

# Our Ghosts Have Come to Collect: Decolonial Turn in Contemporary Brazilian Art

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This text expands, deepens and comments on the essay “As Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas no Contexto Ibero-Americano e o Pensamento Pós-Colonial e Decolonial” (Contemporary Artistic Practices in the Ibero-American Context and Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought; Sales & Cabrera, 2020), where we comment on the work of the artists Yonamine, Grada Kilomba, Jota Mombaça, and Daniela Ortiz. In the text cited, we work on the problematic discussion around the emergence of a field of thought called “post-colonial” and a decolonial project and how poetic practices interested in the discussion around the colonial legacy are configured in the Ibero-American space. From a historical approach, we try to understand how postcolonial studies produce influence in Brazil and the decolonial turn and thought consolidated in Latin America to understand how to produce responses from the Brazilian art field to decolonization issues. In postcolonial studies and the decolonial project, the decolonization of art is related to the questioning of a Eurocentric thought matrix from its racialized and subalternized world representation schemes deeply related to the performative character of the one who narrates. In other words, the decolonization of art and thought, and the ways of being and existing in the world, are not dissociated from the emergence of artists, writers, and intellectuals. These intellectuals dispute the right to self-representation, self-presentation, and the creation of non-colonial narratives and images or those who stand completely outside the Eurocentric imaginary and worldview. This text establishes a deep interest in the Brazilian context, appropriating the important discussion around the constitution of a decolonial field of thought, analyzing the work of contemporary Brazilian artists such as Jota Mombaça, Juliana Notari, Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Paulo Nazareth.

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**Keywords:** decolonial, contemporary art, Brazil

## **Nossos Fantasmas Estão Vindo Cobrar: Giro Decolonial na Arte Contemporânea Brasileira**

Este texto expande, aprofunda e comenta o ensaio “As Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas no Contexto Ibero-Americano e o Pensamento Pós-Colonial e Decolonial” (Sales & Cabrera, 2020), onde comentamos a obra dos artistas Yonamine, Grada Kilomba, Jota Mombaça e Daniela Ortiz. No texto citado, trabalhamos a problemática da discussão em torno do surgimento de um campo de pensamento denominado “pós-colonial”, bem como um projeto decolonial e a maneira como se configuram no espaço ibero-americano práticas poéticas interessadas na discussão em torno do legado colonial. A partir de uma abordagem histórica, neste artigo, tentamos perceber a forma como os estudos pós-coloniais produzem influência no Brasil, assim como o giro e o pensamento decolonial que se consolida na América Latina, a fim de compreender as formas de produzir respostas do campo da arte brasileira para questões que envolvem a descolonização. Nos estudos pós-coloniais e também no projeto decolonial, a descolonização da arte está relacionada com o questionamento da matriz de pensamento eurocêntrico a partir de seus esquemas de representação

de mundo racializados e subalternizados, e também está profundamente relacionada com o caráter performativo daquele ou daquela que narra. Ou seja, a descolonização da arte e do pensamento, assim como dos modos de ser e de estar no mundo não estão dissociados do aparecimento de artistas, escritores e intelectuais que disputam o direito de autorepresentação, de auto-apresentação e de criação de narrativas e imagens não coloniais ou completamente fora do imaginário e da cosmovisão euro-centrada. No texto que agora se apresenta, firmamos um interesse aprofundado no contexto brasileiro, apropriando-nos da discussão importante em torno da constituição de um campo de pensamento decolonial, analisando a obra de artistas brasileiros contemporâneos como Jota Mombaça, Juliana Notari, Michelle Mattiuzzi e Paulo Nazareth.

**Palavras-chave:** decolonial, arte contemporânea, Brasil

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## Introduction

This text expands, deepens, and comments on the essay "As Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas no Contexto Ibero-Americano e o Pensamento Pós-Colonial e Decolonial" (Contemporary Artistic Practices in the Ibero-American Context and Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought; Sales & Cabrera, 2020), where we discuss the work of artists Yonamine, Grada Kilomba, Jota Mombaça, and Daniela Ortiz. This text addresses the emergence of a field of thought known as "postcolonial" based, primarily, on the diasporic production of Black intellectuals based in Europe, a decolonial project, and how poetic practices related to the colonial legacy, the memory of colonialism, and the consequences of slavery are configured in Ibero-America.

It is also important to highlight the experience and buildup around the discussion on decolonization in the art field when elaborating the dossier "Estéticas Especulativas Decoloniais" (Speculative Aesthetics Decolonial), together with Pablo Assumpção, published in 2019, a work that was interested in:

receiving artistic perspectives and academic works on the postcolonial discussion in the art field, already pressing in European and North American contexts, and on the reinterest in anti-colonial aesthetics and imaginaries, in view of the new structures of recolonization in the present and the broad debate that now exists in Brazil about decolonial thinking in the artistic field, taking into account that 2018 was considered the year "in which blacks entered the agenda in the world of arts", according to an article published by Carta Capital (12/12/2018). Last year, the Brazilian art scene saw the emergence of Afro-Atlantic Stories (MASP/ Thomie Othake ), ExAfrica (CCBB), Jamaica, Jamaica ( Sesc March 24 ), The Sewing of Memory, by Rosana Paulino (Pinacoteca de São Paulo), in addition to the strong black presence at FLIP - Paraty International Literary Fair, among many other initiatives. (Sales & Costa, 2019, p. 1)

I believe it is worthy of mentioning this buildup generated by the works above since the issue of decolonization in the art field is assuming multiple faces in Brazil. It is also increasingly viewed as a transdisciplinary and collective theme, especially considering its urgency in a growingly blurred world due to the recrudescence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the authoritarian and neo-colonial political context in which we find ourselves.

In the present text, we take an in-depth interest in the Brazilian context, appropriating the important discussion around the constitution of a field of thought known as "postcolonial" and a social and aesthetic movement perceived as decolonial, analyzing the work of contemporary Brazilian artists such as Jota Mombaça, Michelle Mattiuzzi, Paulo Nazareth and Juliana Notari.

Thus, when thinking about the history of colonialism in Brazil and coloniality (Quijano, 1997) as a form of economic, political, and social power, we can see how the modern-colonial imaginary brought with it a complex linguistic/discursive apparatus that corroborates European omnipotence and superiority, whose developments in the field of culture and formation of identities around the world are devastating. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994/2006) argue: "colonialist culture constructed a sense of ontological European superiority to lesser breeds without the law" (p. 45).

In *Crítica da Razão Negra* (Critique of Black Reason), Achille Mbembe (2013/2017) argues that the territorial conquest, economic domination, and political submission of colonized peoples, across all continents, dragged along with it a complex of fantasies linked to the European imagination, whose effects — still incalculable — coincide with the work of death and precariousness, as well as with the impoverishment and subordination of many lives in the political sphere, but also in the field of symbolic production and construction of identities. Alongside the civilizing fiction that pervades the discourse of colonization — the core of modernity — this delirium of superiority can be called "Eurocentrism".

The critique of Eurocentrism is key to understanding the developments around the postcolonial studies that advanced throughout Europe from the post-World War II context, with the projection of Afro-European intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, amongst others. We want to emphasize that the term "postcolonial" is derived from two aspects: the first concerns the decolonization process of the "third world" countries in the second half of the 20th century and, therefore, means liberation, emancipation, and independence from imperialism and colonialism. The other aspect concerns the postcolonial as a broad epistemic, intellectual and political current, whose insertion in "third world" countries, such as Brazil, took place in the context of globalization and the end of the century, only in the 1990s.

In the 1980s, subaltern studies, largely "influenced" by the first generation of postcolonial intellectuals, launched names like Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This group of Indian intellectuals was responsible for consolidating the idea that colonialism is not only a political or economic phenomenon but an event whose epistemic dimension was linked to the very birth of the human sciences, amounting to an epistemic and, above all, symbolic domination.

The projection of subaltern studies was determinant for the decolonial turn in Latin America, as Luciana Ballestrin (2013) argues, a kind of current, a research group and social movement that would emerge in the 1990s in the United States and Latin America. It brought together intellectuals in the field of human sciences interested in thinking about the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011/2017): no longer colonialism, but coloniality, that is, the continuity of institutions and social and cultural practices created during the colonial period that persist even after the end of colonialism — and its various implications in the field of culture, art, and thought.

This decolonial turn amplifies and expands the critique and crisis around the Eurocentric matrix, the Eurocentric image, and the old representation schemes based on a Eurocentric worldview created by a modern-colonial world-system. We have been witnessing a contemporary art that increasingly wishes to move away from the *universal* Eurocentric aesthetic/norm, which signals that this world representation system is in crisis and decline.

Walter Mignolo (2010), in his "Decolonial Aesthetics", defines non-colonial aesthetics when he addresses the work of artists such as Fred Wilson, Pedro Lasch, and Tanja Ostojic. In this essay, we are invited to think about the forms assumed by a decolonized or non-colonial art capable of activating subjects and subjectivities which are also decolonial<sup>1</sup>. Just as Denise Ferreira da Silva (2015/2020), on the other hand, explores and argues in "Ler a Arte Como Confronto" (Reading Art as Confrontation) when dealing with an anti-colonial art founded on refusal as a form of self-representation.

In both texts, the decolonization of art is related to the questioning of the Eurocentric thought matrix, its racialized and subalternized world representation schemes, but it is also deeply connected with the performative character of the one who narrates. In other words, the decolonization of art and thought, and the ways of being and existing in the world, are not dissociated from the emergence of artists, writers, and intellectuals. These intellectuals dispute the right to self-representation, self-presentation, and the creation of non-colonial narratives and images or those who stand completely outside the Eurocentric imaginary and worldview. Commenting on *Mining the Museum*, by Fred Wilson, Walter Mignolo (2010) argues:

oppression and negation are two aspects of the logic of coloniality. The first operates in the action of one individual over another, in unequal power relations. The second operates on individuals, in the way they deny what they know deep down. Decolonial processes bring both aspects out of their repressed places, while also revealing the imperial characteristics of "negation". Oppression and negation are not limited to the modern European subject - Marx's wage worker or the modern European subject analyzed by Freud. They operate in racial/colonial oppression, and also in the denial of imperial and colonial subjects: the black man who wants to be white and the master who refuses to view the oppression and exploitation of another human being as ethically reprehensible and humanly unacceptable. For these and other reasons, Fred Wilson's work is a constant process of decolonizing aesthesis. (pp. 18-19)

For Walter Mignolo (2011/2017), the Westernization of the world has reached a saturation point, pushing an increasing number of people to resist (or rather, to re-exist) to being incorporated into this ideal of a civilization. The social developments in the art fields have been quite noticeable, and we can say that, in the last decade of the 20th century, contemporary art all over the world has focused on political issues as an effort to repoliticize the field of art that is capable of putting pressing issues on the agenda, such as the colonial legacy, as well as ethnic-racial and gender relations. This tension in the field of art became more pronounced in Brazil at the turn of the 21st century and is related to the public policies adopted as of 2003, the growing discussion about racial and social quotas in universities, and the fourth wave of feminism and visible aesthetic-political developments.

## Brazilian Contemporary Art and Colonial Legacy

In this essay, we want to highlight that the visual arts have reinforced these lines by discussing the colonial legacy and the legacy of slavery in Brazil, expanding the debate on new engagements with the image and ways of relating to, perceiving, and producing contemporary Brazilian art. We identify, especially from the 2nd decade of the 2000s, a stage in which the dynamics of decolonial thinking and cultural production (Maldonado-Torres, 2008) in Brazil intensify the tensions connected with memory and the colonial past, as well as its socio-cultural and aesthetic developments. We observe this tension in contemporary artists such as Jaime Lauriano, Michelle Mattiuzzi, Paulo Nazareth, Juliana Notari, and Jota Mombaça. Such tension, however, can also be perceived as an unavoidable generational crossing, an idea that will not be argued here but only presented.

To some extent, the generational aspects can be understood, meaningfully, from the discussion around "place of speech", a concept recovered by Djamila Ribeiro (2017) in *O Que É Lugar de Fala?* (What Is Place of Speech?). This essay by Djamila Ribeiro accompanies and provokes important debates about the hegemony of certain social actors in producing knowledge and imaginary in Brazil. It is worth noting that the deepening of the discussion catalyzed by Djamila Ribeiro was already being expanded, especially at the turn of the 21st century, with the unavoidable discussion on racial quotas in universities.

From a greater political, media, and social representation, racial quotas have also transformed the cultural scene and, from then on, the field of art in Brazil is called upon to think about the coloniality that structures its practices and its poetics through a double questioning: first, who produces art in Brazil and why most of them are male and white and, second, what forms should one art that claims to be decolonized assume. This double bias deepens and expands the work of numerous contemporary artists now debating the decolonization of art and thought in Brazil.

This double problematic around the decolonization of art and thought can be better understood through the notion of the "Black Atlantic", a culture which, due to its hybrid character, is not circumscribed to ethnic or national borders, as thought by Paul Gilroy (1993), in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. According to the author, the "Black Atlantic" refers metaphorically to the transnational structures created when the modern-colonial world was established, giving rise to a system of communications and cultural exchanges in the West marked by exiles, forced displacements, and work journeys. The construction of this network allowed Black and non-White populations to form, during the African diaspora (but not only), a culture that cannot be identified exclusively as Caribbean, African, American, or European, but all simultaneously.

Still, according to Gilroy (1993), such relationships established from the experience of the diaspora favor the formation of a collaborative circuit of communication that is beyond the ethnic boundaries of a nation-state, creating cultural exchanges that are characteristic of a new context, built from the transit of enslaved people and/or their descendants. The sea signals an index of a mixture, contamination, and instability and concerns the "Black Atlantic" world as an intertwined network between the "local" and the "global". Gilroy argues that analyzing Black political and cultural history in the West requires a more in-depth look into the complex mixture between European and African philosophical and cultural systems. This complex mixture consolidates the modern-colonial world and marks, even today, the dynamics, thematic, and positioning of Afrodiasporic artists or artists interested in Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous-Brazilian issues. Although Gilroy's analysis is circumscribed to the British colonial empire and the cultural exchanges subordinated to British colonialism, we argue that the idea of a "Black Atlantic" is also an important reading key for thinking about the cultural crossings in the history of Portuguese colonialism.

To understand how this cultural and discursive complexity can be engendered in art, we will approach the artworks of Jota Mombaça, Juliana Notari, Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Paulo Nazareth. I have purposely inserted a non-black Brazilian artist into this analysis to think about the implications in the art field involving the form and content of the works and the social origin, race, and gender of contemporary Brazilian artists. To open this discussion, we will analyze the work of Jota Mombaça.

The colonial legacy in Jota Mombaça's work is reflected in many aspects. From the personal transit marked by a strong presence in the Portugal-Brazil axis to the approach to themes that cover the relationship between Brazil and Portugal, or those that touch on issues experienced/feelings of a trans, Black, and northeastern Brazilian artist, as pointed out in numerous texts by the artist. The path and work of the artist raise questions that involve race, gender, and sexuality, confronting life itself as an object of aesthetic creation. A fact that will also characterize the trajectory of other artists mentioned here, such as Michelle Mattiuzzi and Paulo Nazareth.

In Mombaça's artistic production, we perceive an interest in constructing an intersectional worldview: a worldview capable of relating multiple levels of oppression to the body, such as gender, race, and sexuality. In her work and artistic journey, the texts of feminists such as Gayatri Spivak and Grada Kilomba are often recovered and updated. Grada Kilomba (2019), in *Memórias da Plantação* (Plantation Memories), in retrieving Spivak's (1988) well-known essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", makes a profound questioning about the possibility of speaking and being heard in the white male-dominated Western world. This questioning is cited, transformed, and even updated by Mombaça (2015) in the essay *Pode um Cu Mestiço Falar?* (Can a Mestizo Ass Speak?). In reflecting on the institutional invisibility of Black women, the latter extends Grada Kilomba's

(2019) cited text introducing the debate on "queers" and non-binary subjects to the field of art and proposing a reflection on the unfeasibility of producing and circulating images and self-representational narratives of these subjects in Brazil. Expanding the discussion initiated by Spivak, Mombaça (2015) argues that

the silencing of black subjects allows white colonial speech to consolidate itself as truth without the interference of opposing discourses. The impossibility of black speech to manifest itself is the condition through which the white subject reproduces itself. So much so that, in the framework of racism, the white subject depends on the arbitrary production of the black subject as a silenced "Other" in order to establish itself, updating, and based on the white/black binomial, a series of other binary formulae such as good/bad, right/wrong, human/inhuman, rational/wild, in which the black subject is constantly represented as evil, wrong, inhuman or savage. In this way, the black subject is never in question, but rather the dominant images and narratives about him, produced from a colonial point of view. (para. 5)

In decolonial terms, Mombaça's work imposes ruptures that involve the colonizing imaginary of oppression over bodies and sexualities. It forces us to think about the deviant production of subjects and bodies marginalized by a norm built from the white cisheteronormative modern-colonial world — the world, finally, built by the colonial enterprise and systematized by Eurocentrism, the most lasting form of domination.

Mombaça granted an interview to the research group *África nas Artes* (2018a, 2018b) at the conference "Echoes of the South Atlantic", held by the Goethe Institute, in Salvador, in 2018. In a specific point of this interview, the artist spoke about self-definition and unfolding the identity in the art world. She claims a self-definition, queer, northeastern, non-binary artist, which escapes the normative definitions that the art world has to offer, and, in contrast, reacts to the "hyper-definition" of her artistic practice, addressing themes and issues that are far beyond the race-gender binomial. It is an ambivalent and "violent" endeavor, an attempt to perform other experiences, other lives, and other worlds — beyond those provided for in everyday lives and in the cisheteronormative imaginary, including the aesthetic experience itself. It is a central point in the performance performed during the exhibition *A Gente Combinamos de Não Morrer* (We Agreed Not to Die), held in Lisbon in 2018 at the Galeria Municipal da Avenida da Índia.

It is important to pay attention to this resistance to hyper-definition as a crossing force towards new postcolonial or decolonial horizons in the face of a world in crisis, that is, as a way of going through the social-political chaos in which we live and sustaining progressive agendas, contained in the identity struggle that is so evident in the work of Mombaça, but not only:

there is a double movement. Self-defining, to reclaim a place historically erased and predisposed to be subsumed by hegemonic narratives and, at the same time, fighting against hyper-definition, fighting against the hyper-circumscription of my work to a very small area when, in fact, I am interested in many other subjects that exceed my own definitions. (*África nas Artes*, 2018b, 00:02:25)

This double movement is important as a strategic thought for a decolonial attitude as a Brazilian artist. The question that Mombaça deftly raises is not limited to the definition of discourse as a Black-queer-northeasterner, but also (and mainly) to produce from it a place of enunciation that generates "violence" by itself or, as she puts it, "redistributes violence" (Mombaça, 2016). Violence appears here in opposition to the idea of safety — and by safety, I mean the unrestrained desire of the White consciousness to preserve its life at the expense of others, and literally capable of erecting a concrete world to its advantage at the expense of another, racialized and peripheral, one.

That is a "forked tongue", the double consciousness of which Paul Gilroy (1993) speaks, a not so obvious intelligence, characterized by irony and sarcasm and so present in Brazilian culture, recovered in the political-aesthetic path of Mombaça. Not only as an aesthetic of creation but a form of resistance and political re-existence for Black bodies and lives — constantly at stake and at risk.

The complexity of life at risk and the racist strategies of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2013/2017) require a reconfiguration of agendas towards representativeness and non-obliteration. In what sense? According to Mombaça, we need to establish that "visibility does not protect us" (África nas Artes, 2018a, 00:01:55), we need to understand spaces of Black, transgender, and subalternized body enunciation as spaces of power to act in the world in an unobvious way:

not being silenced and yet not being completely translated. To incorporate a form of resistance that exists in this ambiguity, in this opacity. The time has come, it is perhaps past time, to also claim, along with the right to visibility and representativeness, the right to opacity. (África nas Artes, 2018a, 00:02:05)

Just as racism is not an epiphenomenon of colonialism, sexism is not a lateral practice of a world constructed from the modernity-coloniality dichotomy. The creation of social roles around gender has imposed a condition on women and a system of representation that imprisons and controls women's bodies. On the other hand, intersectional and Black feminists, as Lélia Gonzalez, Sueli Carneiro, and Beatriz Nascimento, have been calling attention to the double oppression, the double subalternity, and the dual control to which Black women are subjected, as they experience racism and sexism in an inseparable and non-hierarchical way. Somehow, this discussion also takes on a poetic character in the visual arts, literature, and cinema, with the consecration of numerous Black artists established in the field of art in Brazil in the 21st century. Artists such as Michelle Mattiuzzi, whose work confronts the representation and the living conditions of Black women.

In her work [Merci Beaucoup Blanco!](#) (Thank you so much White!), the artist Michelle Mattiuzzi questions the forced whitening of Black bodies and minds imposed by the myth of racial democracy. In Brazil, throughout the 20th century, social sciences have perfected racist knowledge and practices, consolidating the myth of peaceful coexistence between three races — White, Indigenous, and Black — which originated a friendly society based on miscegenation inherent to our colonial legacy.

The numerous essays by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, particularly the one describing the specific traits of Portuguese colonialism in *O Luso e o Trópico* (The Portuguese and the Tropic), contributed greatly to the construction of the idea of this friendly society. The deconstruction around such peaceful miscegenation — consolidated from the wide dissemination of the racial democracy concept in Brazil — invariably involves black feminism. Authors such as Lélia Gonzalez, when looking deeper into the stereotyped image of Black women in Brazilian culture, points out imprisoning paradigms of representation that break with the fallacy of peaceful miscegenation, exposing all the violence of colonialism on women's bodies and the asymmetrical and unequal forms that permeated this "mixture". According to Gonzalez (1984):

as with every myth, the myth of racial democracy hides more than it shows. First, we notice that it exerts its symbolic violence especially over Black women. The other side of the deification of the carnival occurs in the daily life of this woman, in the moment in which she is transfigured into a domestic servant. This is why the guilt produced by her deification is manifested through strong and aggressive charges. This is also what allows us to conclude that the terms mulatta and maid are attached to the same subject. This identification depends on the situation in which we are seen. (p. 228)

In her analysis, Gonzalez (1984) highlights the social role played by Black women in the Brazilian social structure, which occupies a twofold productive function: plantation work — and reproductive work. Michelle Mattiuzzi's performance, as we see it, dialogues with Gonzalez's thought since her work *Merci Beaucoup Blanco!* by appropriating the well-known mask used as an instrument of torture during slavery in Brazil exposes the daily violence on the plantation. On the other hand, the exposure of a Black woman's naked body reflects the continued objectification of the Black female body in a sexist and colonial society. It is interesting how Mattiuzzi's work amplifies the relationship between productive and reproductive labor by engaging with representations of slavery (such as the mask) through a body that can be displayed, sold, and traded.

The mask used by Michelle Mattiuzzi in her performance establishes a dialogue with recent research and also with the poetic practice of Grada Kilomba in her exhibition [Secrets to Tell](#), held at Lisbon's Museum of Architecture, Art and Technology, in 2017. Kilomba's exhibition recovers much of her earlier essay *Memórias da Plantação* (Kilomba, 2019). This work's opening image is the face of slave Anastasia, always covered by the mask that prevented her from speaking, according to Kilomba, about the secrets of slavery, the secrets of colonialism that the author brings to light in *Secrets to Tell*, and that Mattiuzzi explores in her performance.

The work of Jota Mombaça, Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Grada Kilomba reveal the intersections and connections born of a culture produced in the "Black Atlantic", as we suggest from Paul Gilroy (1993) when we observe the works developed in collaboration or dialogue, the transnational participation of the artists and their own transit. It is a diaspora energized by the old relations between the north-south axes of the world, the "colonized southern world" and the European "metropolises". In *Memórias da Plantação* (2019), Kilomba (2019)

examines the timelessness of everyday racism. The combination of these two words, "plantation" and "memories", describes everyday racism not only as the re-enactment of racism from a colonial past, but also as a traumatic reality that has been neglected. It is a violent shock that suddenly places the black subject in a colonial scene, in which, as in a plantation setting, he/she is the imprisoned, subordinated and exotic "other". Suddenly, the past coincides with the present, and the present is experienced as if the black subject were in that agonizing past. (p. 30)

It re-enacted agonizing past that Kilomba talks about is determinant in the work of Michelle Mattiuzzi. By exposing the body of Black women in public places, the author openly confronts the fate of Black bodies, a fate that is violently imposed by the daily and structural racism in modern-day Brazil.

Just as in the work of Mattiuzzi, the racial issue is structural to the work of Paulo Nazareth, from Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais, considered one of the reinventors of the Brazilian performance. In one of his best-known works, [Notícias da América](#) (News from America), the artist walked across America, from Governador Valadares to the United States, taking photographs and offering cleaning services to pay for the expenses of the journey partially.

The racial issue is subtly introduced in his performance work. According to the artist, his body is an index of the violent miscegenation between Black, White and Indigenous populations. In an interview granted to the author on September 19, 2020, Paulo Nazareth comments on the unfolding of his work affected by ancestry:

my work also deals with issues related to names, to naming, and I increasingly claim the former name, the original name: Figueiras, Porto das Figueiras, Santo Antônio das Figueiras, Porto das Canoas and Atu, in the Borum language, the name of the river. My mother's mother comes from the Borum people and there is this mixture with some communities, which at the time called themselves quilombolas, from the surrounding area,

and which had similar practices and were smaller groups. So when both the Borum people and the quilombola communities were growing, they were breaking up into smaller groups, precisely for the sake of survival in this region. My mother's mother is from 1913, her father is from 1911 and the fathers of the fathers and mothers of the mothers are from the late 1800s, roughly 1890, 1880. In 1944, my mother's mother, Nazareth Cassiano de Jesus... she was very angry, had many issues... there in this region where the family was from, this region was transformed into a farm and some people left, others stayed and became what she called Bugres. So, those who were Borum remained in the territory and were transformed into Bugres, and are now called Bugres. My mother's mother was very resistant and when my mother was born, she left the farm and went to the city... and they say that the day they [the police] took her and sent her to the colony, the Psychiatric Hospital in Barbacena, she was walking towards the river... and they said she was going to drown, she was going to kill the child. And she fought for this child, this baby that was my mother, and the more they tried to remove the child, the more she fought, and the more she fought, the more they said she was crazy and, in fact, she had a fit of rage over the situation and the theft of the child. And then the boss, who was a delegate at the time and also a notary public, signed the document to send my grandmother to Barbacena, where she was put on the crazy train that took Nazareth Cassiano de Jesus. This is part of the story that I inherit, it is part of my story and to this day my mother has this cry: she cries for the mother who was gone. My work is to be Nazareth too, to carry Nazareth, I carry Nazareth and Nazareth carries me... (P. Nazareth, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

In Paulo Nazareth's work, the image of an exoticized, mestizo body, made "different" (as in Kilomba's *Memórias da Plantação*, 2019, and Mombasa and Mattiuzzi's poetic works), subalternized, marginalized, and violated by the racial schemes imposed by coloniality, addresses the racial issue in a complex and broader way. It introduces the debate on the racialization of non-White bodies and those that are not completely Black, in a direct reference to his self-biography, his family background, and the affective-social path of his relatives. Such an image brings to light the difficult debate around definitions of race in Brazil.

Paulo Nazareth's work blurs several boundaries: the limit of racial overdetermination in his work and the construction of Blackness in Brazil, as well as the indetermination of the limits between his life and his performance work, like the wanderings of the artist around the world, that is, his life experience per se, form a large part of his poetic process.

With its wounds and traumas, the colonial legacy is also central to the work of the Brazilian artist Juliana Notari. I also chose to comment on the work of a non-Black artist from a decolonial perspective because I consider the discussion on who can narrate (and who can be heard) — as Spivak, Kilomba, and Mombaça question — a central point when questioning the colonial legacy and, therefore, racism and sexism, which cannot be separated. The choice made by the non-Black artist Juliana Notari is a desire to problematize this debate. We could also analyze the work of Gê Viana, Denilson Baniwa, Jorge Cabrera, André Feitosa, and Daniel Meirinho, amongst others, that I chose to address in another text. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to resume the concept of Afro-Brazilian art and the discussions around this concept engendered in the last decades by Kabengele Munanga, Emmanuel Araújo, among others, and discuss them in light of today's problematics — a work still ongoing and to be published.

With this in mind, we start by analyzing [Soledad](#) (Loneliness), a video-performance by Juliana Notari in the Nossa Senhora da Soledad cemetery that was built in Belém in the 19th century, during the yellow fever epidemic, to bury the dead of the local elite and separate them from the slaves and the subalternized population.

According to Notari, in an interview with Luciana Veras (2020), the performance consisted of a ritual of "cleaning and purification", and the "central" action was her, dressed in white, cleaning not

only the tombs, deposits, and marble monuments, but also the remains and bones of supposed former colonizers living in Belém and/or the local elite. In her words:

I was authorized by the City Hall of Belém to be there, but I did not know what could happen, if I would find a rat or a snake, for example. When I arrived, an ossuary was open and I started to remove everything in order to wash it. When I finished, my clothes were rotten, all green from the slime, while the bones and marble tombs were clean. It was an exchange between life and death" (Veras, 2020, para. 14)

The referential in the performance work of Juliana Notari is the trajectory of important Brazilian artists such as Letícia Parente and Adriana Varella, both of them with a solid relationship between the language of video and that of performance, who use video-performance as a truly hybrid field in which the body effectively produces the action gesture that is completed, altered, blurred or contaminated by the language of video. Notari appropriates the legacy of Parente e Varella and embeds video performance among his languages as in *Soledad* and others, as we have argued.

In *Soledad*, the woman in white who can atone for the sins of the dead through a cleansing ritual evokes the multiple rituals of care and cleansing to which the female body is subjected in a patriarchal social structure while this same body is the agent of the gesture, of the ritual. It is worthy of mention that, for many decolonial and Latin American thinkers, the course of the colonial matrix of power has not been far removed from the development of a patriarchal society and from the perfecting of the capitalist/extractivist mode of production, which inscribes the gendered bodies of "women" in a subalternized way.

As in the work of Mombaça, Michelle Mattiuzzi, and Paulo Nazareth, the body is also the main epidermis of work, the place, and vehicle where memories and traumas are registered and operated in the trajectory of Juliana Notari, from Recife. Thus, it is in the video-performance [Mimoso](#) (Delicate), made during the artist's residency in Belém (Funarte Women in Contemporary Art Award). Here, the naked artist is pulled by a buffalo on the sand of Pesqueiro beach and then, still naked, eats the testicles of the freshly castrated animal with a fork and knife. In the words of Notari:

I was two years without shaving and there, in that place, with that animal, I saw myself subjected to forces of nature, to libidinal forces, to the vibration emanating from the buffalo and the freedom to go with the flow. (Veras, 2020, para. 12)

The relationship between nature and colonial legacy has been addressed in the trajectory of Latin American artists, who have drawn attention to the depletion of natural resources, environmental collapse, and the wear and tear of life in the anthropocene as a way of questioning colonial extractivist practices concerning the Earth and their current unfolding. As to the anthropocene, the geological era marked by the human footprint on Earth, Marina Guzzo and Renzo Tadei (2019) comment on the role of the arts in the effort to reorganize the world and create new regimes of perception and visibility:

it is precisely there that the arts figure prominently in debates on the Anthropocene, in the fields of philosophy and social sciences. The capacity that artistic activity has to construct new regimes of perception gains strength as an invaluable resource for human existence and for facing the challenges of the present moment. Although not undisputedly, the Anthropocene reveals the existence of an intense civilizational crisis, in which the epistemic and philosophical constructs of the past (of which technologies are materializations) prove ineffective. Contemporary thought on the Anthropocene identifies two fundamental lines of work: one concerns the creative role of the art world and the other concerns other worlds, the worlds of others, through contact with non-Western peoples who build themselves and

their worlds with other epistemic constructs and other ontological strategies. Artists and indigenous peoples thus figure at the epicenter of the contemporary philosophical debate. (p. 75)

Bringing to the surface local, Indigenous and feminine knowledge has been one of the forms taken by one art that can be understood from a decolonial perspective. To think about the consequences of modernity-coloniality, the impacts of capitalism, and the extractive forms regarding the planet's natural resources, connecting them to poetic practices that question and deepen the discussion around the colonial legacy. We propose to think about the work of Juliana Notari from that point of view.

The relationship between body, colonial legacy, and nature is reinforced in [Amuamas](#). Again in white, while reproducing and changing the rituals of care and cleaning, generally related to the feminine — and addressed in so many ways by other Brazilian artists — Notari digs a vagina-shaped slit in the trunk of an Amazonian *samaúma* tree where she introduces a gynecological speculum, which she ends up covering with her menstrual blood.

According to the artist, the choice of the tree was not by chance: it represents the sacred feminine, fertility, abundance, and the ability to make women pregnant. The artist always uses the body in cycles of life and death. The artist relied on her relationship with local shamans to ask for advice and permission to execute the work. Aggressive and cruel, the rape committed, thought and followed by Juliana in the "mother of the forests" is a metaphor that echoes in female bodies. Wound and trauma: colonial legacy and the formation of Brazil.

## Conclusion

In expanding, deepening, and commenting on the essay "As Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas no Contexto Ibero-Americano e o Pensamento Pós-Colonial e Decolonial" (Contemporary Art Practices in the Ibero-American Context and Postcolonial and Decolonial Thinking; Sales & Cabrera, 2020), we gather in this text analyses of Jota Mombaça, Michelle Mattiuzzi, Paulo Nazareth, and Juliana Notari, who add to the previous ones in the mentioned article: Yonamine, Grada Kilomba and Daniela Ortiz. While working on the problematic discussion around the emergence of a field of thought called "postcolonial" and a decolonial project, the focus was on how poetic practices related to the discussion around the colonial legacy, the traumas of slavery, and the unfoldings of colonialism today are configured in Brazil. From a historical approach, in this article, we try to understand how postcolonial studies produce influence in Brazil and the decolonial turn and thought consolidated in Latin America to understand how to produce responses from the Brazilian art field to issues involving decolonization. This analysis is still circumstantial and must be expanded, even to contemplate the different authors that emerged in Brazil at the turn of the 21st century and dealt with the decolonial debate. When debating postcolonial studies and the decolonial project, it becomes evident how the decolonization of art is related to the questioning of the Eurocentric thought matrix from its racialized and subalternized world representation schemes, as well as to the performative character of the one who narrates. In other words, the decolonization of art and thought, as well as of the ways of being and being in the world, is not dissociated from the emergence of artists, writers, and intellectuals who question the hegemony of the stereotypes created by colonial representations and reclaim the right of self-representation and the creation of non-colonial narratives and images or those that escape and completely refuse the colonial imaginary and the Euro-centered worldview. By bringing Juliana Notari's work in the context of this discussion around the forms of a decolonial contemporary art, we emphasize that it is not enough to think only about the ethnic-racial issues that go through colonial forms and representations, but that, as Lélia Gonzalez (1984) underlines, racism and sexism must be thought of inseparably. On the other hand, even though this issue has not been unfolded here, to include a non-Black artist within the decolonial debate implies dialoguing with the ideas of Kabengele Munanga, Emmanuel

Araújo, among others, when thinking of an Afro-Brazilian art and the implications of the use of this concept. A decolonial contemporary art concerns its form and content and the subject that engenders the discourse. We believe that this discussion can provoke unfoldings that escape this text and become increasingly unavoidable when announced in our present.

Translation: Tânia Vasco

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## Biographic Note

**Michelle Sales** is a researcher, teacher, and independent curator. She is an associate professor at the School of Fine Arts at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (since 2010) and the Graduate Program in Multimedia of the State University of Campinas. She is the coordinator of the research network Postcolonial and Peripheral Cinemas in Brazil and Portugal and the project *As Práticas Artísticas Contemporâneas e o Pensamento Pós-Colonial e Decolonial* (Contemporary Art Practices and Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought). She did a postdoctoral fellowship in contemporary studies at the University of Coimbra (2018-2020), coordinated the research project *À Margem do Cinema Português* (On the Fringes of Portuguese Cinema; 2020), funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. She is a former grantee of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in the Investigadores Estrangeiros (Foreigner Researchers) program (2013-2014) and collaborates with the Communication and Society Research Center of the University of Minho (2020). As a curator, among other exhibitions, include: "Daqui Para Frente: Arte Contemporânea em Angola" (From now on: Contemporary Art in Angola; Caixa Cultural, Rio de Janeiro, 2017; Caixa Cultural, Brasília, 2018). She works in postcolonial, decolonial, anti-colonial studies, intersectional feminism, ethnic-racial relations, and gender.

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## Notes

1. In Brazil, the decision to use the term "descolonial" (portuguese version) implies a political position since the term is not a simple translation or synonym of the current term used by Latin Americans, the "decolonial". Therefore, "descolonial" refers to a discussion whose matrix is Brazilian thought and context.

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