



**Breaking Boundaries:
Exploring Creative Resistance in Brazilian Feminist Art and Activism Against
Gender-Based Violence**

MA Thesis

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1. Introduction

Brazil, a country renowned for both its vibrant cultural heritage and its social disparities, has become a hotbed of feminist resistance in recent decades. Amidst the socio-political landscape, gender-based violence persists, affecting women from all walks of life, perpetuating a cycle of fear, oppression, and marginalization that reflects colonization patterns. According to Waters (2021), in 2016, it was estimated that more than 12 women were killed each day in Brazil, placing the country at the 13th position globally in terms of the average rate of female homicides. Moreover, Brazil has reported the largest number of murders of trans and gender-diverse individuals compared to any other country worldwide. However, within this reality, feminist artists and activists have played an essential role in challenging the status quo.

A wave of feminist art and activism has swept Brazilian society, challenging deeply rooted gender-based violence, pushing the boundaries of creative expression, and providing voices to marginalized groups. This is an examination of the dynamic realm where Brazilian feminist artists and activists intersect, exploring the innovative approaches they employ, such as installations, murals, performances, and social media, to confront and dismantle the pervasive violence inflicted upon women, especially those that are lacking privilege.

This research holds significance as it sheds light on the transformative power of art and activism by addressing the pressing issue of gender-based violence and its complexities. By analyzing the creative practices employed by Brazilian feminist artists, this thesis aims to unravel the symbolism and impact behind their chosen mediums, while placing them within the contemporary Brazilian social context.

I have chosen to examine the work of three feminist artists who provide valuable perspectives on the feminist art scene in Brazil. First, I use Rosana Paulino's artwork to provide an angle on the crucial relationship between gender and race in the country. She uses relevant concepts in her artwork blending memory, identity, and suturing. Second, I explain key concepts used by the transgender, non-binary "bicha", Jota Mombaça. In their productions, the notions of gender disobedience, redistribution of violence, and anti-colonization reinforce a contemporary approach to intersectional feminism. The last artist I chose to illustrate feminism and the challenges of gender-based violence is Aleta Valente, a feminist performance artist that has an important voice regarding reproductive rights, activism in social media, and generating public debate.

These artists can collaborate to confront what is happening with some marginalized groups of women in Brazil, those that are not heard and face harsh consequences. They present perspectives on the social context. By engaging critically with their artistic expressions and modes of activism, I seek to understand how they challenge social norms, foster dialogue, and promote societal change. Hence, this thesis will address the question: *How do Brazilian feminist artists and activists use creative approaches to challenge gender-based violence in contemporary society?*

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations and scope of this study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its findings. While this thesis strives to provide insights into the creative resistance of Brazilian feminist artists and activists against gender-based violence, it is important to note some limitations. Due to the vastness and diversity of the Brazilian feminist art and activism scene, it is not possible to include every artist and activist in this study. Therefore, a selective approach was employed, focusing on representative examples that showcase a range of creative mediums and highlight some of the marginalized groups in the country.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the three selected artists, their expressions, motivations, and impact, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of the intersections between art, activism, and gender-based violence within the contemporary Brazilian context.

In the subsequent chapters, a deeper explanation into the theoretical framework, methodology, and creative approaches utilized by Brazilian feminist artists and activists is provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis draws upon intersectional feminism and some of the fundamental issues that feminism in Brazil has to deal with to develop a more equal society. To understand how Brazilian artists and activists use creative approaches to challenge gender-based violence a range of critical concepts is used.

Primarily, in the chapter 4, a short introduction is provided about feminism in Brazil using Heleieth Saffioti's *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes: Mito e Realidade* (1979) (*The Woman in the Society of Classes: Myth and Reality*), followed by some context on what

fourth-wave feminism means in Brazil with Jacielene Maria Silva's book *Feminismo Na Atualidade: A Formação Da Quarta Onda* (2019) (*Feminism Today: The Making of the Fourth Wave*), where it is fundamental to understand the role of social media in contemporary feminism.

The first artist analyzed is Rosana Paulino (chapter 5), who works closely with theories about gender and race. In this chapter, concepts such as suturing and memory are employed by the artist in dialogue with other feminist theorists, such as Nira Yuval-Davis in the articles "Women, Citizenship and Difference" (1997) and "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging" (2006), therefore relating it to concepts of belonging and identity.

When discussing the provocative art of Jota Mombaça (chapter 6), anti-colonial lenses are applied to examine colonial legacies and power dynamics. A short movie made by the artist is analyzed using the concepts of the poor image and the sublime, delivering insights about the redistribution of violence and gender disobedience. In this chapter, works by authors such as the artist herself, as well as Philip Shaw in the book *The Sublime* (2007) and Hiro Steyerl in "In Defense of the Poor Image" (2009) form the analytical basis.

Finally, the discourse on reproductive rights provides a crucial framework for understanding the complexities of bodily autonomy, participatory art, and social media activism used by Aleta Valente (chapter 7). This chapter will draw on the work of the authors: Carolina Matos in "New Brazilian Feminisms and online networks: Cyberfeminism, protest and the Female 'Arab Spring.' International Sociology" (2017), Chantal Mouffe's "Art & Research" (2007) and Kris Rutten in "*Participation, Art and Digital Culture*"(2018). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this research aims to offer an analysis of the interplay between gender violence and feminist art and activism.

The power of art as a form of resistance cannot be underestimated in the context of addressing gender-based violence and promoting equality in Brazil. Throughout history, art has served as a potent means to challenge societal norms, ignite dialogue, and raise consciousness regarding pressing social issues. By harnessing their creative expressions, artists can shine a spotlight on the pervasive nature of gender-based violence, inspiring viewers to reflect, empathize, and take action.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research thesis using multimodal analysis. This methodology is well-suited to investigating how Brazilian artists and activists use creative approaches to challenge gender-based violence. To address the research question, a qualitative approach is adopted to capture the nuanced experiences, perspectives, and artistic expressions of the selected artists. The methodology consists of three main components: data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. By employing qualitative methods, the research aims to capture symbolic and anthropological perspectives. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of how these artists employ various mediums, including installations, photographs, collages, murals, performances, and social media, to address issues experienced by women within different Brazilian contexts. Interpretations of the artworks are intertwined critically with the theoretical framework, drawing connections between the main themes, and situating them within the broader socio-political context of contemporary Brazil.

The criteria used to select the data in this research were based on the aim of including representative examples of Brazilian feminist artists and activists who have made significant contributions to addressing gender-based violence, not only in the artistic realm but also as activists and public speakers. The selection aimed to showcase a range of creative approaches while focusing on artists from marginalized groups in Brazil. The three artists chosen - Rosana Paulino, Jota Mombaça, and Aleta Valente - were selected based on their artistic expressions, their contributions to the feminist art scene in Brazil, and their relevance to the research question. It is also important to highlight that Brazil is a diverse and multicultural country, meaning that the artists and activists chosen for this research are a small sample of ideas on feminism and forms to advocate against gender violence. The plurality of interpretations is key for a deep understanding and effective social change.

Furthermore, the context of Brazilian society, which is characterized by a vibrant cultural heritage, social disparities, and rising cases of femicide. The socio-political landscape of Brazil provides the backdrop for the exploration of feminist art and activism as a response to these issues. The context shapes the experiences.

As a researcher, I recognize that this research cannot be impartial. I believe that as a Brazilian woman, I am entitled to show what is happening with women in my country. I am aware that it is not possible to provide a reflection on every artist, however, I believe these artists are crucial to an understanding the results of a long process of colonization. The

context shapes experience and I aim demonstrate the beauty and power of what is being produced. In the analysis I develop a subjective interpretation as well as the socio-political context in which their work is situated, highlighting their collective potential to drive social change.

By harnessing the power of artists' voices, this essay seeks to contribute to the awareness of gender-based violence and the alarming number of women's deaths. It is crucial to contextualize Brazilian art production not only within the local context, but also in the international arena. Brazil, like any other country, is influenced by global trends, both positive and negative.

4. A Short Introduction: Feminism in a Global Context

Feminism, simply stated, is a movement that believes in the idea of social, economic, and political equality between the sexes (Brunell & Burkett, 2023). Feminism claims the freedom of women, their bodies, and their wishes regarding gender violence and discrimination. Feminists have a history based on activism and social change, which has made crucial achievements in the intellectual, philosophical, political, and artistic spheres. One of the most notable accomplishments is the fight for women's suffrage, which granted women the right to vote, varying according to country and social contexts. In Brazil, this achievement only happened in 1932, when finally, women started to be seen as citizens. Feminist activism has also played a crucial role in securing women's reproductive rights, with landmark decisions like the United States Supreme Court's decision on *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 legalizing abortion and providing a women's right to decide upon their body. Although this case showed great progress, these issues cannot be taken for granted – as the recent (2022) decision to overturn *Roe* demonstrates. Feminist advocacy has led to significant progress in workplace equality, such as the right to equal pay for equal work, as seen in the US Equal Pay Act of 1963. Additionally, the feminist movement has brought awareness to domestic violence and sexual assault and advocated for survivors.

The feminist movement is mainly described in three "waves" that reflect the predominant demands and actions of each social context and historical moment. The three waves of feminism mark significant milestones in the fight for gender equality and women's rights. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the first wave emerged, focusing on

legal rights for women. It aimed to challenge traditional gender roles and secure women's political participation. The second wave emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, addressing broader issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and combating gender-based violence. This wave emphasized the importance of social and cultural changes to achieve gender equality. The third wave, starting in the 1990s, sought to address intersectionality and inclusivity, recognizing that women's experiences are shaped by race, class, sexuality, and other factors. It advocated for diversity and challenged the notion of a singular "women's experience". These waves have laid the foundation for ongoing feminist activism and continue to inspire individuals worldwide in the pursuit of gender justice.

Today, contemporary feminism is understood as the fourth wave, as stated by Cochrane in the book *All the Rebel Women: The Rise of the fourth wave of Feminism* (2013). This latest wave is based on the growth of social media platforms, globalization, and the ramifications of the twenty-first century and its specific complexities. The fourth wave brings more authenticity and identity to the struggles Brazilian women speak about and their representation in the world.

The Brazilian feminist movement has played a crucial role in achieving significant victories in the fight for women's rights. These achievements should be celebrated by all women, regardless of race or social context; however, sometimes the situation is otherwise. One notable achievement is enacting the Maria da Penha Law in 2006, which criminalizes domestic violence and provides protection for victims. In 2015, the Femicide Law, which has become a new category of crime that specifically addresses women murdered because of their gender, provides the legal framework for penalties. It is relevant to notice that when a new category of crime is created to punish, it reflects a greater necessity. According to data from the *Brazilian Public Security Forum*, in the first half of 2022, an average of four women per day were victims of femicide in Brazil. This number is alarming.

As stated by the Brazilian sociologist Heleieth Saffioti in the book *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* (1979), there is a relationship between social inequality and the violence suffered by vulnerable groups, such as women and children. In the book, Saffioti analyzes the position of women in a capitalist society, stipulating that oppression is connected to the social structure and the class system. Overall, Saffioti's analysis focuses on the intersectionality of oppression, recognizing that women are not a homogeneous group and that the experiences of women are shaped by their race, class, and other factors. Although written decades ago, Saffioti's arguments are a rich instigation for understanding intersectional oppression.

4.1 Fourth-Wave Feminism in Brazil

The fourth wave of feminism in Brazil emerged in the early 2010s, building on the successes of the previous waves and addressing new challenges women face in contemporary society. This wave is characterized by a strong presence on social media and a focus on intersectionality, recognizing the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other forms of oppression. Brazilian activism addresses social issues and matters looking inside what is happening with Brazilian women, and their particular struggles, shifting away from a narrow global north perspective/westerncentric perspective. Therefore, it also acknowledges the multiple forms of oppression which women face. Not only educated women from an elite class should experience the right to equality.

Intersectional feminism emphasizes women who encounter multiple, simultaneous types of discrimination, aiming to comprehend violence, power relationships, and structural complexities in numerous contexts and situations. Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the term that had been used for decades in her essays *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (2014).

Carta Capital, a Brazilian newspaper, stated that in 2022, Brazil recorded 1,410 cases of femicide. On average, a woman was murdered every 6 hours in the country only because of her gender. These numbers are from the Violence Monitor, a project by G1, and the Center for the Study of Violence at the University of São Paulo (NEV-USP). Brazil's rate of femicide is one of the highest in the world. According to a UN report published in late November 2022, the Brazilian rate surpasses the average of all continents (Carta Capital, 2023). Women from different backgrounds, social contexts, and races are murdered, and the fourth wave of feminism, intersectional feminism, considers these intertwined perspectives and contexts. Furthermore, an intersectional approach is essential to cover the diversity in Brazil. As stated by UN Women headquarters, "Using an intersectional lens also means recognizing the historical contexts surrounding an issue. Long histories of violence and systematic discrimination have created deep inequities that disadvantage some from the outset. These inequalities intersect with each other, for example, poverty, caste systems, racism, and sexism, denying people their rights and equal opportunities. The impacts extend across generations" (2020). In addition to addressing these new challenges, the fourth wave continues to advocate for issues that were central to previous waves, such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and representation in politics and other leadership positions.

Moreover, the fourth wave of feminism in Brazil represents a continuation of the feminist movement's ongoing struggle for gender equality while also adapting to the country's reality. By prioritizing intersectionality and incorporating new voices and perspectives, the fourth wave is working towards a more inclusive and effective feminist movement. The online sphere helps to engage and give the spotlight to multiple voices. Through social media and diverse mediums, feminist artists around Brazil are presenting a creative approach to the country's political and social context, generating public debate and awareness about it.

In "Feminismo na atualidade: A Formação Da Quarta Onda" (Feminism nowadays: The formation of the fourth wave) (2019) Jacilene Maria Silva claims that the internet has brought a revolution in communication and that the feminist movement has gained from it. The fourth wave is characterized by the massive use of social media for organization, articulation, and the spread of gender equality. Artists use social media to engage the debate and illustrate perspectives. Feminist art challenges misogyny, sexism, and various ways society creates gender-based inequalities and violence.

In the Brazilian feminist movement, various hashtags have been employed to promote awareness, and mobilization surrounding gender issues. For instance, the hashtag #MeuPrimeiroAssédio (MyFirstHarassment) was created in 2015 to enable women to share their experiences of sexual harassment from an early age, bringing to the forefront discussions on gender-based violence and emphasizing the importance of combating this reality. Similarly, the hashtag #NãoMereçoSerEstuprada (IDon'tDeserveToBeRaped) emerged as a resolute response to rape culture, aiming to challenge victim-blaming discourse. This hashtag was created to encourage women to assert their rights to safety and equality, underscoring that nobody deserves to be a victim of sexual violence. Another example is the hashtag #LuteComoUmaGarota (FightLikeAGirl), which seeks to empower women and challenge gender stereotypes, motivating them to fight for their rights and showcase their strength. It highlights the significance of recognizing the potential and determination of women in all spheres of life. These hashtags, among others, have served as tools to amplify feminist voices, mobilize collective actions, and challenge oppressive social norms. They contribute to visibility, engagement, and awareness regarding the issues faced by women in Brazil, ultimately strengthening the pursuit of a more just and egalitarian society.

While it is true that feminism has strongly appropriated the virtual environment, the fourth wave is not only about "cyber-activism." The popularization of the internet has had a crucial influence on the awakening of the new feminism, as it has given a spotlight to other groups of women democratizing the movement. Feminist art in Brazil tells stories of those

women and their claims for rights. Women can meet other women in the same situation and share their experiences in the public sphere. Feminism in contemporary Brazilian society is a movement that focuses on Brazilian women and not on other countries with different histories, diverting from the three waves that emerged in the 20th century (Silva, 2019, p. 29).

Brazilian activists have found an opportunity to articulate their struggle against gender-based violence, which manifests in various forms in both public and private spheres, through movements such as "March das Vadias" (SlutWalk). SlutWalk is a feminist movement that emerged in Toronto, Canada, in 2011, in response to a comment made by a police officer during a safety seminar, where he stated that "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized" (Dale & Overell, 2018, p. 98). The movement aims to challenge victim-blaming and slut-shaming culture, and advocate for sexual freedom and autonomy. The movement has spread to other countries, including Brazil. In 2011, the first SlutWalk in Brazil was held in São Paulo. Since then, the movement has happened in other cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Porto Alegre. The walk reflects the intersectional approach of the movement, which centers on the experiences of marginalized groups and aims to challenge multiple forms of oppression.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) stated that in 2021, women represented slightly more than half (51.1%) of the Brazilian population. Regarding race, Brazil is a highly diverse country, and women from different racial backgrounds face different socio-economic realities. Based on the IBGE's census data (2010), approximately 47.7% of Brazilian women identify as white, 43.1% as brown (mixed-race), 7.6% as Black, 1.1% as Asian, and 0.5% as Indigenous. When analyzing feminist art, it is possible to notice some important issues about the representation of women that have been helping to construct the history of Brazil and change the narrative. Investigating this contemporary historical appropriation means embracing identity.

Gender-based violence is a significant issue in Brazil, affecting women across all socio-economic backgrounds and racial groups. Gender-based issues in Brazil are often linked to broader issues of gender inequality, poverty, and racial discrimination. Women from marginalized communities, such as Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ women, are often disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, as Saffioti (1979) analyzed.

To explore themes of race, gender, feminism, and power relationships through the works of three Brazilian artists, Rosana Paulino, Jota Mombaça, and Aleta Valente are analyzed. These artists challenge the dominant narratives of Brazilian history and explore the experiences and identities of marginalized groups. Their creative processes and artwork

highlight the urgent need for social and political change and promote a deeper understanding of the complex intersections of race, gender, and power. Using creative approaches, these artists engage with the activism of feminist themes and their impact on Brazilian society, inspiring social change.

5. Rosana Paulino: Feminism and Race

Rosana Paulino (1967- present) was born in São Paulo and is a notable Brazilian visual artist who is recognized for her powerful and provocative works that address issues related to race, gender, and identity. She explores the complex and often painful experiences of Black women in Brazil, challenging the mainstream narratives of Brazilian history and society. In her artwork, she delves into the symbolic places of Black women. She engages with themes such as identity, memory, culture, and belonging. Throughout her career, Paulino has used diverse media methods, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and installation, to confront social and political realities. She delivers a critical perspective on the Brazilian history of colonization, especially regarding slavery and the ongoing struggle for racial equality. Her pieces challenge the status quo and call attention to often invisible forms of oppression and violence against Black women. Beyond her artistic production, she is a public speaker who advocates for the issues of race and gender. Rosana Paulino is an inspiring example of how to translate academic knowledge and reflections into art (and vice-versa), thus, providing a means to interpret what is happening in society.

In 2018 Rosana Paulino held her exhibition, "Suturas" (Sutures), at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, one of Brazil's most prestigious art museums. The concept of the suture is fundamental to analyzing Paulino's artwork. The exhibition featured a series of installations incorporating various techniques and materials, including sewing, embroidery, and weaving. To explore the idea of "suturing" is "to heal" the wounds of history. One of the art pieces presented in the exhibition titled "Parede da Memória" (wall of memory) (1994-2015) is constituted of eleven photographs taken from the artist's personal archive and family albums multiplied and manufactured as *patuás* - objects used as protection amulets in African originated religions. This is the starting point in Paulino's career: a symmetry wall in 19 rows and 78 columns of *patuás*, arranged side by side.



Parede da Memória, 1994/2015- Rosana Paulino. Retrieved from: <https://rosanapaulino.com.br/parede/>

Within Afro-religious practices, the patuá is an essential item, and its contents are considered the most significant component. However, Rosana Paulino challenges this traditional notion in her artwork "Wall of Memory" by utilizing the outer surface of the amulet as a medium for her family portraits. Through small changes of the artwork from time to time, Paulino prevents the gradual fading of her family's images, both on paper and in memory, while combating the erasure of social memories of black people.

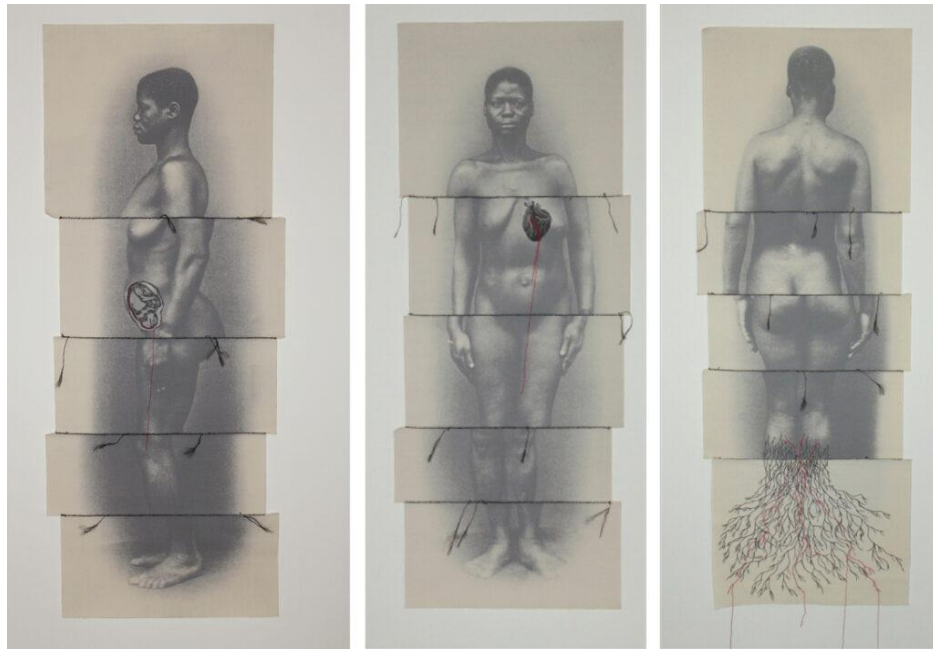
In her artwork, the concept of sewing and suturing is essential to give materialization to the memory of slavery in Brazil. Therefore, slavery is not only a memory that remains in the past. The consequences of it still play an essential role in the social issues of Black people, especially women. Sewing is connected to an idea of work made by women, "a feminine" job. Paulino challenges this notion in her art and criticizes social and gender inequalities. Through sewing, she makes memories present in daily life.

This act of remembrance also challenges the marginalization and invisibility of Black and Afro-Brazilian histories and identities, which have historically been neglected and erased

from mainstream narratives. In this way, Paulino's work is a personal act of reclamation and a political statement that seeks to resist and subvert dominant power structures that perpetuate social and cultural exclusion.

To illustrate the concept of healing through suturing in Paulino's feminist art, another series of art pieces can shed some light on the idea. Flavia de Araujo (2019) has analyzed transatlantic projects of creativity and points out that the Black female body is a sign and a visible display of meaning (p. 66). It is possible to see in many artistic representations how Black women were and are portrayed in society and how it continues to connect with their ancestry. Araujo argues that "contemporary Black women artists negotiate with inherited social structures that, on the one hand, profit from the hypersexualization and commodification of their bodies; and on the other hand fosters mechanisms of silence" (2019, p. 66). Paulino's productions aim to challenge the perspective that Araujo describes, humanizing Black women. At the same time, she wants to appropriate the history of resilience around this group in Brazilian society.

The installation that is analyzed is named "Assentamento", (2013) (translation: settlement). In this work of multi-medium art pieces Paulino uses photographs by the Swiss zoologist Louis Agassiz, that were taken in the second half of the nineteenth century and she points out some key aspects when analyzing the story of these pictures. On Paulino's website one can find a complete explanation of the installation, detailing her artistic choices. The woman in the pictures is unknown; it is not possible to know where she came from, and Paulino even states that the woman could be her great-grandmother. Paulino reintegrates Black women's bodies into the historical narrative of Brazil, colonization, and memory, highlighting marks of identity and belonging that will be further explored in this chapter.



Assentamento, 2013 (Photo: Cláudia Melo)

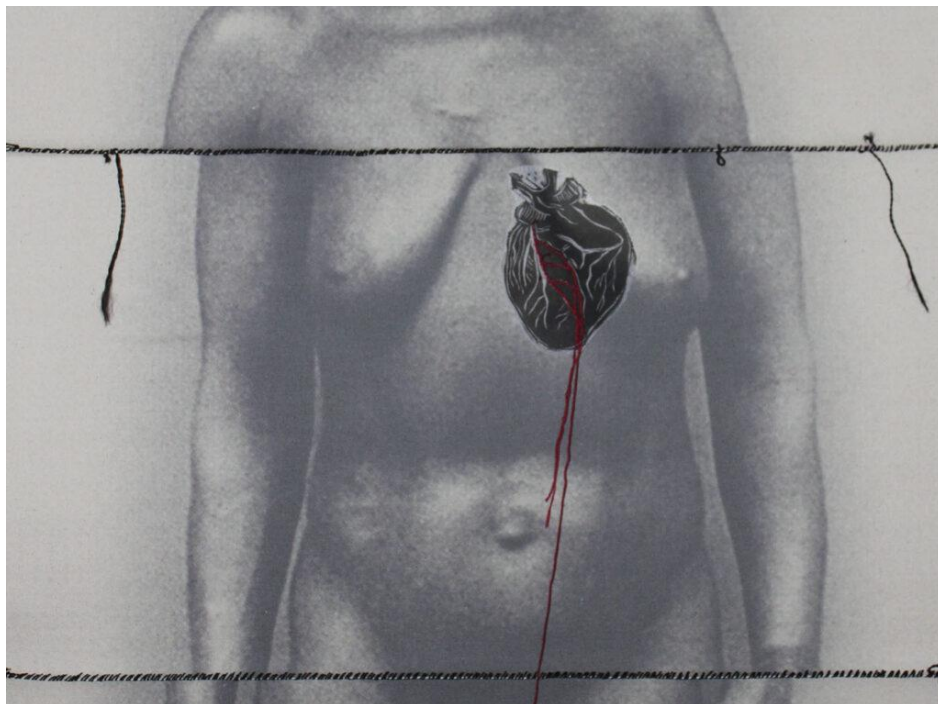
The story behind the pictures helps to provide a context for an analysis of Paulino's artwork and what she advocates for. According to her website, the photographs were taken between 1865 and 1866 during a scientific expedition to Brazil led by Agassiz. The zoologist believed in the racial superiority of white people. He sought to collect data to support his racist theories and commissioned a series of photographs of African people in Rio de Janeiro to prove the supposed superiority. Ironically, the scientific nature of these photographs resulted in a unique record of the enslaved population in the city. As stated by Paulino (2013), rather than supporting Agassiz's theories, these photographs provide a vital record of the people who contribute to what Brazilian culture is today. Furthermore, the text goes on to explore the notion of settling, which refers to the forced transportation of African people to Brazil, where they had to establish and fight for their right to continue practicing their beliefs and culture. Their identity was almost erased. The installation aims to honor these people and their contribution to Brazilian culture.

In Paulino's artwork, it is possible to see how the artist deploys the representation of the Black female body redefining homogeneous historical narratives and, as stated by De Araújo, liberating the Black body to become a sign of plurality and agent of meaning-production (2019, p. 69). Paulino's art goes beyond the conceptual and methodological spheres; it is a way to show and tell the stories of slavery in Brazil, and the consequences that it has in the present - it is a way to tell the stories of Black women in

marginalized societies that still suffer from the consequences of colonial times and reveal the scars that remain in contemporary society.

In 2012 Paulino decided to study issues relating slavery and the (pseudo) scientific production in Brazil, such as the studies of Agassiz. Assentamento offers an alternative perspective on the female Black body by showcasing its individual yet communal history. Paulino's creative process involves enlarging Agassiz's photographs to their natural size and transferring them onto a piece of fabric, which is cut into larger parts. The sections are misaligned and apply visible rough sutures. The artist purposefully did that to represent the discontinuity of Black women's history, the disconnection between the past and present. This process happens on the three images, frontal, rear, and profile. Through this process, the artist engages in a process of remaking the memory and identity of this woman. Agassiz's photograph is documentation, an example of a "pure type": a female slave kidnapped in West Africa and enslaved in the Portuguese colony (De Araújo, 2019, p. 72). Paulino aims to embody the recovery of historical memory and identity, represented in the processing of suturing.

5.1 Suturing: Memory, Identity, and Belonging



Assentamento, 2013 (photo: Cláudia Melo)

Rosana Paulino builds her artwork based on memory and ethnic identity. She uses the concept she created of suturing to engage with memory, identity, and belonging. In this section, it is explained how these concepts can be engaging in the discourse of a feminist activist in public debate. The act of suturing the images together challenges the origins of Black women in Brazilian society. This production and documentation are highly relevant to the education of a community, developing a better understanding of their past and collective memory.

The installation *Assentamento* (2013) brings different layers of discussion regarding the cultural heritage of African society in Brazil. In that installation, expressions are using African languages that are still used in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese. The general context of the exhibition shows how much African culture is present in mainstream society, such as language, religion, culinary dances, and music.

Language is important to build identity. According to Anderson (1991), the emergence of "print capitalism" led individuals to perceive themselves as part of a specific group that could access and read written material. During the colony period of Brazil, African slaves had their language, however, if they were seeking a rise in social status that would mean learning Portuguese. Their access to learning tools was limited, so it was the chance that they could have to thrive. Thus, language shapes privilege.

Anderson (1991) views nations as cultural systems that enable individuals to envision a shared sense of belonging with an extended community. The exclusionary politics in the colonial period left Black people aside. However, words of African culture were incorporated into Brazilian Portuguese. More than that, cultural traditions were also absorbed, such as capoeira, maracatu, and other forms of cultural manifestations, that are pillars of Brazilian culture. The author claims that identity formation through national belonging and mother tongue affiliation are closely linked. A shared language serves as a crucial factor in the creation of a nation and national identity, as claimed Anderson (1991). The belief in "one language, one nation" is often a driving force behind various national initiatives. Brazilian society has numerous languages, from indigenous languages to dialects, and all are products of history and the bricks that are the foundations of the community.

According to Yuval-Davis (1997), national projects may rely on more than just the belief in a shared language (p.12). Three additional ideologies can be used to construct a nation: a common ancestry, a common culture, or a shared citizenship. Knowing these beliefs helps to create a sense of intersectional national identity that does not rely solely upon a common language. Piller (2001) states the idea of common values resulting from a common

heritage and shared memories (2001, p. 261). In Paulino's productions, it is possible to interpret the political tensions and the complexity of Brazilian history that is represented through the concept of suturing. Suturing according to her is about connecting and sewing together these stress points. The discontinuity is sutured together to show the connection between past and present, showing disparities in the present. Brazil is constituted by many discontinuous cultures that collectively integrate into a unique nation.

It might be a challenge to overcome prejudices and develop a society that is so intertwined with colonial history. Paulino makes the memory and the identity of Black women alive in contemporary society. She provides a shift in the narrative and how this community finds its role in integrating Brazilian society. As stated by Yuval-Davis (2006), "belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations" (2006, p. 199). As this dynamic process encounters intolerance and prejudice in history, a shift in power relations is necessary.

Yuval-Davis argues that the notion of belonging is constituted of three different major analytical levels: social locations, individuals' identification, and emotional attachments to various collections. It is useful to apply these layers to analyze Paulino's artwork and its relevance. As stated by Yuval-Davis (2006) when referring to someone's gender, race, class, nation, age group, kinship group, or profession, we are, in one way or another, actually talking about their social and economic position in society. This positioning has certain implications for the power relations in society. Each individual's location along these axes of power is not just a static category, but rather, it represents a certain level of power concerning other categories. For instance, whether someone is a man or a woman, black or white, working-class or middle-class, or a member of a European or an African nation, all of these categories represent a certain level of power or positionality in society. However, the positionalities of these categories tend to be different in different historical contexts and are often fluid and subject to contestation (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). While individuals may identify with a particular identity category, such as being Black, or female, their social location is often shaped by multiple intersecting factors. In the context of Brazilian feminism and art production, Rosana Paulino is a great example of intersectionality in art and feminism, and how it shapes experiences in Brazil. Even though the interpretation of an art piece can vary for each person, the critique and message are passed through and gives the spotlight to that specific gender and race, the black/slavery, and its particular history. Being a Black woman in Brazil has its specificity, these women marginalized and excluded groups are

advocating for their right to belong equally in post-colonial society. It is interesting to notice that depending on those multiple factors and the multiple ways in which women experience life, it creates a new level of power and therefore, oppression. A Black woman who belongs to a higher social class will encounter different challenges than one in the lower and most financially vulnerable class, however every Black woman in a society such as Brazil experiences oppression and exclusion in a certain level or environment. Paulino shows that this oppression dates back to colonialism; her artwork often incorporates critiques in which black women have been historically excluded, showing abusive power relations.

Thus, by acknowledging how social and economic locations intersect and shape power relations, Paulino has been able to highlight the challenges faced by Black women in Brazil, advocating for their inclusion, the feeling of belonging, and empowerment. It is crucial to understand that intersectionality in a social division as described by Yuval-Davis (2006) is not separate categories, but rather they are mutually constructive and connected. In Brazil races are mixed making these concepts even more complex: a Black woman with light skin color can experience exclusion differently than a dark skin woman. Paulino brings awareness of these factors and the complexities of Black belonging.

Rosana Paulino's artwork, "Assentamento" (2013) depicts a Black woman and her body sutured in a way that suggests a sense of collective strength and resilience. The woman has different elements attached to her body, representing her journey, for example, her heart bleeding, which can be seen as a symbol of their cultural identity and resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards.

The artwork highlights the complex and intersecting nature of social identity, particularly in relation to gender and race. The woman in the artwork is Black and female; it is known that she is a slave, however, it is not possible to know exact information, for example, her background, nationality, age, and other elements that shape their social location and experiences.

Furthermore, by depicting the woman in a strong and unified manner, the artwork challenges the notion that Black women are powerless or insignificant and instead celebrates their strength and resilience in the face of oppression and exclusion. The artwork celebrates the diversity and complexity of Black women's identities and experiences and challenges dominant narratives and categorizations that seek to marginalize them.

Another interesting issue arises when discussing these productions, it is the politics of belonging, particularly in terms of identifications and emotional attachments. Yuval Davis

(2006) discusses how identities are constructed through narratives that people tell themselves and others, which can relate to individual attributes or group membership (2006, p. 202). Identity narratives can be individual or collective and are often connected. Paulino's artwork is a collective narrative that empowers individual narratives of Black women. The artist shifts the socially accepted story, relating it to the past and bringing it to the present to tell what those women have been through. Yuval-Davis claims that belonging is not just a cognitive process, but also involves emotional investment and a desire for attachments. Identity is seen as a process of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong (2006, p. 202). These narratives can also relate to group memberships, such as ethnic, racial, national, cultural, or religious affiliations. When Paulino makes the exhibition of Assentamento (2013) she is changing the narratives of what Black women have been and what they are becoming by telling these narratives, belonging, and engaging with everything that is and can become as individuals in society. Narratives of identity can be individual or collective, and one can be a resource for the former. This means that a person's sense of identity can be shaped not only by their personal experiences and characteristics but also by their sense of belonging to a larger group or community (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). Assentamentos bring awareness of Black women and their past. Therefore, as Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests, belonging involves emotional investment and a desire for attachments. Individuals and groups have a yearning to belong and become part of something larger than themselves. Paulino changes the slavery narrative, bringing attention to history, and shaping ongoing experiences of Black women in Brazilian society.

Not all senses of belonging hold the same level of importance for individuals. Emotions, like perceptions, can change in response to different times and situations. However, emotions become more central to people's constructions of self-identity, when they feel more threatened or insecure. In extreme cases, people are willing to make sacrifices, to maintain their identities and attachments. In the case of Black slave women, they had to survive, leaving their identity erased. They were seen as objects without past or importance. Sometimes, historical contexts can make belonging and identity important dimensions of people's social positioning. However, it is crucial to differentiate between these analytical levels when analyzing belonging. Without this differentiation, there would be no possibility for resistance, and biology or belonging would become a person's destiny. It is necessary to direct a politics of resistance not only at oppressed people's social and economic locations but also at their internalizations of forced constructions of self and identity, as argued by Frantz Fanon (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203). Rosana Paulino makes an effort to restore this identity in

the present by providing an attachment to the past. Constructions of belonging are performative and involve repetitive practices within specific social and cultural spaces, that link individual and collective behavior. This is crucial for constructing and reproducing identity narratives and attachments (Yuval- Davis, 2006, p. 203). Paulino's artwork highlights the ongoing struggle for recognition and representation of Black women's perspectives in Brazilian society and underscores the power of art as a tool for resistance and social change.

Paulino is an example of what Yuval-Davis (2006) presented as a complex understanding of how identity and belonging are constructed and reproduced through narratives, emotions, and social practices. The idea that constructions of belonging are performative, highlights the importance of repeated practices within specific social and cultural spaces. It also suggests that our sense of attachment to particular social objects is not fixed or predetermined, but rather shaped and reshaped over time.

To sum up this chapter, Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that the politics of belonging are shaped by how individuals are categorized and classified within society, and by the power dynamics that emerge from these categorizations (p. 204).

Rosana Paulino's artwork explores issues of exclusion, concerning race. She challenges dominant narratives about Black femininity and asserts the agency and creativity of women in shaping their own identities and histories from a post-colonial perspective. In other words, Paulino's artwork can be seen as a form of resistance to these issues, as it asserts the agency and creativity of women in shaping their own identities and histories. Her work also serves as a reminder that the struggles of Black women in Brazil are an integral part of the larger feminist movement, and that true social change requires an intersectional approach that recognizes and addresses the multiple forms of oppression faced by marginalized groups.

The concept of memory, ancestry, and identity are intertwined with the sense of belonging in a society. The role of Black women in Brazilian society is fundamental for the construction of the Brazilian identity and culture. Voices like Paulino's are important to highlight the participation of those women in this identity-building and politics of the belonging process. Due to miscegenation and the whitewashing process, to know the history of these Black women is to know the story of a big part of Brazilian women. It is fundamental to advocate for these memories and identities to create a more inclusive and equitable society. The empowerment of these women is to empower the individual self and the collective.

6. Jota Mombaça- Gender Disobedience and Anti-Colonial Feminism

Jota Mombaça is an artist with an interdisciplinary background who incorporates elements of poetry, critical theory, queer studies, political intersectionality, anti-colonial justice, and violence redistribution into their work. Mombaça, as a non-binary person, reclaims the term "bicha" - a slang term used to discriminate against gay men - as a form of self-identification. Mombaça's performances, performative readings, and workshops often center around these elements. The artist's production is characterized by the use of sound and visual elements, which play a crucial role in relating gender disobedience and decolonial perspectives. In their recent work, Mombaça explores the relationship between monstrosity and humanity in the Global South. The artist challenges the dominant Modern-Colonial subject and imagines what comes after the end of the world, after the redistribution of violence. Mombaça believes that to reach equality in the world, blood has to be spilled, redistributing the violence to those who were violated throughout history.

Jota Mombaça's work is deeply rooted in anti-colonial critique and gender disobedience, which are both important elements in their artistic practice. By exploring these themes, Mombaça aims to challenge dominant power structures and hierarchies and to create spaces for resistance. These elements are present in their productions and engage a radical, yet, necessary, perspective on modernity. The philosopher Paul B. Preciado in his book *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018) developed a similar theory. The author in the manifesto argues that sexualities are like languages, complex systems of communication and identity built through history, and just like languages, a human being can learn more than one. However, during our childhood, we have learned a "monolingualism" that is imposed and naturalized. Sexuality, according to Preciado, is a social artifact. He goes on to say that sexual realism is a political technology to inject determinism into the process of social reproduction and context. The goal of dissident practices and gender disobedience is not physical pleasure, but to be extravagant and to experience freedom (Preciado, 2018). Preciado and Mombaça advocate for the decolonization of body and sexualities.

One of the key aspects of Mombaça's work is their use of language and the reappropriation of terms that are historically used to oppress marginalized communities. For instance one of their criticisms is that by using the word "bicha", to self-identify, Mombaça recognizes the power of language in shaping and reinforcing societal norms and expectations. By using the Brazilian slang term "bicha", Mombaça is reclaiming a term that has been used

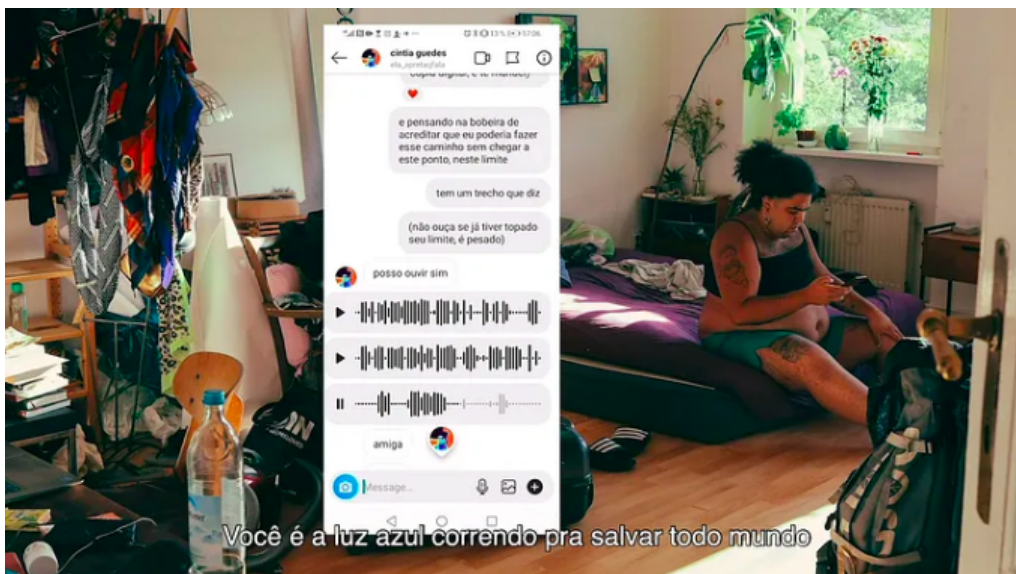
to stigmatize and discriminate against gay men. This act of reappropriation by using slang in a non-pejorative way, according to Mombaça in their book *Não Vão Nos Matar Agora* (2021), is a form of resistance against dominant power structures that seek to marginalize and silence non-normative identities. In addition to their use of language, Mombaça's work also explores the intersections between anti-colonialism and gender disobedience. By examining how colonialism has shaped our understanding of gender and sexuality, Mombaça subverts norms. For example, in their text about monstrosity and humanity, named "Pode um Cu Mestiço Falar?" (translation: Can a mixed ass talk?) (2015), Mombaça is examining how colonialism has constructed certain bodies as monstrous and others as human, and how this has contributed to the oppression of marginalized communities. Preciado in the speech *Can the monster speak?* (2019) also sheds light on the importance of challenging existing belief systems to embrace the full spectrum of human experience and questions the criteria for accepting a human body within social and political collectives. It prompts readers to question the criteria for accepting human bodies within social and political collectives beyond genital difference and gender expression, engaging in freedom and tolerance. By foregrounding the importance of anti-colonial critique and gender disobedience in their work, Mombaça is contributing to a broader movement of decolonization and liberation, and offering new possibilities for imagining a more just and equitable world.

Jota Mombaça's artistic practice is deeply concerned with the significance of language and the medium. The artist has been exploring the sonic and visual features of words and their meanings, often using language as a tool to express their ideas and engage with their audience. For Mombaça, language is also a political tool that can be used to challenge dominant narratives and subvert power structures.

In their work, Mombaça often employs a variety of mediums, including performance, video, poetry, and critical theory. Each medium is carefully selected to convey a specific message or concept and to challenge the dominant discourse around issues such as gender, race, and sexuality. Through their use of diverse mediums, Mombaça can create a multi-layered and complex artistic language that invites the viewer to engage with the challenges of society on multiple levels. One of the most significant aspects of Mombaça's work is their use of non-linear narratives, which are often fragmented and dispersed. This reflects their interest in disrupting traditional modes of storytelling and representation, and in challenging the linear and hierarchical structures, often used to reinforce dominant power relations. Mombaça invites the viewer to question their assumptions and engage with the work more critically.

Moreover, Mombaça has been examining how racialized transgender individuals negotiate their experiences of embodiment and belonging, in a world that is defined by hierarchies of power and exclusion and relates it to the process of colonization. The artist focus on understanding the world through the senses and acknowledging the entangled relationship between humans and the environment. The artist's work actively engages with the intersectionality of different forms of oppression, including race, gender, sexuality, and class.

6.1 "O que não tem espaço está em todo lugar" by Jota Mombaça



Screenshot movie: O que não tem espaço está em todo lugar (2020)

O Que Não Tem Espaço Está Em Todo Lugar (translation: "What Has No Space Is Everywhere") (2020) is an experimental film directed by Jota Mombaça during the Covid-19 pandemic. The film explores the concept of displacement, both physical and emotional, and the effects it has on individual and collective experiences. The title itself sets the tone for the exploration of liminal spaces and the notion of the in-between. That can be related to the issues of transgender women and the marginalized positions and challenges of these groups.

The film consists of a series of vignettes that are interconnected by themes of memory, trauma, and the search for belonging. Mombaça's use of abstract imagery, spoken word, and music creates an immersive experience that engages with the emotional landscape of the film. One of the central themes is the experience of transgender individuals and the challenges they face in navigating society. Mombaça employs a critical and intersectional

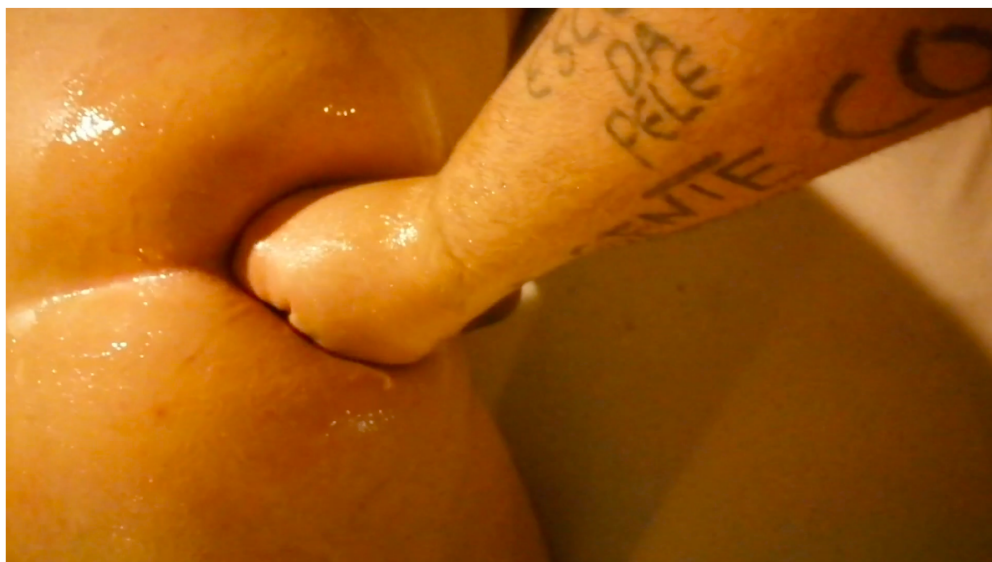
lens to explore race, gender, and sexuality, and how they shape experiences of displacement and otherness, which will be further explored in this chapter.

The film's focus on displacement and liminality is also reflected in its use of space and location. Mombaça filmed the movie in various locations, including the city streets, abandoned buildings, and natural landscapes. The spaces in which the film takes place reflect the characters' emotional states and their search for a sense of place, reflecting gender violence and misplacement.

6.2 Gender Disobedience and Its Symbolic Actions

The short movie *O que não tem espaço está em todo lugar* by Jota Mombaca is a thought-provoking piece that engages with the concepts of sublime, anti-colonialism, and gender disobedience. Therefore, it can provide an interesting overview of intersectional feminism and illustrate some themes regarding gender violence in Brazilian artwork.

When going in-depth with the concept of the sublime in this short movie, it is possible to notice the sublime from different points and perspectives. As Philip Shaw in the book *The Sublime* (2007) states based on Burke and Kant, the sublime is a concept that refers to a feeling of awe or terror that arises from experiencing something greater than oneself (2007, p. 68), it is related to the feeling of beyond the self. In the movie, the sublime is explored through the portrayal of nature as a force that is both beautiful and terrifying. It is ordinary and magical. The short movie evokes feelings through human senses and can shock, making the audience disoriented through their senses. The shots of the vast landscape and the sound of the wind blowing create a sense of awe that is characteristic of the sublime. At the same time, the desolate and seemingly uninhabitable nature of the landscape also inspires fear and unease. The explicit sex scene (fisting) at the end of the movie shows another characteristic of this concept which is pleasure and pain (Shaw, 2007, p. 73). The music and all the elements of social media and daily aspects of the artist's life when put on a screen can evoke feelings of sublime.



Scenes from *O que não tem espaço está em todo lugar* (2020)

The essay "In Defense of the Poor Image" (2009) by Hito Steyerl explores the concept of the poor image and its significance in contemporary digital culture. This concept can present in the short movie by Mombaça. The poor image is described as a low-quality, degraded, and often freely distributed copy in motion. It undergoes deterioration as it circulates and is reproduced through various channels. The poor image challenges traditional notions of resolution and value, as it prioritizes accessibility and availability over high quality. It signifies a shift from contemplation to distraction, from cinema to digital uncertainty. During the film, a lot of frames with stories from Instagram are unfocused and moving all over the place, providing a democratic experience of creation. When Jota

Mombaça exposes their house and intimacy the aesthetics are ordinary, and has no intention to go beyond that, and perhaps for this fact can be uncomfortable. The poor image subverts the promises of digital technology, pushing the boundaries of what can be considered an image, art, or sublime. Its existence is made possible only through digital technology, which can produce such degraded representations (Steyerl, 2009).

The poor image is associated with the marginalized and discarded aspects of audiovisual production, embodying the debris and waste that result from the cycles of audiovisual capitalism. In this case, the poor image concept is also related to the marginalized group of transgender women. It serves as evidence of violent displacement, acceleration, and circulation of images and this group of people within digital economies and divergent voices. Poor images are commodities, artifacts, or symbols that fit the aesthetics that Mombaca delivers in her artwork. The poor image is deeply intertwined with the sublime, it evokes discomfort and spreads a range of content from pleasure to death threats, as seen in the film. It is because of the poor image that women in marginalized positions can be heard and present their experiences in life. It helps to build a testimony to the gender violence that they suffer.

These images now are more present in the online sphere and can be seen worldwide. It is a provocative phenomenon that reflects digital culture and how technology is transforming and, because more people can produce, it is more democratic. Steyerl (2009) also touches upon the significance of resolution in the hierarchy of images, where high-resolution images are associated with wealth and privilege. Cinema is portrayed as a flagship store, while more affordable derivatives circulate as poor images. The cult of high-resolution and analog film is critiqued for its conservative structures and the fetishization of resolution, even in independent film production. They present a mix of the rare, obvious, and unbelievable, requiring deciphering and interpretation of society.

Jota Mombaça is also a writer, known for their insightful and radical contributions to various fields. As a writer, they have explored topics such as gender, sexuality, decoloniality, and queer theory, among others. Through their writings, Jota Mombaça offers thought-provoking perspectives and critical analysis, challenging traditional norms. Mombaça advocates for redistribution of violence, paying special attention to gender disobedience and anti-colonialism and its consequences to contemporary Brazilian society. Jota Mombaça has an intersectional perspective, complex and well rooted in their own experience as a non-binary "bicha", Black person and marginalized.

In September 2016 Jota Mombaça was part of the 32nd Biennial in São Paulo. For that occasion, they had written a text that is interesting to illustrate and provide insights about the short movie analyzed. The text is "Rumo a uma redistribuição desobediente de gênero e anticolonial da violência" (translation: Towards a Gender Disobedient & Anti-Colonial Redistribution of Violence) together with their book published in 2021 *Não vão nos matar agora* (translation: Ain't gonna kill us now) these are fundamental to understand ideologies Mombaça has when interpreting the world and Brazilian society.

Mombaça claims a revolution in everyday body configurations, challenging the white Eurocentric understandings. In the short movie, it is possible to notice their body in a state of flux, and as stated by Eleonora Fabião (2013), the performative body is oscillating between the boundaries of the stage and the non-stage, blurring the lines between art and non-art (p. 6). It is within this logic that Mombaça and their performative message thrive. In the movie, the message goes beyond the aesthetics, the poor image is there to communicate democratically with those dissident bodies and sexualities, that according to Mombaça still part of a colonial past that Brazil is not over, because, as a society it did not get over a post-slavery mindset. Therefore, still has violent actions towards everyone and everything that is not classified as an everyday existence.

In this context, the concept of transgender performativity (Leal, 2018) unveils the social codes that enforce cisnormativity within the body. By challenging these codes, it becomes intricately linked to the multifaceted struggle against colonialism, operating across various interdependent spheres: the political, economic, aesthetic, and pedagogical realms. The act of embodying and performing gender in ways that transcend societal norms disrupts the colonial matrix of power, opening up new possibilities for personal and collective liberation (Mombaça, 2016).

María Lugones (2014), an Argentine feminist philosopher and cultural critic, in her work *Towards a Decolonial Feminism* sheds light on the inherent humiliation and dispossessed nature experienced by the colonized when subjected to practices that disrupt their ways of living, identity and render their bodies monstrous and ill-fitting. This aspect of monstrosity is visible in the movie and is vastly explored by Mombaça. Using this approach Jota Mombaça shows humanity without erasing the dissident and disobedient norm of (cis)gender. In the video, Mombaça shows a reality that is present but unseen by normality. Mombaça has claimed in the text for the Biennial, that by "naming the norm" it is possible to acknowledge these dissident experiences and global design violence that these bodies witness and thus, not erase (or kill) them (2016, p. 10). Mombaça claims that violence is socially

distributed and plays an important role in how it intervenes in society, it is part of a global project of an extermination and normalization policy, aiming to erase bodies that are not part of the norm. Thus, a political racist, colonial, cisgender, and heteronormativity of existence. Mombaça states (2016, p. 10) that this war has already started and dissident lives must fight for their existence, show that they are there, naming the norm and subverting those people with full status in the world (white, cisgender, and straight male) perpetuating the colonization ideologies until the date. By employing the term coloniality, the intention is not only to denote the categorization of peoples in terms of power and gender coloniality, but the active process of reducing individuals, the dehumanization that renders them susceptible to classification, the process of subjectivization, and the endeavor to make the colonized less than human beings (Lugones, 2014, p. 939).

The artist points out during a interview that gender and all matters of sexual identities are deeply intertwined with the colonial/modern cis-hetero-capitalist agenda. It is crucial to understand that the production, resources, and sexual markets are not solely determined by anatomical differences. In the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist studies and gender dissidence theories/practices have gone beyond essentialist perspectives on sexuality. Instead, as stated by Leal & Rosa, they have explored the multifaceted dimensions of labor division and market dynamics, which act as normative social and political forces in the construction of sexual identities and genders. These forces are further amplified by intersecting forms of oppression, including racism, social inequalities, epistemic disparities, linguistic biases, and spiritual imbalances (Leal & Rosa, 2020).

When analyzing performative events, such as the movie by Jota Mombaça, the focus lies on how imaginative constructs, bodily expressions, and representations bring about transformative shifts and interventions within bodies. These acts give rise to experiences of strangeness, marginalization, and the emergence of unconventional forms, thereby challenging the notion of the "normal" and its standardization. This inquiry particularly emphasizes the rights of marginalized groups that exist outside the established social and cultural norms dictated by racist, cisgender, and classist ideologies. By rejecting a logic closely associated with capitalism, these groups also dismantle the systems of control that attempt to regulate desires and bodies (Rosa, 2019).

Colonialism encompasses the economic and political-administrative control and domination of a people, whereas coloniality refers to a system of classification and subjugation primarily driven by racialization and capital (Rosa, 2019). According to Aníbal Quijano (2002) in his work *Coloniality, Power, Globalization, and Democracy* (2002), the

notion of "the coloniality of power" captures one of the fundamental pillars of the current power structure, which is the universal social classification of the world's population based on the concept of "race". Colonization represents the deepest and most enduring manifestations of colonial domination and were imposed on a global scale during the expansion of European colonialism. Over time, they have permeated all realms of social existence, constituting the most profound and effective forms of social, material, and intersubjective domination. Consequently, they serve as the universally pervasive basis for political dominance within the existing power paradigm (Quijano, 2002, p. 1). Mombaça in their creations advocates for the end of it. A radical end, redistributing the violence. They claim that the post-racial world is a dystopia. For it to be equal it is necessary to subvert binarism, the privilege logic, and reposition dissident bodies, like theirs. Showing that those bodies are there, dying. Radicalism, and redistribution of violence, in Jota's argument, is the only way possible to end racism and gender-based violence. The world will not get fair just by making a few changes for inclusivity, it is necessary to break the standards and form a resistance force to hear those voices. An alliance must be formed against racism that is still present in Brazilian society perpetuating the privileges of colonization.

To sum up, the exploration of Jota Mombaca's artistic practice within the context of anti-colonization and gender disobedience serves as a significant contribution to the formulation of strategies for resistance, struggle, and opposition against violence targeting all marginalized identities. Mombaça uses extreme scenes to evoke the sublime, the terror, and, therefore, the reality. It stands as an invitation to construct empowering fictions that facilitate alternative forms of existence, embodiment, collectivity, and resistance, engaging deeply and tangibly with the real world. This resistance is attuned to the complexities of these life-or-death manifestations (Mombaça, 2021, p. 114).

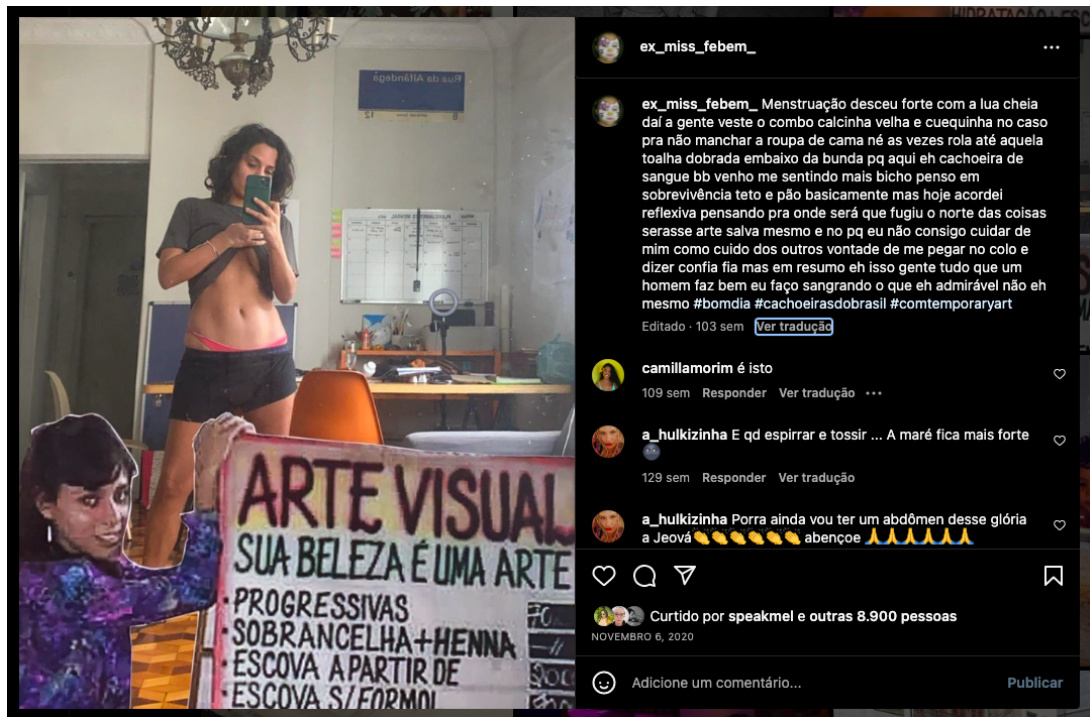
By challenging normativity, Mombaça's work encourages to enact of transformative possibilities that disrupt oppressive systems, opening up spaces for radical imagination and the construction of emancipatory narratives. It underscores the importance of intersectionality and the recognition of interconnected struggles, emphasizing the urgent need to dismantle structures of power that perpetuate violence and marginalization. Mombaça's artistic and intellectual endeavors invite us to engage in a praxis of resistance that not only critiques but actively transforms social, cultural, and political landscapes, fostering a more inclusive society. Their work calls for a praxis of resistance that goes beyond mere critique, advocating for transformative action and social change. Redistributing the violence, according to them, is the only option.

7. Aleta Valente: Reproductive Rights and Social Media Activism

The role of artists in the political sphere is a topic of ongoing debate. Some argue that their influence has waned over time, while others assert that artists continue to play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and driving social change. In recent years, many artists have turned to provocative and controversial subject matter, such as abortion, to spark meaningful discussions and challenge the dominant hegemony. In this chapter I develop thoughts on feminist art and activism related to the online realm and participatory art, showing how this practice can fight gender-based violence.

Aleta Valente is a Brazilian artist born in 1989 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. She pursued Art History studies at the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and participated in the in-depth program offered by the School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage. Additionally, she has held various positions within the art field. Initially, her artistic endeavors were rather scattered, but she already harbored an interest in specific issues derived from her personal experiences. Although she did not confine herself to a particular medium, she actively produced texts, installations, and performances. This artistic trajectory persisted until the transformative moment when she acquired a smartphone, an event that marked a turning point in her life, as outlined in her web biography.

One of her productions (or activism) began on Instagram, with the profile @ex_miss_febem. The main element on this social media profile is pictures of her body taken in an artistic composition. Aleta Valente advocates for issues related to women's bodies, freedom, and rights that are intertwined with the battlefield of this body. Between 2015 and 2017, her self-portrait series sparked a significant reaction on social media, thanks to the provocative persona she adopted. With her sharp language and alignment with key feminist issues, particularly the empowerment of bodily autonomy, she established the @ex_miss_febem. Through a mixture of eroticism, irony, and social provocation, @ex_miss_febem evolved into an identity brimming with subjective nuances, assuming feminist dimensions aimed at exploring the boundaries of representing the female body in public display.

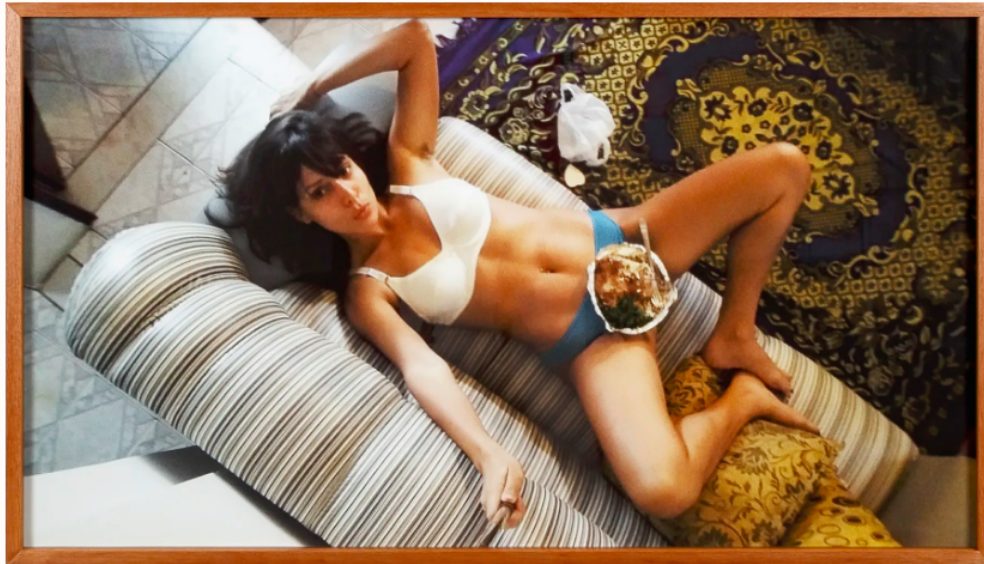


Screenshot @ex_miss_febem_ Instagram account

The virtual realm opened its doors to facilitate an artistic expression of a young artist who embodies multiple identities: a mother, a woman, someone living in poverty on the outskirts of society, as she self-identifies. This enabled her to unleash a profound and critical poetic force. The ripple effect of her work even prompted virtual surveillance and compelled the revision of policies governing image display within the realm of social media. At the heart of Aleta's artistic proposition, her photographic compositions unveiled diverse modes of representing her physical form, which she enacted and exposed through performative gestures captured by her phone's camera. Infused with elements of eroticism, irony, and social provocation, @ex_miss_febem evolved into an identity brimming with subjectivities, assuming a feminist stance aimed at delving into the boundaries that govern the representation of the female body in the public sphere.

Aleta and @ex_miss_febem are the same people, sharing the same body and the same life. However, the artist's identity created situations for the body of the avatar identity and began to mobilize this body in favor of other narratives she lived. In reality, she was able to create fiction, which provided even more room for her creative process. As Mirele de Oliveira Pacheco (2019) stated, the work led her through a process of self-legitimization through the dissemination of images that stemmed from her perspective of the city, sexuality, morality, politics, and even the art circuit. In an act of appropriating urban territory, the

images expressed on the social network also made use of hashtags such as #cidadeolimpica, #cidademaravilhosa, and #rio40graus, for example. In this way, the artist showcased a field of popular culture that values the peripheral, portraying class struggle, rituals, and the everyday lives of the working class (p. 39).



Quentinha (2015), Aleta Valente

The Instagram profile is a tool where the artist interacts with the audience and creates a provocative and engaging sphere for discussion, recognizing that online participation stimulates the conscious and critical use of digital technologies and social networks, aiming for an effective role of users and followers of the project in both the digital realm and social reality. In this context, the aim is to engage the viewer in their realm, utilizing the computer screen as a means to transcend physical boundaries and establish connections. However, the digital realm is a diverse landscape characterized by various interests and conflicts, within which art actively interacts while carving out its distinct spaces and establishing relationships. As a result, artistic endeavors on social networks frequently delve into these intricate conflicts and contradictions (Bulhões, 2014, p. 50).

It is known that participation, interaction, immersion, and collaboration are part of contemporary digital culture, as stated by Rutten (2018), participatory art is challenged to move beyond instrumental use of technologies (p. 2). Aleta Valente uses Instagram as a way to engage with her audience, also online, Aleta uses her surroundings to create her self pictures. The artist started as a common user of social media, however, it gained social

relevance as she engaged with the social issues that she was advocating for. Aleta Valente is a feminist who fights for the autonomy of women's bodies and that reflects on her creations.

Participatory and digital art have provided the opportunity for more users to become content creators, therefore, critically generating their representations and forms of experience of the world. In the article, *A Different Point of View: Women's self- Representation in Instagram's Participatory Artistic Movements*, @girlgaze project, and @arthoecollective, the authors argue how the creations on Instagram can be perceived as a form of "everyday politics" because it's a powerful tool to perform social change and affect the politics. Aleta's Instagram posts have reached multiple women and developed a debate beyond its medium. Aleta makes it possible to discuss feminist agendas using humor, satire, and the embracement of women's bodies. Aleta, while producing this socially engaging content has the opportunity to reclaim her position as a creator and as an artist, delivering more accessibility to the debate. With her posts, Aleta is an "everyday activist" that translates her reality (and of many others) into a creative social criticism that mixes self-representation and participatory art (Rutten, 2018, p. 4).

Beyond the persona on Instagram and Facebook, Aleta also engages with the audience using different mediums to challenge gender-based violence. Another case that engages the public debate is Aleta Valente's piece: *"Marque um X para cada aborto que você já fez"* (2019) (translation: Cross an X for each abortion you have done.). Nonetheless, showing how art remains a powerful means of bringing sensitive topics to public debate. A brief summary of abortion in Brazil is provided, for context and understanding of women's agency upon their bodies, that instead of women's care and choices being made by themselves, it was shaped by policies, laws, and the state, such as their role in society.

7.1 Abortion in Brazil

As expected, the history of abortion in Brazil is similar to that of Western countries. It has been considered a criminal offense punishable since 1940, both for women and also those who perform it. However, it is clear that not everyone is punished, and the punishment depends on many other factors. The Brazilian legislation also has some exceptions that ensure the procedure by law, for example, in case of rape, to save the woman's life, and since 2012, in the case of anencephalic fetuses. Even though abortion for pregnancies resulting from rape

has been allowed since 1940, it was not the case until 1989 that the first legal abortion service for women was opened in Sao Paulo. This service was the only one available until 1994, when another service for women who were victims of violence was opened. Since then, new services have emerged, most marginalized or hidden from the authorities.

Abortion is a polemic matter in Brazil. With the increase of religious public figures in power, the discussion has become more and more vivid and complex in the last few years. The debate has not made significant improvements in the law or big changes that affected women's daily lives. Brazil is a continental country in Latin America that faces huge issues with social inequalities. Some perspectives argue that abortion in Brazil is used as a contraceptive method. However, abortion is intertwined with other crucial issues in the country, such as the lack of sexual education, violence against women, and a population devoid of financial conditions and family planning. It is known that women call upon undercover practices that can result in physical and psychological consequences.

Even though abortion is discussed a lot, it is one of the tremendous current problems in the public debate, causing divergent opinions, mainly in the two extremes, the religious and the medical areas. The Brazilian Constitution states that life must be protected and preserved. However, it adds “with dignity”. This “dignity” is key in the discussion, where rationality is sometimes left behind, and emotional debates happen. Abortion in Brazil is a practice that goes under the law. The women who go under this procedure are at their own risk. The worse their financial conditions, the worse will be the consequences. Constantly they are left to their luck. It is worth mentioning that socioeconomic status is often related to the color of women’s skin. Most women who subject themselves to it and do not have financial support are marginalized people of color living in economically vulnerable communities. Therefore, the ones who have a higher probability of dying or facing worse consequences are those. It shows that abortion can be done in Brazil. However, better financial support means better chances that the woman will be alive without criminal penalties.

The guilt and shame some women carry after going under the procedure make the debate not open, even though it is more present than common sense can assume. Such as it is a public health matter it is also a public debate topic, understanding the behavior of the society when dealing with the topic and the progress of an open discussion. It is clear that abortion exists in Brazil, and it happens with different women. Art can make an impact on the discussion of this theme.

7.2 The Public Debate Through Artistic Activism



Marque um X para cada aborto que voce ja fez (2019); Aleta Valente (1986-)

Abortion is a lonely and solitary process that requires a lot from the woman. The criminalization only makes these aspects even worse and hidden from the public realm. Often the discussion does not get even close to private circles, such as family and friends. In 2020, Valente talked about her motivations for producing this piece about this sensitive topic. She stated that the right not to be a mother is a right that still needs to be conquered. Therefore, it is indispensable to talk about abortion, interrupting the silence and loneliness (Valente, 2020).

In 2019 Aleta Valente exhibited for the first time her mural “*Marque um X para cada aborto que você já fez*”, in Rio de Janeiro, from 9 to 20 December 2019. A patterned squared wall of 250 x 325 cm was there to be filled by the audience, which should use a red marker to cross an X. The aim was that the visitors felt safe interacting with the wall and, therefore, triggered conversations. Regarding this event, she stated: “I had incredible moments of mothers scoring in front of their children, I saw mothers waiting for the children to go down the stairs to score, I saw women telling stories [...] When there was [in Rio de Janeiro gallery], it was cathartic, many women massively, one man or another scored too” (Valente, 2021).

Gabriela Duarte (2021) states that Aleta Valente uses her productions to trigger conversation, relief, and confession (p. 37). Her work takes place not only in the wall but also

in the relationship between the audience and the wall. It is, in its essence, a confession of a crime in front of everyone. After the exhibition, the X's are erased from the wall, such as the traces of the abortion process in Brazil. It only remains in the imagination and in the memory of the people who participate in the collective secret. The piece is an opportunity to promote confession, showing with their marks that the practice is more common than it is thought and may have been carried out by someone closer than expected. The red Xs show how many illegal abortions were made and how crucial it is to provide regularization to the procedure. It demonstrated that the women are not alone, encouraged the subject to be discussed, and that the illegality does not stop abortion procedures. This kind of artwork on abortion evokes the ghost of the topic and promotes mechanisms of empathy and purge.

It is known that artistic activism is a practice that combines creative expressions and activism that can bring social awareness to social change. It is a form to challenge and shift power structures and increase discussion aiming for an equal society where the hegemonic approach is not oppressive. It uses art to state what you are protesting for, and your message and intention with that creative piece. Art, often, has a clear message. However, the interpretation can trigger multiple discussions. The goal of art is to touch the emotions, the feelings. The goal of activism is social change. Art generates affect, activism effect. They are complementary in contemporary society. People are unlikely to change their minds about a polemic topic. They must be personally intrigued to do so, moved by emotional stimuli. (*LibGuides: Artistic Activism for Social Change: About*, n.d.). As human beings, we sense the world through our emotions, stories, and symbols. Art and activism can combine this with politics and rationality for change.

Artistic activism is a media intervention because it is a tactical and strategic action impacting society. Unlike traditional art, which is typically confined to museums and galleries, activism is associated with street protests and governmental institutions, artistic activism can occur in public spaces such as town squares, shopping malls, and even on billboards or social media platforms. Moreover, artistic activism can coexist with traditional art in galleries, such as in the example by Aleta Valente.

As Brian Holmes (2004) stated, art provides an opportunity for society to collectively contemplate the fictional characters and concepts that it relies on, for its coherence and self-awareness. In this case study, the audience has the opportunity to reflect on their real lives through the lenses of the performance instigated by the artist. Chantal Mouffe claimed in her article "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces" (2007) that activism and art are fronts of total resistance to the power of hegemonic relations. Those practices necessarily overflow

the field of knowledge production towards new practices of debating, consuming, and collective appropriation of shared spaces and everyday culture.

Aleta proposes an open door for new discussion possibilities, aiming to progress in a political discussion that requires intense and critical analysis. This debate is necessary for public spaces because this is a terrain where consensus can emerge aiming for a solution – although, as Mouffe argues, the public space is a battleground where different projects are confronted without any possibility of final reconciliation (2007). In the exhibition, there is no final reconciliation. However, an intervention was needed in the public sphere, raising questions and confrontations. Furthermore, this is an example of an alternative configuration of confronting the social hegemony advocating for social change in the public sphere. Valente's artwork had resulted in the showing of a women's health issue hidden, however more common than expected, being extremely necessary to challenge gender-based violence. Making clear the argument that Mouffe claims that there is a political dimension in art and an aesthetics dimension in politics.

This is a case where the agonistic approach is suited to grasp new forms of political activism, challenging the consensus. The artist aims to show that abortion is more common than imagined. However, she is underlining a social problem for marginalized women who are still dying under this procedure. Those women who are alive to tell their stories are scared and ashamed, while others are dead. This art piece is a protest to claim action from the government for the discrimination of abortion. They are showing that this is an effort that should be made at multiple levels of the public debate.

Nowadays, it is impossible to argue that artists' political role has ended. They bring to the public realm meaningful discussions for social change. They are constructing new subjectivities through a strategic approach, intervening in society, and challenging the dominant hegemony.

Mouffe (2007) argued that despite some people's beliefs, it is not enough for one group of people to establish a new dominant power. In her article, "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" (2007), she asserts that a truly transformative and democratic political movement requires a coordinated effort in multiple levels of social relations to create a shared understanding of ideals. Artists are part of the intervention. However, to think that artistic activism could single-handedly overthrow the domination would be a severe mistake.

Abortion raises controversies, discussions, and judgments, but also, talking about it delivers recognition and support. Art pieces cooperate with strategic changes. Time has changed, and women's right advocates for awareness, freedom, and respect. Artistic activists,

like Valente, articulate new forms of bringing sensitive topics often marginalized to the public debate.

8. Discussion

This chapter aims to bring together the findings of this thesis, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and real-life experiences.

The artist Rosana Paulino's works examined the concepts of suture and memory. This analysis demonstrates how these themes intersect with the lived experiences of Black women, highlighting the significance of acknowledging and appropriating memory as a means to construct Brazilian identity, recognizing Black identity and their contributions to shaping the nation. Through her artwork, Paulino promotes the search for identity. To know the past is to know the present and therefore, challenge power relations. This applies to multiple spheres, for instance, the significance of this research is to put the Global South into perspective, revealing its struggles. To write about marginalized groups in Academia is to shed light on the hope for social change.

Moving on to the artist Jota Mombaça, the discussion is around transgender identity and gender disobedience. This exploration elucidates how the concept serves as an anti-colonialist framework, pointing towards new configurations of feminism that transcend binary categorizations. Mombaça's work is situated within the context of the fourth wave of feminism, and the democratization of media through the use of poor images and activism on social media platforms. A similar medium is used by the artist Aleta Valente, who explores her activism centered on the rights of women over their bodies, particularly within the realm of social media. That chapter explored how Valente utilizes digital platforms to advocate for reproductive rights and to raise awareness about the significance of bodily autonomy.

The research underscores the importance of recognizing the perspectives of the selected artists and their contributions to societal debates. Moreover, the themes of gender violence, redistribution of violence, anti-colonialism, and reproductive rights serve as connecting threads to provide a better understanding of non-mainstream women, delivering a comprehensive understanding of issues that these marginalized figures are facing. Furthermore, these artists are activists with powerful voices that develop elaborate theories to challenge gender-based violence, giving the spotlight to their similarities, therefore, building narratives that are not Westernized. These artists embrace their identity, the Brazilian specificity in history, construction, and context, furthering the global issue salience. Engaging

with Brazilian reality can deliver new debates and discussions that move acts for social change and equality in the country. Different perspectives shift the focus and aim beyond empathy and actions of subversion. Together, their body of work contributes to a comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence, offering different perspectives and strategies for resistance and change.

It is necessary to recognize the importance of this research in a European academic context. Feminism holds significant importance in Brazil, as it has played a crucial role in challenging and transforming gender norms, patriarchy, and the systemic inequalities faced by women in the region. Latin American feminism encompasses a rich history of activism, grassroots movements, and theoretical contributions that have brought attention to the relevant issues. Understanding feminism in Latin America is essential for gaining insights into the diverse strategies employed to address gender-based injustices and promote social change.

Studying feminism in Europe is a privilege. It allows for a comparative analysis of feminist movements and their responses to specific regional contexts. By examining the similarities and differences between Latin American and European feminisms, scholars and activists can broaden their understanding of the global struggle for gender equality. Most of the struggles that are faced by Brazilian women are different to those faced by women in the Global North. Additionally, studying Latin American feminism in Europe fosters cross-cultural dialogue and knowledge exchange, leading to enriched perspectives and collaborative efforts in addressing gender issues. Furthermore, European societies can learn from the resilience, creativity, and collective mobilization of Brazilian - and Latin-American-feminists, potentially inspiring new approaches to feminist activism and policies within their own contexts.

In a world where feminist movements span continents, constructing bridges between European feminism and Latin American feminism becomes a form of connection and collaboration. Picture European and Latin American feminists gathering to exchange experiences. They can share their research, unveil perspectives, and challenge each other's assumptions with discourse.

In this landscape, intersectionality is fundamental to building bridges. European and Latin American feminisms intertwine, recognizing the intricate links between gender, race, class, and sexuality, and can create identities and a powerful collective, honoring the lived

experiences that shape women's struggle. Through this lens, bridges grow stronger, fueled by the power of inclusivity and shared resilience.

Solidarity is a guiding force, binding feminists across borders. The actions must go beyond cyberspace, generating public debate worldwide. Thus, a wave of united voices reverberates, amplifying the impact of their advocacy. Scholars, activists, and artists are key to reflecting on social issues and acting upon them. It is necessary to bring gender-based violence close to the public sphere, engaging the debate and involving young generations for social change.

Amidst it all, movements emerge as the heart of this interconnected battle. The stories of local activists are embraced and uplifted, proving them with places where they did not have a place before.

9. Conclusion

This thesis has delved into the multifaceted and interconnected issues of gender-based violence in Brazil. By shedding light on the powerful and transformative acts of feminist art and activism, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding those challenges.

This research has revealed the pervasive nature of gender violence, which permeates the lives of individuals in various forms. It has illuminated the urgency of challenging the oppressive systems that perpetuate violence and redefining power dynamics rooted in patriarchal norms. By centering the experiences of marginalized groups, this research unravels the intricate ways in which gender violence intersects with race, class, and other social dimensions, highlighting the need for an intersectional feminist approach.

Moreover, the investigation into the redistribution of violence has shed light on the mechanisms through which violence is perpetuated and how power is consolidated in society. The exploration of anti-colonialism has brought forth the voices of those affected by historical and ongoing colonization, exposing the interplay between colonial legacies, cultural erasure, and the struggle for self-determination. Contemporary society has witnessed the resilience and determination of individuals and communities as they resist oppressive structures and assert their agency.

Reproductive rights have emerged as a crucial battleground, where autonomy, bodily integrity, and access to comprehensive healthcare are fiercely contested. By examining the

complexities surrounding reproductive rights, it is necessary to understand the intersecting factors of gender, class, race, and colonial history that shape reproductive experiences and rights in Brazil. This has underscored the importance of inclusive and empathic reproductive healthcare services that empower individuals to make informed choices.

The power of collective action and debate in the face of systemic injustice, allows the voices of feminist artists and activists to reverberate, breaking through the confines of societal norms, challenging the status quo, and demanding change. Their creative approaches, whether through videos, installations, murals, performances, or social media, have disrupted dominant narratives, ignited conversations, and mobilized communities.

In envisioning a future of justice and equality, we must continue to uplift these voices, amplify their messages, and work towards dismantling the structures that perpetuate violence and inequality. We call for continued collaboration and support among feminist movements, activists, artists, scholars, and policymakers to enact meaningful change and create spaces where everyone can thrive free from violence and oppression.

Ultimately, this thesis catalyzes ongoing dialogue, research, and activism. May it inspire us to challenge gender-based violence and the status quo, question oppressive systems, and envision a society that celebrates and respects the diversity of gender identities.

In the words of Brazilian feminist artist Jota Mombaça, it is necessary to "redistribute violence" and pave the way for a future where every individual's rights and dignity are protected and respected. The journey toward gender justice and liberation is ongoing, and it is a collective responsibility to nurture the seeds of change and cultivate a society that embraces true equality.

This thesis aims to go beyond academic discourse and serves as a call to action, urging collective efforts to create a future free from gender-based violence, where power is redistributed, anti-colonial struggles are championed, and reproductive rights are respected. It is through research, activism, and amplifying voices that lasting change can be achieved. Let art be part of the action.

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