women moving structures.” As of the time of writing, her brutal murder remains unsolved. Marielle’s life illustrates what it means to be marginalized in Brazilian society in many intersectional levels. For this reason, Paula Callus, an animation researcher and practitioner, suggested that her story could establish a narrative thread to create an animated short piece, connecting the daily struggles of marginalized communities in Brazil and Kenya. She then invited Ng’endo Mukii, an award-winning filmmaker, to conduct a four-day animation workshop with young artists in Nairobi. Entitled “A Portrait of Marielle,” the workshop was held from 20 to 23 August 2018 at PAWA 254, an organization that serves as a hub for activists in Kenya. Later in 2018, Mukii was selected for an artistic residency in Salvador, Brazil. Funded by the Goethe Institut Bahia she conducted the workshop “Homage to Wangari Maathai” in Acervo da Laje, a museum in the periphery of Salvador, with a group of Brazilian artists, applying similar techniques. The two workshops resulted in two short films of 1’57” (Portrait of Marielle) and 1’21” (Homage to Wangari), which conveyed the dialogues that took place between Kenyans and Brazilians.

By dialogue, we refer to an exploration of mutuality, as we mentioned earlier, but also an exploration of inequalities through conversations in which various “lugares de fala” (Ribeiro 2017) are acknowledged. In this article, we argue that activism – or the combination of art and activism – acts as an enabler of these encounters, even if this entails overcoming significant cultural, historical, political, and social barriers. We find Duncombe and Lambert’s association of activism with “affect” useful here (2018, 63). Activism entails activities towards an outcome that usually depends on challenging power relations. In other words, activism can generate an “effect.” Unlike activism, art does not have a clear target. Art’s impact is hard to measure. It refers to a feeling, a perception, something that moves us but that we cannot quite describe. Thus, art generates “affect.” Effect and affect can be complementary in activism because affect leads to effect and effects have affective impact. Thus, the merging of the two – affect – can capture the essence of activism (Duncombe and Lambert 2018, 64). In this article, we incorporate decolonial (Moyo 2020; Quijano 2008; Santos 2016) and feminist perspectives (Crenshaw 1991; Harding 2004; Ribeiro 2017) to expand on this definition. When doing so, we propose an understanding of activism that considers the specificities of Global South contexts, connecting it to two axes: (a) establishing dialogical spaces and (b) mobilizing memories and histories. We also reveal the ways in which valuing situated knowledges (Haraway 2004; Harding 2004) at the margins can play a role in developing fairer social projects and models. When marginalized groups express themselves through activism from pluriversal standpoints and positions from which they speak (or lugares de fala, in Portuguese – Ribeiro 2017), this can have a binding nature, creating transformative connections between Global South peoples. Thus, the animation workshops illustrate how affirmations of personal stories in creative artifacts, such as the two animated films, can be used for South-to-South dialogical purposes.

## 2. Decolonial and feminist perspectives on the importance of South-to-South dialogues

Decolonial perspectives are helpful in revealing some of the consequences of the colonial power system, prompting us to challenge them. The first is that people become

dispossessed of their singular historical identities. The second is perhaps less obvious, but no less cruel. Being assigned inferior racial identities, Black people and people of color's "cultural production of humanity" is also denied. In sum, from a colonizer angle, there are inferior places and peoples in the world, and these places and peoples are only capable of producing inferior cultures (Quijano 2008; Santos 2016). The third implication is that the colonial identity becomes associated with a location in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was Europe (Blaut 1993; Lander 1997; Quijano 2008).

Mukii (2018) referred to this process as "taxidermy." Mukii (2018) described taxidermy as a process of "taking a living creature, removing its insides, stuffing and positioning it always in a new context, preserved forever in a pose." The practice of taxidermy, she added, "involves an act of deletion, of editing, for the sake of presenting indigenous species as icons in a foreign context" (Mukii 2018). In addition to being dehumanized and killed, the indigenous species are stuffed in a menacing pose, growling and frozen in their leaps to attack. This is meant to make the colonial hunter – as the one who is telling this taxidermic story – look courageous and distinguished. Similarly, the knowledges produced by colonized peoples, with their dangerous primitive nature, become frozen in the past so that they serve the function of being unfavorably compared to the brave new world of the colonizer.

This freezing of knowledges in the past represents a specific form of colonial genocide, namely intellectual genocide or "epistemicide." Boaventura de Sousa Santos defines "epistemicides" as the "unequal exchanges among cultures that have always implied the death of knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it." He adds that "in the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide" (2016, 92). Such destruction of knowledge involves the "destruction of the social practices and the disqualification of the social agents that operate according to such knowledges" (Santos 2016, 153). Therefore, colonized peoples are linked to a legacy of non-knowledge which erases their histories and stories. They are assigned a place in a past of non-humanity, a place that must be forgotten if one wishes to move on and reach a Euro-centric modernity.

Epistemicide creates the conditions for another colonial self-serving concept: universalism. Eurocentric ideas, norms, and values are deemed to have universal applicability. At the same time, colonial powers create top-down and mono-directional flows of knowledge from the North to the South. Consequently, Global South peoples across continents such as Africa and Latin America face two challenges: lack of historical knowledge about each other (Ki-Zerbo 2010) and the colonial tendency of propagating experiences that are described as universal but do not resonate with (plural) southern realities. As a reaction against this tendency, the concept of pluriversality becomes central to the work of decolonial authors. The pluriverse consists in seeing beyond Northern (and Western) claims to superiority. Importantly, a pluriversal approach to knowledge requires South-to-South dialogues to prevent Global South peoples from universalizing cultural values and demonizing each other. To cite Parekh, these dialogues can bring together "different historical experiences and cultural sensibilities and ensure that we appreciate human beings in all their richness" (2000, 128). Additionally, they enable our reasons to be held to "a cross-cultural test, requiring us to ensure that they are accessible and acceptable to members of very different cultures. The dialogue has the further advantages that it shows respect for

other cultures” (Parekh 2000). From the perspective of indigenous epistemologies such as *Sumak Kawsay* (in Quechua) or *Shiram Pujustin* (in Achuar) – which have been translated as “good living” – pluriversal forms of knowledge production are built around a deep respect for the plurality of conceptions without hierarchies. As argued by authors such as Gudynas (2011, 445) and Vila Viñas, Crespo, and Martens (2020, 103), *Sumak Kawsay* or *Shiram Pujustin* means more than the simple coexistence or juxtaposition of different living cultures. Rather, they propose an interactive dialogue and praxis.

One way to challenge the myth of universalism is by acknowledging the role of different loci of enunciation for productive dialogues. This idea is proposed by decolonial scholars (Mignolo 2008) and is also central to standpoint feminist perspectives. Standpoint feminism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory concerned with the relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding 2004, 1). The starting point is a recognition that women, like members of other oppressed groups, are rarely allowed to become the authors of knowledge in their local, national, and global social relations. The issue is not so much that women have not been allowed to “speak” in public. Indeed, individual women have often done so. However, such speeches could never answer women’s questions about nature and social relations. To cite Harding, “the implied ‘speaker’ of scientific (sociological, economic, philosophic, etc.) sentences was never women, it was supposed to be humanity in general” (2004, 4). Here, we have an example of what Haraway (2004) has referred to as the “God trick,” or the idea that there is an idealized agent who can speak authoritatively about everything from no particular location or human perspective at all (cited in Harding 2004, 4). Therefore, standpoint feminism exposes the “God trick” by demonstrating that research always speaks from historically specific social locations. Additionally, a radical contribution of standpoint feminism has been to propose that the social locations of women or other oppressed groups can be the source of illuminating knowledge claims not only about their own realities but also the rest of nature and social relations (Harding 2004, 4).

Here, linkages can be established between standpoint theory and intersectionality. The Black, LGBTQ+, disabled, and women of color feminists (Anzaldúa 2016; Collins 1986; Crenshaw 1991; hooks 2000) who developed or embraced intersectionality were always vocal about their unique social locations at the margins, contributing to making standpoint theory even more holistic. These writings focused on the interlocking relationships between class, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability, placing these dynamics within complex power structures (Crenshaw 1991). In this way, intersectional thinkers and activists shed light on how multiple layers of privilege and oppression interact and multiply with one another.

Black feminist thought, specifically, focuses on Black women as agents of knowledge who can generate a distinctive standpoint on existing sociological paradigms (Collins 1986). Echoing these ideas in Brazil, Ribeiro (2017) calls attention to Black women’s unique perspectives on what marginality means. She demonstrates the ways in which these perspectives can be used in the fight against racist, classist, and sexist domination. Ribeiro (2017) has proposed the expression “lugar de fala,” which has reached beyond academic circles in Brazil, having been adopted by groups of people interested in the power relations involved in discourse. “Lugar de fala” can be translated as “the position from which we speak” because it has been used to acknowledge the origin/locus of the enunciator.



The expression refers to the enunciator's identity in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class – among other elements – and how such identity elements inform and shape that person's experiences and worldviews. In this way, one can understand the subtleties and complexities entailed in experiencing racism and sexism, for instance, and how these experiences might vary from the perspective of a white male, a white female, or a Black man or a Black woman. Importantly, this is an attempt to make groups that have been historically privileged in society (such as upper-class white males) to reflect upon their own privileges. The idea is to ensure that marginalized groups in society have a place to speak out about their own experiences of marginalization.

However, ideas from standpoint feminism as well as the concept of “lugar de fala” have been interpreted in an overly literal manner in Brazil and elsewhere, limiting their socially transformative potential. According to this interpretation, people would not be allowed to speak about an issue unless they belong to that specific identity group. For example, a man should not speak about sexism, or a white person should say little about racism. Following this logic, people would then become isolated in identity bubbles because the expressions that stem from outside the authorized “lugar de fala” must be silenced. As a result, people from different identity groups are not able to empathize and join forces in the struggles against oppression.

In this article, we wish to argue that this acknowledgement of intersectional standpoints and “lugares de fala” does not have a divisive nature. As Ribeiro puts it, the aims are not to create hierarchies between worse or better forms of oppression. Rather, recognizing that knowledge is situated and can be helpful in breaking away from an unequal society and developing new social projects and models (2017, 9). Here, we wish to demonstrate how expressing ourselves from pluriversal “lugares de fala” can have a binding nature, prompting the exercise of seeing the world with empathic eyes. Importantly, such perspectives on “lugares de fala” are inherently dialogical. We will demonstrate the ways in which the affirmation of personal stories in creative artifacts, such as the two animated films, can be used for South-to-South dialogical purposes.

Before we turn to how activism was used as a tool for dialogue between Global South peoples, we rescue the “Freirean” (1972) meaning of dialogue. As Suzina and Tufte put it, “dialogue is Freire’s central mechanism of change” (2020, 414). For Freire, various stages make up a journey of dialogue. Humanization represents one of these stages and it is not just about repositioning the oppressed in a better condition. It is about redrawing the oppressed–oppressor relationship and addressing its power asymmetry (Suzina and Tufte 2020). Freire has also made important points on humility as a pathway in the journey of dialogue. Indeed, humility features as a specific requirement to recognize that people – any people – are knowledgeable. Humility also suggests that the authentic truth – or the authentic word, *a palavra*, in Freire’s terminology – does not reside with any individual or group, nor can it be forced upon one group by another (Suzina and Tufte 2020, 414).

Adopting a South-to-South dialogical approach, we establish linkages between scholars who focus on Latin America and Africa. Mano and Milton’s (2021) perspectives on Afrology of media and communication, and incompleteness are helpful here. The authors define Afrology as an epistemological approach that is “open and creative in its embrace of emerging ideas, concepts and connections as resources for new thinking”



(2021, 23). Afrokology also represents a move away from “the duality that results from colonialism” towards encounters and interactions between colonizer and colonized, but also between colonized and colonized, which result in “inextricable interconnections” (Mano and Milton’s 2021). In this way, “we can understand knowledge as entangled, rather than purely dichotomous” (Mano and Milton’s 2021). Moving it close to Nyamnjoh’s (2017) notion of incompleteness, Mano and Milton interpret Afrokology as a “heuristic tool” that engenders a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world” (2021, 35). Incompleteness refers to exploring ways of thinking in which “things, words, deeds and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences but because of their possibilities” (Nyamnjoh 2017, 256; cited in Mano and Milton 2021, 35). Thus, intellectual approaches should be always incomplete, Nyamnjoh (2017, 36) adds, because they are “constantly in need of activation, potency and enhancement through relationships with incomplete others” (cited in Mano and Milton 2021, 36).

In this article, we carry out conceptual and empirical dialogues between African and Latin American theoretical and activist perspectives. We start by demonstrating that the Freirean (1972) conceptualizations of dialogue and humility and the revitalization of Afrokology (Mano and Milton 2021) with its focus on incompleteness (Nyamnjoh 2017) enrich each other. First, embracing our incompleteness represents an act of humility. Second, humbly recognizing one’s incompleteness requires acknowledging the importance of connecting to the other’s knowledge through dialogue. This, in turn, cannot happen if hierarchies are created, positioning certain types of knowledge above others. It also implies adopting pluriversal modes of seeing the world, avoiding colonial dichotomies and instances when the oppressed becomes oppressor (Freire 1972). In this way, a humble incompleteness (as in a sense of being eager for more connection) depends on dedicating energy to foster, engage, and maintain dialogues. Thus, our understanding of South-to-South activist dialogues results from the ways in which notions of pluriversality, incompleteness, and humility are intertwined.

In what follows we demonstrate how activist experiences connected Brazilian and Kenyan artists by using animation to challenge colonial erasures and foster South-to-South dialogue and solidarity. We explain the rationale for the two animation workshops: (a) “Portrait of Marielle,” produced in August 2018 with Kenyan activists in Nairobi; and (b) Homage to Wangari Maathai, produced in December 2018 with Brazilian activists in Salvador to celebrate the legacy of the late politician, Nobel prize winner, and environmental activist.

### 3. The animation workshops and animated films

In this section, we analyze the animation workshops, drawing from an ethnographic inspiration (Medrado 2010; Medrado, Souza, and Paulla 2021). Here, ethnography refers to both the method and the product of researching and writing about personal lived experiences on the margins and their relationships to the cultural, social, and political (Ellis 2004). This involves turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self and at the same time keeping an outward gaze, examining the larger context wherein experiences take place (Boylorn and Orbe 2014). Our aim was twofold: (a) to engage multiple authors and perspectives, producing a collaborative account, which was made possible by the creation of an artistic output – the animated film; (b) to place ourselves as coauthors in the narratives, locating our own

loci of enunciation or lugares de fala (Ribeiro 2017) in the different contexts. During the workshop, the first step was for Medrado to share Marielle's story with the Kenyan participants. She did a presentation about Marielle's life, her upbringing in the favela, her struggles as a Black lesbian woman, her journey through the education system, obtaining her Master's degree in Public Administration, and her work as a human rights advocate and politician. In terms of data collection, audio diaries with her own and workshop participants' reflections were recorded by Medrado during her stay in Kenya, and later they were written as ethnographic fieldnotes. Medrado and Rega also conducted in-depth interviews with female activists in Kenya (Judy Lumumba and Nancy Chela) and with Ng'endo Mukii, drawing on their reflections about the experience. In Brazil, Paulla conducted similar interviews with the participants Marina Lima and Milena Anjos.

Additionally, we used production notes written by Paula Callus, who was responsible for the conception of the workshop dynamics. There were four main reasons for choosing animation as an artistic language:

- (1) Animation affords a range of different aesthetic devices, such as painting, drawing, collage, and photograph. It can use a range of physical materials and is able to combine these into a series of images to create the moving image.
- (2) Artists with no previous knowledge of animation (but practice in other media) deploy their artistic skills and combine them in a very short time to create animation.
- (3) The combination of these artistic practices means that you can introduce pictorial metaphors and symbols that go beyond "denoting" something – and connoting/second level meaning.
- (4) Animation in a workshop setup encourages collaborative practices. It prompts dialogue and relies upon coherent practice from one artist to the other to achieve a single goal.

(Paula Callus, Production Notes, 16/10/2018).

The workshops involved a staged process, using video source material that served two ends – an educational and an aesthetic purpose. The educational was to teach artists how to use their own practices to make animation. The aesthetic element explored a combination of video footage and other materials operated to locate the images within a documentary genre. It also grounded the workshop as it reminded the participants of the "realism" of the content (as opposed to fictional child-like connotations). In both films – "Portrait of Marielle"<sup>1</sup> and "Homage to Wangari Maathai"<sup>2</sup> – the juxtaposition of photographic images in succession reveals what Callus refers to as a "paradoxical condition through the persistence of vision: the reliance upon renditions of still images to make visible movement" (2015, 58). During the entire animation process, artists in Kenya and Brazil managed the shift between stillness and the appearance of the moving image as they constructed sequential assemblies of images.

The first stage of production included selecting various film and video footage of the two subjects, such as images from Marielle's election campaign and Wangari's Nobel Prize ceremony, news clips, protests in Brazil when Marielle was murdered and women working

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<sup>1</sup>YouTube Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPsqlwZ2\\_WY&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPsqlwZ2_WY&t=7s).

<sup>2</sup>Vimeo Link: <https://vimeo.com/321451971>.



**Figure 1.** Group of Kenyan artists working on images related to Marielle Franco's story.

the fields in Kenya. The film makers then captured and exported these clips as sequential frames. The initial selection was reduced to a few choice sequences, which were then printed out as a series of images on letter-sized (or A4) paper. The sequences were numbered to retain the order of frames. Artists were expected to intervene upon these images, using different materials in an iterative process. They were encouraged to consider how their own mark-making on the original image can play or relate to them and to the message. The workshop conveners asked artists to think of questions, such as: "How are you affecting the image?" and "What are the intrinsic connections between the materials and processes you are using, and the theme you are exploring in the images you make?" (Paula Callus, Production Notes, 16/10/2018) (Figures 1 and 2).

The next stage involved collecting and scanning the hundreds of images that had been created by the artists. The sequence of images was imported and converted to a movie file (mp4/mov) for editing. Here, it is important to return to the *transformative* quality of animation, which goes beyond technical aspects. The magic of animation lies precisely on how the still image transforms into a moving image.

For Portrait of Marielle, A-Zee Coptel created the soundtrack based on a Brazilian song called "É D'Oxum," by Gerônimo. The title is a reference to Oshun, the Yoruba Orisha who represents the deity of rivers and fresh waters, beauty, and love. Friends of Marielle said that she loved this song and there is a video of her dancing to it to celebrate her campaign victory. A-Zee adapted the song to a Kenyan beat and added lyrics in Sheng.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The urban language that combines Kiswahili, English, and native languages, such as Kikuyu and Luyha.



**Figure 2.** Artist Nancy Chela working on an image for the Portrait of Marielle animation.

The lyrics<sup>4</sup> describe a process in which the Kenyan artists connect to the Brazilians' grieving, but draw inspiration from Marielle's legacy to find hope and keep fighting. For *Homage to Wangari*, Suyá Nascimento composed the original score. It was based on a poem by Marina Lima (interviewed for this article). The lyrics emphasize the ancestral connections between Brazil and Kenya, Black women's strengths, and how shared memories shaped histories in both countries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>**Nina Majonzi moyoni, nina machozi machoni** (I am suffering; I have tears in my eyes)/ **Hii story ni sad yaani** (This story is so sad)/ **But same time ni, tamu yani** (But at the same time it's sweet)/ **Design nakumbusha nikukumbushe** (I am reminded to remind you)/ **Checki yaani, look within you** (You look, look inside yourself)/ **Juu utapata- unachotaka** (You will find what you are looking for)/ **Juu mawingu ilifunga na sai jua imechomoza design**/ The clouds are gone, the sun is out/ **Ina prove it's a new day** (To prove it's a new day)/ **Tuko far na sea** (We are far from the sea)/ **My eyes are red juu** (My eyes are red)/ **ya machozi nilimwaga jana** (Because of the tears I shed yesterday)/ **But nina hope** (But there's hope) **so I can still see** - Lyrics in Sheng with an English translation provided by the song's composer A'Zee Coptel.

<sup>5</sup>**Wagari, seus olhos continuam vivos** (Wangari, your eyes remain alive)/ **espumando pelo mar da Bahia** (sparkling over the Bahian sea)/ **O barco das memórias atravessou o oceano** (the boat of memories traversed the ocean)/ **e fez da sua história a nossa história** (and made your history our story)/ **Aprendemos a lidar com a terra** (we learned to care for the earth)/ **Seguramos as suas mãos Negras** (we hold your hands of a Black woman)/ **Plantamos árvores e tudo tornou-se verde** (we plant trees and everything turns green)/ **Quênia, ressoa o nome Wangari** (Kenya, resonate the name Wangari)/ **Gritem: revolução** (Scream: revolution) / **Mulher negra desde o ventre da sua mãe** (a Black woman from her mother's womb) / **Wagari, seus olhos continuam vivos espumando pelo mar da Bahia** (Wangari, your eyes remain alive sparkling over the Bahian sea)/ **É o andar de pés no chão que aprendi com meus ancestrais** (it is with the walk with feet planted on the ground that I learned from my ancestors) - Lyrics in Portuguese with an English translation. Poem written by Marina Lima.

The animation workshops were situated within the Latin American tradition of Participatory Action (PAR) approaches (Fals Borda 1987; Freire 1972). Here, three elements emerge as key:

- (a) The “vivências” or the actual lived experiences of the participants were communicated via storytelling but also on sensorial levels as artists experimented with textures when intervening upon the sheets of papers as well as with poetry and music.
- (b) An authentic commitment (Fals Borda 1987) to understanding the injustices of the world in order to transform them. In our case, Marielle Franco’s and Wangari Maathai’s stories featured as a narrative thread that could connect the oppressed realities of Brazilian and Kenyan activists, representing a solidarity project whose aim was to strengthen the fight for human rights and equality.
- (c) The rejection of asymmetries throughout the entire process. The dynamics were built around blurring the boundaries between “objects” and “subjects,” “narrators” and “protagonists of the story,” “artists and activists.” Additionally, the participants had no background in animation, meaning that they could all share their artistic knowledge and skills in somewhat horizontal ways, with no privileging of one art form over another.

Usually, with participatory methodological approaches, the actual output of the activities does not matter as much as the participatory processes. However, because we were working with artists, for them, the aesthetic qualities of the animation seemed to be just as important as the participation processes. This resulted in two beautiful – emotionally but also aesthetically – films.

#### 4. Activism as an enabler of South-to-South dialogues

Brazilian and Kenyan activists admitted to having no previous knowledge about each other’s contexts and called attention to how art represented a driving force in exposing them to each other’s realities. This lack of mutual knowledge confirms decolonial authors’ ideas on the disqualification of the legacies, knowledges, stories, and histories from the plural Global Souths (Santos 2016). During the Wangari workshop, Marina Lima, a 31-year-old Black woman from Plataforma, located in Salvador’s periphery, authored the poem that served as the basis for the film’s song. She used the poem to explain historical erasures:

I knew nothing about Wangari before the workshop. In the poem, I say that her eyes are alive, sparkling over the Bahian sea. This refers to our shared living histories. This is about ancestry. Ancestry can really move us. I also was not familiar with Ng’endo Mukii’s work. When the workshop was over, I cried so hard. It really made me shiver. Wangari was wonderful, Ng’endo is wonderful. These women are references to us. (Interview, Marina Lima, 14/05/2021)

Milena Anjos, another workshop participant, a 32-year-old Black woman who lives in the Federação neighbourhood in Salvador, echoes Marina’s points about their lack of knowledge of inspiring African women: “It’s so surreal how our histories, the histories of *our* people are not portrayed or circulated in the right places. It’s great that I got to



know about Wangari. It was a very beautiful process” (Interview, Milena Anjos, 12/05/2021). Producing a film to honor a remarkable Kenyan female figure made the Brazilian participants reflect on how other global south cultures and histories are deemed unworthy. The connections between Latin America and Africa, Brazil, and Kenya, are also articulated in terms of a collective – the histories of *our* people – as Milena puts it. These are the histories that are often untold or oversimplified (Quijano 2008).

The Kenyan activist Judy Lumumba, who was part of the workshop in Nairobi to honor Marielle Franco, confirms this lack of mutual knowledge and also establishes connections between the Brazilian and Kenyan contexts:

When I think of Brazil, I think of a football stadium, and we don't see places like that where Marielle came from. This makes us think: 'oh, there are slums in Brazil, there are marginalised communities there like in Kenya'. (Group discussion, Portrait of Marielle animation workshop, 21/08/2018)

As it was the case with Marina and Milena, who were unfamiliar with Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan activists knew nothing about Marielle Franco. During the workshop, they were introduced to her story and prompted to discuss the parallels between Brazil and Kenya. Learning about Marielle's fight against police brutality directed at Black favela youths, the Kenyans raised issues on how urban youths were criminalized in similar ways. Nancy Chela mentioned that “during election times, rumors would go around, with political rivals instigating youths from poor communities, police getting involved and lots of innocent people dying” (Group discussion, Portrait of Marielle animation workshop, 21/08/2018). This hints at how the police forces have suppressed the existence of informal settlements and the poor as a response to the elites' fears in both countries. Despite the large differences in terms of policing and public safety policies in Brazil and Kenya, what matters here is that they have similar consequences on people's daily lives. In her research, Villalobos demonstrates how both contexts “are rooted in a sense of inevitability, framing heavy-handed policing of poor, working-class, informalised areas as the sole solution to their respective security issues” (2019, 41). Additionally, binary media portrayals of the “formal” *versus* the “informal” city, the “good citizen” *versus* the “criminal person,” and the “State” *versus* the “enemy” contribute to marginalize poverty and to normalize daily killings. Thus, the workshops helped challenge such simplistic binarism by developing more nuanced understandings of Brazilian marginalized realities in Kenya and vice-versa.

Moreover, Wangari's and Marielle's stories provided connective narrative threads. Plural “reference points” were offered to participants, to use Marina's expression, allowing activists to be mutually inspired by Wangari's and Marielle's legacies. Another important point is that the films revolved around honoring two Black women who offered their conceptions of social change focusing on human rights (Marielle) and environmental justice (Wangari). Stemming from plural Souths, such conceptions offer pluriversal approaches (Gudynas 2011; Vila Viñas, Crespo, and Martens 2020), which challenge colonial hierarchies that attribute lesser value to Global Southern knowledges. We argue that by actively creating an artistic output – the animated films Portrait of Marielle and Homage to Wangari – Brazilian and Kenyan activists helped unfreeze each other's knowledge from a fragmented colonial past. Such knowledges then no longer represent taxidermic artifacts (Mukii 2018) as they come to life, breathe, inspire each other.

Here, the idea of art as a force that drives people to transformative exchanges and encounters comes to the fore. In Salvador, Milena, for instance, stresses that art was what triggered all the participants to sign up for the workshop.

It's fair to say that art was the real protagonist because art was what moved me to participate in the workshop due to my interest in video making. Other women were interested in other art forms, but art was what enabled us to get together. (Interview, Milena Anjos, 12/05/2021)

Taking art as the starting point in the journey of connection with Wangari's/Marielle's previously unknown stories, with the realities of Kenyans/Brazilians, with the director Ng'endo Mukii, and with each other, participants emphasized the collective nature of the workshops. Marina describes the experience of "sitting down, together with all the other women, drawing, painting, helping each other. It is so wonderful when we can get our hands dirty." (Interview, Marina Lima, 14/05/2021). Milena added that the mutual

exchanges during the workshop went way beyond technical aspects. We learned about video and animation, but we learned about this wonderful woman (Wangari), we met Ng'endo, and learned about her work, we learned about each other, all these inspiring African women that I did not know before. It was a beautiful exchange of histories, and learning life knowledges, not just about Wangari, but also exchanges between the women and men who participated in the workshop. (Interview, Milena Anjos, 12/05/2021)

Drawing from the workshop experiences, we observe that an openness to learning from multiple centers rather than from one center of knowledge (Mano and Milton 2021) and to engage in dialogue is deeply intertwined with humility (Suzina and Tufte 2020). This happens because the "other" – and her knowledges – are recognized as valuable and worthy. As we explained earlier, producing the animation entailed participants "completing" each other's drawings so that, together, they could produce image sequences. Sitting on a circle, the person on the right had to draw something that was an extension of what the person on the left had drawn. In addition to an artistic technique for making an animated video, we argue that this process offered a decolonial epistemological approach. Just like the drawings made by each participant on the images used for the animations, our knowledges are incomplete (Nyamnjoh 2017). An embrace of incompleteness is connected to a recognition of our "standpoints" (Harding 2004) or the ways in which our social positions provide us with unique experiences and perspectives of the world, none of which are complete. As it happens in an animation, our plural knowledges and experiences need to connect to each other to produce integrated sequences, to come into motion, to come to life. As they move, they are no longer taxidermic (Mukii 2018), they inspire and expire, they breathe. Therefore, our incompleteness is not shaped by absences, it is inspired by multiple and plural possibilities. Instead of a vacuum left by fragmented colonial histories, dialogical experiences – like the ones we described in Brazil and Kenya – produce new spaces filled with possibility, opportunity and potential.

Having analyzed the connections between workshop participants in each country, we now turn our attention to how Brazilian and Kenyan activists connected across the ocean. As we mentioned, one of the first steps was to present Wangari's and Marielle's stories to the groups of activists, sharing the legacies of two remarkable Black women. Additionally, their personal stories provided a window to understand complex issues in Brazilian and Kenyan societies that revolve around the denial of human rights, poverty, inequality, racism, sexism, tribalism (in Kenya) amongst other forms of injustice. When asked to



intervene upon the images on the frames, activists were prompted to *transform* them into something meaningful for their own realities. In Nairobi, we saw Nancy Chela drawing a sunflower on Marielle's printed image. The sunflower had been a campaign symbol for Marielle when she ran (and was elected) for the City Hall of Rio de Janeiro. After her murder, the sunflower was re-signified and linked to an epitaph by Ernesto Cardenal that said: "they believed that they were burying you but what they did was to bury a seed." This was used as reference to how Marielle's legacy would remain alive with other Black women who would carry on her struggle for social justice. Reflecting on the sunflower's meaning, Nancy was able to connect it (and Marielle's story) to her own reality: "Whether you are in the slums of Nairobi or Rio, as a single mum, you need to be always resilient, always chasing the light" (Group discussion, Portrait of Marielle animation workshop, 21/08/2018).

The Brazilian participants emphasized the idea of connection, suggesting that multiple elements in Brazilian and Kenyan women's stories were "inextricably interconnected" (Mano and Milton 2021). Milena articulated it beautifully in her accounts of the workshop:

Our stories cross each other all the time. Whether we realise it or not, what we did was to build a collective memory. Together, we managed to build a meaningful memory of a woman [Wangari] that had been unknown to us. This was impactful – we learned histories, but we also made histories. We need to recognise ourselves in our stories and histories to become stronger. (Interview, Milena Anjos, 12/05/2021)

However, the workshops also presented challenges and limitations in terms of dialogical processes. The first one refers to issues of language. The Brazilian activists could not speak English or Swahili whilst the Kenyan activists could not speak Portuguese. This meant that the researchers acted as mediators in most of the communications that took place between them. In Kenya, Medrado interviewed the participants and shared their perspectives with the Brazilian perspectives. In Brazil, Ng'endo Mukii was assisted by translators but also faced language barriers when engaging with the workshop participants. Such barriers reinforced power dynamics and hierarchies between researchers and participants. In addition to taking place via researchers and translators, the Brazil-Kenya activist dialogues were made possible by the actual creative outputs: the two animated films. Referring back to Participatory Action perspectives (Fals Borda 1987; Freire 1972), such dialogues should have ideally been more horizontal, with activists speaking directly to each other, challenging asymmetries between workshop facilitators and participants, the "researched" and the "researcher."

Moreover, some of the participants raised critical points in relation to an over emphasis on the activist side of the activist equation. Milena Anjos, for instance, acknowledged that what they achieved in the Wangari workshop was highly "political." However, she emphasized that "art was what made us attend these workshops. Without the artistic elements, we would not get to learn the histories. Art was the reason why people kept coming to the sessions and did not give up, simple as that. Art came before us getting to know Wangari" (Interview, Milena Anjos, 12/05/2021). This resonates with critiques from authors who question, from a Global South perspective: how reasonable is it to expect those finding it difficult to put food on the table to be active in activism? (Mutsvairo and Mutsvairo 2016). The experience in Brazil and Kenya confirms that whilst participants were certainly inspired by the activism side of the activism spectrum, they were particularly moved by

the possibility of working with an award-winning artist like Ng'endo Mukii, and learning artistic skills that could prove valuable in their careers.

In any case, the activist dialogues that took place between Kenyans and Brazilians illustrated the planting of seeds of empathy, with empowering efforts to learn and value their common strengths, ancestries, histories, and stories. In other words, they were able to embark on an emotional journey through feelings of connection and empathy. This journey, we argue, is what enabled artists to identify themselves as activists. Additionally, such activists dialogues produced what Duncombe and Lambert (2018) call an "aeffect." Such dialogues produced an *effect* – as they challenged the colonial devaluing of Southern knowledges and experiences, and they produced *affect* – by moving Southern realities closer and making them "cross each other" in powerful ways.

Here, we wish to reaffirm the ways in which an intersectional standpoint awareness can play the role of binding the realities of marginalized communities across the globe. This happens because intersectionality prompts us to acquire a deeper understanding of the complexities entailed in multiple layers of oppression, such as sexism, heteronormativism, racism, and classism, amongst others. Ribeiro's (2017) thoughts on "lugar de fala" become helpful because they represent a call for people to reflect upon how their identities and social standpoints, as well as their own marginalities, recognize and reconnect their stories and histories, to use Milena's words.

## 5. Concluding thoughts

Whilst intersectionality represents a glue that can connect experiences of Global South peoples, the presence of female protagonists was what enabled the empowering workshop experiences that we analyzed. Carla Akotirene reminds us of the importance of drawing strength from the affective elements present in South-to-South connections. As she suggests, "the black diaspora has added sweat, tears, and blood to the taste of the sea. Epistemic erasure is still a consequence of these salty experiences" (Akotirene 2019, 32). Thus, one important way to maintain the legacy of the many women who fight for social justice is to tell their stories. Indeed, paying homage to black women like Marielle Franco and Wangari Maathai teaches us that stories are connective, connections can be transformative, and transformations can be powerful. Ng'endo Mukii's Instagram post on the experience of screening both animations – Portrait of Marielle and Portrait of Wangari Maathai – in the black capital of Salvador illustrates this point.

The students were so moved and so engaged with the work. Marina wrote a beautiful poem for me, and @maria\_fifi\_89 started weeping while translating it, and I started weeping upon hearing the translation and then Marina who was already weeping softly began to weep harder and then someone in the crowd picked up the Wave of Weeping and it swept over us like the years gone by while we searched for the meaning of our lives. In other words ... this night was powerful. (Ng'endo Mukii – @ngendomukii – Instagram post, 07/12/2018)

Reflecting upon the workshop experiences, we asked: what have we learned from engaging in South-to-South dialogues between scholars and activists in both countries? Here, we share two important lessons that can also serve as methodological recommendations for future research. The first one refers to the importance of creating collectively with the participants. In both workshops, the dynamics revolved around people adding

their perspectives and “standpoints” (Harding 2004) to Marielle’s and Wangari’s stories. The artistic method involved asking artists to manually intervene upon the images by adding visuals that were meaningful on a personal level (drawing, collage, etc.). The end result was based on a collective effort, as our interviewees inferred, and the groups felt like they “owned the piece” (Group discussion, Portrait of Marielle, Nairobi, 23/08/2018). The second lesson is that we must always remember that marginalization is plural and nuanced. The workshops were a reminder of the different levels of marginalization that can be found in marginalized communities. Female participants, for instance, stressed the additional challenges faced by Black women in the context of slums and favelas, particularly if they were single mothers. (Interview with Nancy Chela, 22/08/2018). As researchers who conduct participatory artistic projects with marginalized communities, we need to be extremely attentive to the nuances of marginalization, trying to include the most marginalized amongst the marginalized.

Decolonial intersectional perspectives are useful for identifying these nuances, naming the different facets of marginalization as a complex social problem, particularly in Global South contexts. At the same time, the notions of afrokology and dialogue point to potential avenues for a political solidarity project between Global South marginalized peoples. In this article, our ethnographic observations contribute to the development of decolonial intersectional frameworks by proposing a definition of South-to-South Activism. We argue that South-to-South Activist dialogues are defined by the creation of collective memories. When the workshops finished, participants were touched by the ways in which they were able to make something new, and this “something new” referred to a newly created collective memory. With this argument, we take Duncombe and Lambert’s (2018) “aeffect” concept one step further, moving it closer to the idea of memories being built collectively by Global South people around their shared memories.

Finally, we asked: did this experience in Brazil and Kenya just represent a passing transformative moment, or was this the beginning of a sustainable empowering relationship? It would be ambitious to claim that the relationships forged between Brazilian favela and Kenyan activists are easily sustainable. The barriers were plentiful. They started with language issues, as we discussed, and included issues of funding for South-to-South partnership projects. Often, it is challenging for such initiatives to think and act on a long-term basis, given that they often focus on their daily survival. The way that grants are set up also brings challenges. Whilst we can find grants that fund the “setting up” of international networks, it is much more difficult to obtain grants to “sustain” them. Having said this, facilitated by activism, the dialogues that took place between Kenyans and Brazilians established transformative connections as they challenged colonial hierarchies in which Southern knowledges are devalued. Here, our understanding of activist South-to-South dialogues is shaped by the ways in which notions of pluriversality, incompleteness, and humility are intertwined. By collectively creating the two animations, activists sparked creative fire to unfreeze each other’s knowledges and legacies from a colonial past (present and future). Dialogical artistic practices blossomed as alternatives to a colonial neglect of South-to-South relationships, opening-up spaces filled with possibility, opportunity and potential.

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