

Article

Disputing Authorship: Reinscriptions of Collective Modes of Knowledge Production

Andréa Gill ^{1,*}  and Marta Fernández ^{2,*}¹ Department of Political Science, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro 21941-901, Brazil² Institute of International Relations, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Rio de Janeiro 22451-900, Brazil

* Correspondence: andrea.b.gill@gmail.com (A.G.); martafygarca@gmail.com (M.F.)

Abstract: This article proposes a conversation on the limits and possibilities of collectivizing the way in which we generate and inscribe knowledge within the terms of a political economy of knowledge production and circulation regulated by hierarchies of academic and non-academic classifications, as well as those that demarcate centres and peripheries domestically and internationally through racial-gendered distributions of authority. To this end, it explores a series of collective projects elaborated within the GlobalGRACE network in Brazil (Global Gender and Cultures of Equality), which experiment with residency methodologies designed to create the necessary infrastructure for a redistribution of power, knowledge, and authority in investigations on racial-gendered violence in the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro. As collaborators in this research-action project initiated in 2018 with the Observatory of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, here, we mobilize two of these collective projects as case studies—the dance residency of Cia Passinho Carioca and the Free School of Arts ELA residency—so as to reflect on our ways of knowing and experiencing racial-gendered inequalities in context. In this way, it becomes possible to propose not only questions around the production, erasure, and appropriation of knowledge but also possibilities for the broad-based circulation of dissident knowledge practices and the subsequent displacement of established authorities in the field, notably by means of a disobjectification of subjects of knowledge and exercises in authoring in the first-person plural. This entry point into the conversation on who has the power to know and control the meanings of intersectional inequalities enables a focus on practice, pedagogy, and methods to unpack the ethical and epistemological questions at hand. By centring the problem of authorship, we argue that feminist and decolonial approaches to knowing, teaching, and learning need to effectuate redistributions of power and the construction of politico-epistemic infrastructure if we have any chance of cultivating the conditions needed for liberatory knowledge practices.

Keywords: epistemology; arts-based methodology; pedagogy; intersectionality; decoloniality

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1. Introduction

This article proposes a conversation on the limits and possibilities of collectivizing the way in which we generate and inscribe knowledge within the terms of a political economy of knowledge production and circulation regulated by hierarchies of academic and non-academic classifications, as well as those that demarcate centres and peripheries domestically and internationally. To this end, it explores a series of collective projects elaborated within the GlobalGRACE network in Brazil (Global Gender and Cultures of Equality)¹, which experiment with residency methodologies designed to create the neces-

sary infrastructure for a redistribution of power, knowledge, and authority in investigations on racial-gendered violence in the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro.

As collaborators in this research-action project initiated in 2018 with the Observatory of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, here, we mobilize two of these collective projects as case studies—the dance residency of Cia Passinho Carioca and the Free School of Arts ELÃ residency—so as to reflect on our ways of knowing and experiencing racial-gendered inequalities in context. In this way, it becomes possible to propose not only questions around the production, erasure, and appropriation of knowledge but also possibilities for the broad-based circulation of dissident knowledge practices and the subsequent displacement of established authorities in the field, notably by means of a disobjectification of subjects of knowledge and exercises in authoring in the first-person plural. This entry point into the conversation on who has the power to know and control the meanings of intersectional inequalities enables a focus on practice, pedagogy, and methods to unpack the ethical and epistemological questions at hand.

In this context, this article delves into the productive tensions between individual and collective processes that seek to register the concepts, methods, and proposals generated in a residency from a feminist and decolonial perspective. From this viewpoint, we work out the ways in which individual processes implicate a collective dimension, as they emerge from present and past social relationships and shared memory. While acknowledging this dimension, the article seeks to explore the potentials of collective modes of inscribing and reinscribing knowledge in the context of projects made up of collaborative experiences involving people positioned by conflicting institutional and intersubjective markers of power, such as race, gender, sexuality, and territory. The aim is to elucidate how the negotiation of these dynamics paves the way toward dialogical investigations into the inequalities of power that sustain contemporary hierarchies of humanity.

The article will thus proceed to situate the process of construction of the two residencies under analysis with special attention given to their praxis. Following the first section, where Marta Fernández will recount the experience of the Cia Passinho Carioca residency, and a second section where Andréa Gill will focus on the ELÃ residency, the final section of the article will synthesize these collective constructions and reflections in order to redimension problems of a political economy of knowledge production and circulation across asymmetries of academic and social movement processes, in local and global contexts. By centring the problem of authorship, we argue that feminist and decolonial approaches to knowing, teaching, and learning need to effectuate redistributions of power and the construction of politico-epistemic infrastructure if we have any chance of cultivating the conditions needed for liberatory knowledge practices.

2. Building Residency I: Cia Passinho Carioca (The Rio de Janeiro Step Company), 2019–2020

The passinho dance performance *Na Manha*² premiered in September 2020 on the official YouTube channel of Arena Carioca Dicro³. The show features dancers from the Companhia de Dança Passinho Carioca⁴, showcasing passinho—an artistic expression that emerged in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro in the late 2000s, characterized by fast, creative, and improvised performances. Initially conceived as a live performance at Arena Carioca Dicro⁵—a public cultural space in Rio de Janeiro that serves as a platform for favela and periphery residents to be recognized for their esthetic creations—the production had to be adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation measures. As a result, the creative process was restructured, and the performance was recorded as a *videodance* under the direction of the collective Mulheres ao Vento (MAV—Women of the Wind)⁶. The MAV artistic project was founded in 2016 by artists and researchers Andreza Jorge and Simonne

Alves. It offers theoretical and practical dance classes for women in the Maré favela in collaboration with local community initiatives (Jorge 2023, p. 19).

Na Manha was presented as one of the “outputs” of the international project GlobalGRACE—Global Gender and Cultures of Equality—led by a team of researchers from Goldsmiths, University of London. However, instead of being shaped into a product by the corporate logic of deliverables (Vergès 2018) and catering to the desires of international audiences for local or folkloric expressions—which often reify marginalized subjects as exotic, fixed, and stereotyped—the true richness of the performance lay in the process itself and the mutual transformations that emerged along the way. The process culminated in a “witness-work to the innovative power of the peripheries, both in technological, artistic, conceptual, and political terms” (Gill et al. 2021, p. 77, our translation), created not to be consumed and assimilated within the frameworks of a racist and sexist society but as a catalyst for transformative and insurgent processes, challenging the hierarchical order that structures us.

Beyond the team of researchers from Goldsmiths, the project involved the participation of academics and civil society organizations from Brazil, Bangladesh, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa. The teams in each of these countries engaged with different artistic and curatorial languages, produced daily by subalternized subjects in their territories—sex workers, women in the construction sector, migrants, racialized communities, and residents of peripheral areas—to challenge dominant gender power relations at their intersection with racial, sexual, territorial, and class dynamics, among others. However, the intersectional hierarchies present in the societies of the countries involved in the project were also reflected in the microcosm of the project itself, which engaged academics and civil society organizations from both the Global South and the Global North. One of the project’s central objectives was establishing networks and synergies among academics, artists, and activists—actors shaped by different positionalities regarding gender, race, sexuality, territory, and other factors.

In Brazil, the project was developed collectively through a partnership between the Institute of International Relations at PUC-Rio and non-governmental organizations Instituto Promundo, UNIPeriferias/Instituto Maria e João Aleixo and the Observatory of Favelas, with the latter two located in the Maré favela complex. Our work package aimed to interrogate how different artistic and cultural expressions produced in and by the periphery rearticulate and subvert daily cis-heteronormative white masculinity, breaking away from the hegemonic gender, race, and sexuality metrics that sustain social hierarchies and offering new ways of being and expressing oneself beyond the limits imposed by dominant structures. How could we, as academics, collaborate productively and build trusting relationships with our interlocutors? Hierarchies could not be erased or transcended; it was essential to recognize the privileges that positioned us in a place of power in order not to reproduce the dynamics of domination.

Academics of Westernized universities are trained to see themselves as exclusive producers of theoretical knowledge, while those who inhabit the margins are understood as objects of knowledge produced in urban and global centres. Inspired by a decolonial perspective, our project aimed precisely to challenge this ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ (Mignolo 2003), that is, to question the production, validation, and unequal distribution of knowledge that disqualifies the knowledge historically produced by racialized and peripheral communities. In this context, the Global South’s ‘South’—favelas and peripheries—are seen as testing grounds or case studies, spaces for extracting knowledge, consumed and rearticulated as ‘theories’ in Westernized university spaces. The ethnographic gaze transforms subjects and lives into study themes (Guerreiro Ramos 1995), reducing peripheries to a

reservoir of cases and empirical data that will be reworked and sophisticated by academics locked in their offices, achieving the status of scientific knowledge.

In line with feminist perspectives, we start from the understanding that theorizing is a verb, a way of life (Zalewski 1996). In this sense, theorizing becomes a democratic exercise, not to be understood as reserved for academia. Dancing passinho, the young people in residency theorized, communicated, produced new subjectivities, and affirmed the meaning of their lives in contrast with knowledge practices that dehumanized them, creating spaces of (re)existence that challenged the inherited hierarchies.

Although the artistic residency preceding the performance *Na Manha* was divided into two distinct phases—a formative, theoretical residency and another of an artistic, practical nature related to the production phase of the performance—we understood from the outset that these processes were deeply interconnected. The dissociation between theory and practice, far from being a natural division, reflects academic extractivism, which historically treats the Global South as a space for practice, experimentation, and data collection while reserving the role of theoretical production and validation to the centres of the Global North (Cruz and Luke 2020). During the artistic experiments, we realized that this division was constantly being challenged: the moments of practice also constituted conversation circles, in which, as bodies moved, they also communicated, philosophized, reflected, and destabilized the terms and places (or non-places) that had been attributed to them by a racist, patriarchal, and capitalist society. This process reaffirmed that, in the peripheries, thinking and doing, theory and practice, are not opposites but inseparable dimensions of the same transformative movement.

The peripheries are redefined through the contributions of Fernando Fernandes et al. (2018), founders of the Observatório de Favelas, a partner organization in the project, based on the ‘paradigm of potency’. The margins are reconfigured, not merely as spaces of absence—theoretical, cultural, and artistic voids—lacking, deprived, violent, and silenced, but as spaces of creativity, inventiveness, and diverse esthetic expressions that emerge as counter-hegemonic ways of life in society (Silva 2012).

The dancers of the Cia. Passinho Carioca explained that in the grammar of passinho, ‘manha’ refers to the possibility for each person to have their own ‘wave’, a personal way of expressing and dancing. By claiming their “manhas”, the dancers insist on the right to self-define and to name themselves, rejecting externally defined images of control (Collins 2019). Art thus emerges as a place of self-affirmation and of self-inscription within the world (Evaristo 2007).

Na Manha names a powerful collective creation at the same time as expressing a singular way for the body to express itself. Bodies shaped by markers of gender, sexuality, race, class, age, and territory, which have historically been criminalized, incarcerated, and dehumanized, are given their names: Ayesca Mayara Souza, Daniel Henrique Costa Rocha, Mayra de Farias Lima, Nayara Costa da Silva, Richard Silva dos Santos, and Walcir Silva De Oliveira (Gill et al. 2021). By claiming their manhas, the dancers are asserting their identities—the right to dance, dress, and carry themselves as they see fit—thus positioning themselves against a society that insists on disciplining and regulating expressions, perceptions, and identities, including gender identities.⁷

While scientific knowledge ‘depersonalizes’ and ‘deindividualizes’ (Césaire 1990, p. xlii), peripheral cultural and artistic practices promote self-knowledge. However, they recover collective memories and reaffirm the production of shared knowledge. As Jorge (2023, p. 171, our translation), one of the stage directors of the performance, emphasizes, ‘Memory is a collective construction of affection, a sense of belonging and community. In this way, the stories that move from the individual sphere to be potentiated in the collective tell about a moment, a culture forged from shared experiences’. In this sense, esthetic

expressions such as *passinho* are not mere individualistic exercises of self-knowledge or personal affirmation but practices deeply rooted in collectivity. These cultural manifestations create bonds, reconnecting individuals with their communities and with their ancestry, from which the violent processes of colonization and enslavement historically tore them. Recognizing *passinho* as a collective practice also recognizes that knowledge is never produced in isolation. It emerges from relationships, exchanges, memories, and ancestral knowledge transmitted across generations. In this context, dance and other forms of esthetic expression function as means of resistance and reconnection, reaffirming that knowledge is a web of interactions that challenges the individualistic and competitive logic of Western knowledge production.

The encounter between Westernized academia and peripheral artistic collectives reflects an epistemological dispute since the knowledge produced in university spaces is based on the illusion that it is the result of a solipsistic method, where the subject establishes an inner monologue with themselves (Grosfoguel 2016). The mainstream academic obsession with authorship, the valorization of individual writing and the figure of the genius, and the hierarchization reflected in the order of authors when writing is collective are products of this method. In this process, historical contexts, social relations, and the contradictions inherent in such relations are erased in the name of a supposedly coherent, neutral, and universal science. Here, the West is not considered a place but a project that claims neutrality, objectivity, universality, and a divine vision when, in fact, it is provincial, situated, and conditioned by Euro-American subjectivity (Hlabangane 2018, p. 662).

In this sense, any productive conversation between academia and peripheralized movements depends on a process of emptying truths, of unlearning what colonialism and racism have instilled in the self, and of a dialogical openness to difference, where contradictions and incoherencies matter less than the political implications of knowledge: whether it contributes to oppression or, on the contrary, to self-knowledge, emancipation, and transformation.

In the West, a common language is often seen as a problem, and difference is perceived as threatening order or rationality. This perspective reflects what Édouard Glissant (2021) calls 'monolingualism', an obsession with uniformity that denies the value of the plurality of voices, experiences, and forms of knowledge. Glissant invites us to think of difference not as an obstacle but as a power, an opportunity to create new languages and forms of dialogue that are not based on the search for consensus or uniformity but on accepting and celebrating diversity. Thus, the challenge is not to erase differences to establish a common ground but to learn to dialogue through them, recognizing conflict and contradiction as essential elements in creating knowledge that breaks away from colonial logic and promotes epistemic justice.

The knowledge cultivated during the artistic residency by the *passinho* dancers was discussed, felt, and shared through pulsating bodies, each in search of their 'manha' (Gill et al. 2021), affirming a body politic of knowledge. Here, the body is understood as central to knowledge production since varied bodies with distinct social markers regarding race, gender, class, sexuality, and location generate different perspectives of being and existing in the world.

Against a science that projects itself as incorporeal and the myth of a floating 'Ego' that produces knowledge considered impartial, unconditioned by a body or location in space (Grosfoguel 2016), decolonial reflections bring the bodily territory to the centre of research. In the body, colonial oppressions are felt, but this same body carries wisdom and potentialities (Rufino 2016). The body, in its physicality and subjectivity, comes to be seen as the first site of attack by racism, colonialism, and patriarchy. However, as Rufino

(2016) shows, this body, which is attacked, reveals other possibilities that express forms of resilience and transgression against oppressive regimes.

However, any knowledge that is intended to stem from the body politic of knowledge is seen as inferior, biased, partial, invalid, and illegitimate (Grosfoguel 2016). For Grada Kilomba (2019), all knowledge is situated. Furthermore, universities are not neutral places but spaces where the privilege of speech and scientific knowledge has been systematically denied for Black people, who are described, classified, dehumanized, primitivized, and killed. In Césaire's terms, scientific knowledge 'enumerates, measures, classifies, and kills' (Césaire 1990, p. xlii). Black people's knowledge is disqualified as too subjective, personal, emotional, and specific. In contrast, white people position themselves at the centre as the norm (Kilomba 2019, p. 51). As Kilomba (2019, p. 51, our translation) states, 'It is not that we have not spoken, the fact is that our voices, due to a racist system, have been systematically disqualified, considered invalid knowledge; or else, they are represented by white people who, ironically, become 'experts' in our culture, and even in us'. The African diasporas have experienced in their bodies the fallacies of universalism, objectivity, and impartiality of 'science', as Abdias do Nascimento (2009, our translation) denounces. In his words: '[I am not] interested in exercising theoretical, impartial, and unengaged gymnastics. I cannot and am not interested in transcending myself, as social scientists usually declare they supposedly do concern their research'.

The performance *Na Manha*, which lasts 19 min, communicates through the body, expanding the understanding of the body as a primordial source of expression (Jorge 2023). The body reads, writes, and rewrites, receives sounds, pain, and pleasure, and creates new imaginaries that subvert the dominant imaginaries, which usually immobilize racialized bodies and define the abject spaces that they must inhabit (Jorge 2023; Evaristo 2007). In racism, black bodies are always out of place; they are bodies that cannot belong, systematically violated in their existence and being summoned to return to their pre-determined places by historical oppression (Kilomba 2019).

However, in the artistic process of the collective *Mulheres ao Vento*, directors of the performance *Na Manha*, this memory of uprooting and displacement transforms into a power of resistance. As Jorge (2023, p. 214) proposes, it is necessary to activate the memory of 'being wind', the ability to occupy spaces and spread, thus breaking the (dis)authorizations imposed by racist and sexist structures. The author continues by emphasizing that Iansã/Oiá⁸, who inspires the name of the collective by representing the wind, symbolizes communication and, through it, unity, which is fundamental for those who live in the diaspora (Jorge 2023, p. 214). Known for controlling the winds and storms, she transforms into a buffalo and a butterfly, indicating the intensity of changes and transformations.⁹

During the artistic residency of Passinho, we were able to experience the reconnection potential of art; art is not disconnected from life, but rather, it is through it that subalternized subjects appropriate the world, connecting with their collective experiences, memories, and ancestry; see (Wa Thiong'o 1986). While the university disconnects the individual from communal life and from their world and represses any knowledge through the senses, the art performed by the passinho dancers opens up to the world, to embodied experiences, to the senses, to concrete universalities that value the plurality of cultures and the mosaic of human experiences. In this sense, it opens up to recognizing embodied masculinities and femininities, which can be experienced in plural ways, outside of the boxes, binaries, and labels that limit and disempower them.

What do these artistic experiments reveal to us about authorship? They show us that all knowledge is collective and collaborative, resulting from past, present, and future social interactions. The modern view of the sovereign author—isolated from social life, locked

in an ivory tower, and supposedly capable of producing universal knowledge—not only ignores the situated nature of their knowledge, often marked by privileges of race, gender, and class, but also alienates them from life itself. This model reinforces an individualistic image, where the academic connects only to an abstract idea of divinity, projected as incorporeal and distant, but which, in practice, reflects the same power structures: white, male, and hierarchical. To break away from this view, the author must descend from this position of superiority, abandon the narcissistic pact with his white peers, and connect with other worlds.

Collective writing requires giving up absolute control in favour of coherence and rationality, allowing dialogue to flourish from diverse and, at times, contradictory perspectives. More than that, it demands space for voices historically silenced to emerge, assert themselves, and tell their own stories. It is about recognizing that these people, for centuries, have been prevented from speaking and signing their names—in both the singular and plural—having their knowledge expropriated and appropriated, their identities erased, and their communal lives fragmented by practices of exclusion, uprooting, genocide, and epistemicide. It is a stance that acknowledges the historical inequality of access to voice, authorship credit, and innovation credentials. In this sense, collective writing—whether in text, dance, or other esthetic expressions—must also contribute to repairing these injustices, reversing priorities, and reorganizing authorship orders so that those historically erased occupy central positions.

Writing, traditionally seen as a process in which hands simply record the knowledge of the mind, eternalized on paper and passed down by academics in classrooms, takes on a new meaning here: writing is embodied, involving the whole body (Evaristo 2007), dynamic and lived, not just transmitted. Writing is also relational; it does not exist in isolation but depends on ongoing social interactions, both past and present. It projects itself into the future, like a call (Evaristo 2007), an act of imagination and transformation that challenges existing power structures and opens up new possibilities for the world. It jumbles temporalities: like in dreams, the past remains alive, and the future is rewritten through performances that break with coloniality, affirming other ways of existing. The future is not merely a distant horizon but something that already pulses in the present, manifesting in cultural and artistic practices that claim life in contexts where “at any careless moment, death is certain”.¹⁰

The knowledge produced is not something finished, extracted from books to be carried or transferred from the “zones of being” to the “zones of non-being”, as paternalistic and salvational logics suggest (Fanon 2020). Knowledge is no longer something that can be held, carried, transferred, stored, or eternalized; instead, it is a practice that emerges from interaction and thus cannot precede it. Against the solipsistic writing that defines Western academia, knowledge production is always dialogical (Freire 1998). As we have seen, knowledge grows out of encounters made possible only by both physical and subjective displacements of academics. One must cross the city, and in crossing, displace notions of centre and periphery—concepts that have been hierarchically positioned in epistemological terms, where “high culture” prevails over “low culture”, or even the absence of culture in peripheral territories. In ontological terms, these distinctions manifest as the “zone of being”, where the humanity of individuals is affirmed in contrast to subjects stripped of their humanity. Crossing implies a subjective displacement—letting go of authoritative knowledge that allows one to “name things” and the predetermined concepts through which we filter and construct the world. It involves vulnerability, abandoning established truths, and being open to new languages, references, and worlds. To do this, one must unlearn what Westernized universities have taught us: that the territory of the Other is a vacant space, a *terra nullius*, devoid of culture, history, or people. In this sense, the academic

must move physically and subjectively, cultivating different senses, such as listening rather than speaking. In this process, the academic is also moved and affected—even without engaging in acts like dancing *passinho* or other forms of bodily experimentation.

3. Building Residency II: ELÃ—Escola Livre de Artes (The Free School of Arts), 2020–2021

3.1. Creating Space

ELÃ—Escola Livre de Artes (The Free School of Arts)¹¹ materializes a commitment to making permanent space for creating and reflecting on contemporary realities in and through the esthetic and political field, namely, as experienced by youth in the peripheries and favelas of Rio de Janeiro. As part of a broader movement for social and epistemic justice, it wagers on the arts as a democratizing language, by way of a residency programme that cultivates conditions for bringing artists, curators, educators, and researchers together in a dialogue. In turn, each cohort takes on a thematic focus aligned with the collectively established agenda of public debate and action drafted annually by the civil society organization, the Observatory of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro¹². Through a broad understanding of art and the role of artists in emancipatory praxis, the School affirms as a priority the dialogue between people and communities marginalized in social and educational institutions, privileging indigenous, black, and LGBT+ residents of the peripheries of the metropolitan region.

In this section, we will contextualize the formation of the School in political, pedagogical, and artistic terms, prior to giving name to the methodologies developed to support interventions into these fields. In order to shed light on the tensions and possibilities of collective modes of knowledge production, we will focus particularly on the propositions of the second cohort of ELÃ 2020/2021, which defined its agenda as: “Masculinities in Dialogue”¹³. Our objective, in offering up the concepts and methods generated in and through ELÃ, is to extend an invitation to think research pedagogically, as a collective process, within which it becomes a means to advancing a shared project and not an end in and of itself. It is an invitation to intellectual humility that makes space for more creative and socially relevant scholarship.

As we are proposing reflections on, and the synthesis of, a collective process that we took part in, it is important to begin by naming our partners in this undertaking: the Observatory of Favelas team directly involved with the planning and execution of the second cohort of ELÃ at the Galpão Bela Maré gallery space—Jean Carlos Azuos, Jefferson dos Santos, Érika Lemos Pereira da Silva, Caju Bezerra, Napê Rocha, Gabrielle Vidal, Alan Furtado, José Francisco Lima, Maria do Perpétuo Socorro, Priscila Rodrigues, Nyl de Sousa, Tiago Alves Pereira, Marcella Pizzolato, Taiane Brito, and Sarah Horsth; the educative team invited to accompany the residents—Gleyce Kelly Heitor, Eloisa Brantes, Luiza Mello, Marisa Mello, Mariana Mello, Coletiva Mulheres de Pedra, Pâmella Carvalho, Rafa Éris, Marcia Farias, and Natália Nichols; the Brazilian team of the GlobalGRACE project—Isabela Souza, Tatiana Moura, Linda Miriam, together with ourselves; and the artists-in-residence whose works made up the exhibition project “Masculinities in Dialogue”—Abimael Salinas, Ana Bia Novais, Davi Pontes, Loo Stavale, morani, Patfudyda, Paulo Vinicius, Pedro de Moraes Barroso, Rafael Amorim, Rafael Simba, Simonne Silva Alves, and Taísa Vitória. Without all of these contributions, the synthetic work elaborated here would not be possible.

As collaborators in the construction of the ELÃ residency, we sought to accompany processes and inhabit the territories of creation through the insights of intervention–research methods (Escóssia et al. 2015). The disposition called for in this process is one that is guided by an ethic of working with, rather than analyzing and extracting from, research participants. It is from this place of working together toward a shared construction that

we now open up these processes for reflection, instead of offering up ready conclusions regarding how to create space for feminist and decolonial learning, teaching, and research, which, incidentally, requires that we take as a starting point the necessary rotation of all of these roles in context. It is in this sense that we understand research as a formative process for all involved: the work of learning, teaching, and researching is redistributed constantly among all participants, depending on the objectives of each stage of development.

In the words of Mulambö¹⁴, who took part of the School's first residency, the collective dimension of the process is key in unlocking the kind of situated consciousness needed to elaborate the means and languages apt to express and transform our contemporary realities:

Galpão Bela Maré has a very important place within my trajectory. From my first exhibition, which was here at Galpão Bela Maré, to my training at ELÃ, it was a very short period. So, arriving at these two moments here in this same space is also very interesting because of the power that this same space can yield in different ways. So, ELÃ is part of a maturation of my research, of my construction and my search for a decentralization of the educational process of art. Not only of art itself. (...) To understand that we are part of a scene, that we are part of a group of many people who are producing many different languages and that we are here, you know? So the school was very important for this maturation, for this understanding that we can take ownership of this scene and of ourselves, and that our presence is forceful. (Translation: ours)

The words of the young artist, who has been consolidating his trajectory in the contemporary art and activism scene of Rio de Janeiro, echo the sense of purpose of the School, which was born out of a decade's work at Galpão Bela Maré, set up as the artistic and cultural space of the Observatory of Favelas. ELÃ goes a step beyond the creation of spaces of visibility for artists from the peripheries and institutes a space for systematic training, experimentation, evolution, and the experience of individual and collective autonomy that enables the reaffirmation of other possible centres and systems of reference.

Beyond a politics of representation, we are speaking to a whole chain of production and circulation that is at stake, which fundamentally alters the kinds of concepts and methods generated along the way. If we are to take intersectionality¹⁵ seriously as an emancipatory praxis, then it requires us to resist the urge to isolate variables (for example, of gender from race and from territory and so forth) and thematize experiences in ways that turn people and places into objects of analysis while decontextualizing problems under analysis through universalizing tropes that are unable to grapple with the inequality of power that sustains inherited hierarchies of humanity. The possibility of constructing counter-archives¹⁶ demands that social and political space be created prior to, or simultaneously with, the creation of epistemological space.

3.2. *Thinking Methodologically*

ELÃ constitutes, and is constituted by, a broader movement to consolidate transformative methodologies based on the political reaffirmation of art as a way to confront material and symbolic inequalities. It does so by incorporating in its organizational practice the revindication of the right to work and receive a fair salary (artists-in-residence receive scholarships and develop portfolios to improve their prospects in the labour market); the right to education (the ELÃ syllabus is a working document open to the public); and the right to culture and esthetic expression (the ELÃ exhibitions are registered in catalogues and online archives); among other articulations of rights and responsibilities that uphold the autonomy of marginalized subjects and territories. To conduct research in this kind of space is to learn by carrying out the work that is necessary to imagine other possible worlds. The Observatory of Favela identifies as one of its guiding principles a *pedagogia*

*da convivência*¹⁷ (the pedagogy of coliving): an attention to how the ways in which we live together generate theory and practice for an emancipatory politics. To rephrase, how we live, relate to others, teach, learn, and research is directly implicated in the kinds of knowledges that we will be able or unable to access.

The opening declaration of the exhibition catalogue that inaugurated ELÃ in 2019, “Where we come from and where we want to go”, co-authored by the Observatory of Favelas director, Isabela Souza, and the curator of ELÃ and Galpão Bela Maré, Jean Carlos Azuos et al. (2021, p. 2), sums it up as follows:

From where we see it, we consider that ELã effectively contributed to the task of rethinking, reimagining, renarrating the city(ies), its subjects and their concepts, pointing to pluralities that identify with the diversity of which we are in fact composed, in the reaffirmation of our own subjectivities, theories of the self and other heritages.

As the coordinators of the production team, Luiza Mello and Marisa Mello, stated, “At the same time, it [ELÃ] points to an expanded and plural conception of art, the dehierarchization of concepts and methodologies” (Azuos et al. 2021, p. 5).

Elaborated in partnership with the School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage—EAV and Produtora Automatica, ELÃ’s formative training programme is based on the following thematic axes: Pathways, Bodies, Concepts, Materialities, and Agencies. Methodologically speaking, the formation process is based on the principle of creating encounters as a means to exchange and recognize the subjective, territorial, corporeal, technical, and artistic repertoires of the residents. This interchange enables the cultivation of relationships based on autonomy and mutual respect as a precondition in conceiving a transformative politics.

The pathways initiated by the School—to evoke one of the thematic axes of the programme that territorializes our approach to art—open up opportunities for dialogue among peers, as a way to learn, subvert, and resignify situated and embodied experiences, territorial practices, and points of confluence for collaboration and agency. As Mello and Mello explain,

More than a relationship of dependence, what emerges is a relationship of mutual respect and understanding, in which participants see the educators and invited artists as catalysts and collaborators in the creative process, with several possibilities of unfolding and articulating existing propositions. (Azuos et al. 2021, p. 6)

In the first ELÃ cohort, 26 young artists graduated, and its exhibition and educative activities brought together approximately 4300 people in Galpão Bela Maré between September 2019 and January 2020, in addition to school visits throughout the territory. In an inaugural spirit, the artists-in-residence decided on the name, *O nome que a gente dá as coisas* (The name we give to things)¹⁸. As such, the tone was set for a new movement aiming to produce systems of reference grounded in the first-person plural. After all, who has the power to name?

Ulisses Carrilho, curator of EAV Parque Lage and partner in the construction of ELÃ, extends the lessons learnt with the first cohort to inform political and pedagogical projects in society more broadly:

Elã—Escola Livre de Artes carries with it, with its organizers, with its audiences, with its collaborators, with the visitors of its exhibitions and, above all, within the poetics of the artists, the possibility of deforming the art system as it is. Investing in the training of artists with a lexicon sensitive to their lives and demands is, above all, to understand that the role of the School does not include only the verb “to teach”. It is necessary that schools learn from the insubordination of

their students. Perhaps in this way, in a radical exercise of rupture with the system of privileges, we will be able to learn from the disobedience present in all zones of the city, in a “spontaneous doing of improbable duration”. Here’s to all territories, indiscriminately, being able to give their own names to things. We are not “different”, we are tired of being “exploited”. (Azuos et al. 2021, p. 13)

ELÃ’s second cohort presented opportunities to consolidate a formative residency methodology, together with a digital presence produced by the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic that reconfigured its mode of operating. It brought together 12 artists-in-residence who took on a research agenda centred on questions of gender in an intersectional perspective, supported by the GlobalGRACE project in 2020/21.

Within the context of the hybrid methodologies of both the training process and the exhibition and educative actions, the very idea of a network was rearticulated, expanding to territories beyond Rio de Janeiro and introducing an intimate dimension of everyday creation through methods based on WhatsApp and itinerant studios, transforming the homes of the participating artists into sites of research and experimentation. Against the privilege of vision and ways of knowing accentuated by the screen, we embraced the challenge of rethinking our means of perception and communication, of being and forging relationships when what is touched has to cross the most varied of distances. Thus, the invited educators dedicated themselves to gaining as much as possible from a reflection on the body in virtuality, without disregarding the massive losses experienced at the time and the limits of virtual relationships. The *how* became the *what* in the lessons learnt.

The overarching artistic–pedagogical strategies were organized through three formative cycles geared toward stimulating horizontal learning processes for all involved: (i) spaces to conceive and reconceive the problem at hand, involving public and online discussions under the call, “Constructing Masculinities Otherwise”; (ii) research laboratories where artists-in-residence and interlocutors could investigate their fields of intervention; and (iii) the individual and collective production of the exhibition project, accompanied by experienced artists from the territories where the cohort was based. All of these strategies were designed to create a formative residency environment, with encounters sometimes reserved for the artists and their working groups and at other times bringing in a broader audience so as to expand the spheres of dialogue and opportunities for access to the knowledge generated by the project.

The significance of a formative residency approach lies in its resistance to pedagogical and research models that typically operate by the demarcated distance between who teaches and who learns, who knows and who is to be known. In these ways, many of the hierarchical categories of curator, artist, producer, and educator, among others, were constantly challenged, producing tensions and implosions that displaced and repositioned all of the people involved—even, the audiences interpellated by poetic and interactive educative actions in-site and online. What we then consider to be the work of research—the kind of research that is recognized by the academy—is thus aimed at systematizing the methods and concepts generated along the way, which work toward the conditions necessary to create space for the proposed conversations. When the time comes for this kind of outward-facing translation, the researcher as cartographer produces the memory of the work collectively achieved and opens up about the processes that enabled it to happen.

3.3. Curating Dialogues

Understanding the exhibition project as a process rather than a product allows one to think dialogically with one’s public, and work toward becoming one’s own curator. Curation as a method implies an attention to relationships—with oneself and with others. Beyond producing ideas that make sense monologically, an intervention-based method

and pedagogy enable the production of knowledge that attends to collective narratives and demands. Thinking about research pedagogically is key in harnessing the potential of these interventions in our modes of producing and legitimating knowledge. The question remains: what do we do with what is produced?

In the case of arts-based research and pedagogical methodologies, the arts needs to be worked on as a language, rather than an object, and all those involved in the process need to implicate themselves in a conception of art that goes beyond the poetic, symbolic, or narrative dimension of representation. As EAV partner curator, Ulisses Carrilho, conveys in one of the public dialogues that inaugurated the 2020 cohort of ELÃ¹⁹, it is necessary to account for how artistic experiments that do not commit to claiming possible spaces for their creations fail to access the transformative potential of art. In other words, we are not talking about a matter of “giving voice” or simply making visible what or who lives “on the margins”. We are talking about building the necessary infrastructure for such an agency to be completed on its own terms.

For this, we must direct our attention to the political economies that not only produce but circulate what we understand to be knowledge. In the context of ELÃ, the transversal axis that brings to bear questions of agency proposes a reflection on the politics of reception and circulation, notably within the art industry, in ways that expand our perception of the relations of power implicated in knowledge production processes. Creating space for these kinds of questions also allows for a permanent questioning of the perverse imbrications of art and education with processes of capitalist accumulation and the legitimization of stereotypes of “high culture” and “low culture” and subsequent disqualifications of subjects of knowledge. Without taking on these practical questions, it is impossible to effectively combat epistemicide: the annihilation, appropriation, and disqualification of ways of knowing and being in the world that do not conform to modern colonial hierarchies of knowledge, power, and being. As Sueli [Carneiro \(2023\)](#) explains, these century-old practices not only deny us access to alternative knowledges but also filter our comprehension of the kinds of knowledge that do guide us. The possibility of consolidating counter-archives to guide and ground our way toward a transformative politics is at stake.

Reflecting on the relationship between the academy and society, [Patricia Hill Collins \(2013\)](#) points to an understanding of intellectual activism based on the capacity to speak with multiple publics. For this, we require a kind of situated consciousness that can engage to disengage what she terms “controlling images” and the stereotyped gaze through which each of us—in our own way, from our particular social locations within a matrix of power, oppression, and privilege—accesses knowledge. Beyond narrow definitions of scientific communication or assistentialist and paternalistic community outreach projects that abound in response to research impact evaluations, how do we create the conditions to produce knowledge with, and not about, society?

In the context of ELÃ, the educative team of Galpão Bela Maré assumed a central role in this sense: transforming art into a pathway of dialogue and communication so as to affect and be affected. Once the exhibition project was consolidated, the multidisciplinary educative team sought to activate the artists’ propositions, not by guiding interpretations of individual artworks but by provoking new lines of questioning and possible unfoldings of the artists’ work—two of which will be detailed below. This method brings about a multiplying effect on the concepts generated during the formation and exhibition process by opening it up to the general public. The accompaniment of this reception process generates what the academy terms, “data”; it broadens the conceptual possibilities in the field, redimensioning what has been carried out and producing follow-up agendas for future research, be they centred on masculinities or other prisms of political analysis and action.

Digital languages and platforms can also play a key role in amplifying these multiplier effects. In addition to the on-site visits and in-school activations of the exhibition, the educative team that accompanied the 2020/2021 cohort of ELÃ developed a number of interactive propositions with audiences through social media (YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook), enhancing the audiovisual and intertextual narratives developed within the exhibition project, “Masculinities in Dialogue”²⁰.

The Poetic Action “Who’s afraid of cockroaches?”, for example, was prepared by the educative team of Galpão Bela Maré based on the work “Mom is the one who killed the cockroaches at home” by the artist-resident, Loo Stavale²¹. Based on extensive research in the area of racial-gendered stereotypes in the territories, the team developed online activities (via Instagram and Facebook), with the aim of promoting reflections and debates on gendered dynamics and relationships that are widespread. Through a GIF format, a visual game was launched with fast-rotating questions to start a dialogue with users through the images and narration proposed by the artist: Are men afraid of cockroaches? Do men cry? Do boys wash dishes? If a child becomes sick, does the dad care for them? Do boys wear makeup? Do guys hug each other? Do men undergo therapy?

Another example of an educative activation of the exhibition can be found in a virtual storytelling corner set up between the past/future mirrors of one of the art installations on site. The stories invite the audience and social media users to refocus how we go about thinking about gender and the power inequalities that it justifies. Instead of critiquing prevailing stereotypes head on, the stories open up space for life outside the boxes—the excess, the incompleteness, and the insurgence of our socializations. Grounded in Afro-Brazilian oral traditions, the educative team brought centre stage the diverse life forms represented by *orixás* of Yoruba origin to access other possible sources of inspiration and strategy, beyond identification and disidentification with hegemonic social norms and pacts. To renew our imaginations, the stories began with the question: “Where does your enchantment live?”²². Focusing in on what moves and re-enchants you has the power to engage and disengage, accordingly.

Through educative actions such as these, artists-in-residence have the opportunity to work and rework their esthetic and political propositions at the same time as contributing to revitalizing public debate. This method of curation is not about transmission but engagement. Through varied educative methodologies, ELÃ’s formative approach and exhibition project offer an expansive repertoire of ways to rethink and remake how we learn, teach, and research—in relation. It does this not only by the kinds of questions that it asks but also by channelling the reception and responses that they generate toward the creation of a sort of permanent feedback loop. Indeed, it is much more challenging to formulate socially and politically relevant questions than to impart ready-made responses. At a time of intense reconfigurations in the knowledge industry by means of artificial intelligence, the sensibilities of curatorship may take precedence over those of authorship, which remain imprisoned by the myths of originality and associated hierarchies of value.

As is repeated time and again during the public actions of the School, art serves as a possibility to “re-educate our gaze”. It can also serve as a communication strategy and a way to make difficult conversations possible. The territorialization of the concept of art²³ and the kind of situated consciousness that it engenders allows for a transformation of our modes of learning, teaching, and researching. Mobilizing all of our senses, beyond that of instrumental reason, not only broadens our field of perception but ultimately enables us to incorporate its lessons in a more effective formative process.

The artistic-pedagogical propositions developed in and by the first two cohorts of ELÃ—*O nome que a gente dá as coisas* (The name we give to things, 2019/20) and *Masculinidades em diálogo* (Masculinities in Dialogue, 2020/21)—demonstrate the numerous

ways in which an esthetic and political praxis can contribute to reimagining societies founded on colonial violence and the inequality of power. Against a hegemonic canon that protects itself by means of an academic monopoly on legitimate knowledge, with its monological methods and insular ethics, methodologies based on the arts invite us to expand our political and intellectual imagination. In turn, we become better equipped to create new languages to make these dialogues possible. Through language and its political and epistemic power, we can reconceive worlds.

bell hooks (2010), in her trilogy on pedagogy, proposes critical thinking as the process of learning a new language. Against the impulse to destroy, this sensibility centres the necessity to create and recreate on one's own terms. This move allows for a decentring of the inherited terms of debate (for example, gender as an individual identity) and a revindication of new terms for dialogue (gender as a relationship).

The technical-rational language privileged by academic, governmental, and even non- and inter-governmental entities tends to be limited in its ability to capture what is at stake and connect with people on their own terms. The wager on the arts prioritizes the necessity to first democratize processes of knowledge production in the hopes of one day learning to think and act collectively.

The memory, which we aimed to transcribe here, of the artistic-pedagogical experiments thus far authored in and through ELÃ has provided us with numerous exercises in discernment. Even when we do not have access to the relationships and resources necessary to organize infrastructure for research on such a coordinated scale, the re-education of our gaze enables us to chart new ways of curating spaces and dialogues in a world marked by extreme power asymmetries and myriad intersecting hierarchies of humanity. A political commitment to reparation, be it avowed under the name of feminism, decoloniality, or another movement, cannot serve as an adjective in individual pursuits of knowledge. Achieving emancipatory knowledge production requires us to connect with collective agendas and movements aligned by a shared purpose.

4. Final Reflections on Constructing Politico-Epistemic Infrastructure for Liberatory Knowledge Practices

The ways in which we inscribe and reinscribe knowledge reflect what kind of space has been effectively created, or not, for it to circulate and contribute to its fields of proposed intervention. This is a work of translation and curation as much as it is a work of political dispute into the distribution of status and authority, notably as sanctioned by the academy. The search for liberatory knowledge practices thus begins with the work of creating the social, political, and economic infrastructure required to reposition the criteria that qualify and disqualify knowledge and its subjects.

In this article, we sought to share two experiences of infrastructure-building, as supported by the GlobalGRACE project that brought together academic, artist, and social movement networks toward a shared goal of confronting racial-gendered violence from a local and global perspective. Through the Cia Passinho Carioca residency, we shed light on the geopolitics of knowledge that informed the limits and possibilities of this work. The methodologies of the ELÃ residency developed here, as a culmination of the infrastructure-building movement proposed in this four-year research-action project, allow us to start to understand the kinds of sensibilities required to reorientate us along the way.

Art—whether through the performances enunciated by the passinho dancers or the installations mounted by ELÃ residents—re-educates the gaze. It invites us to redirect our attention toward counter-archives that have been historically marginalized in the academic canon as much as in public debate and policy-making. In turn, art-based methods can

contribute to the democratization of our knowledge production processes, expanding the scope and relevance of our investigations in and through the reconstruction of agency.

Refusing the myths of neutrality and originality, wrapped up in claims over authorship, enables a reworking of the positions carved out for subjects and objects of knowledge by interrogating who has the power to name them. Only by recognizing the power relations involved in the act of producing knowledge does it become possible to confront them, paving the way for knowledge to cease operating as a tool of domination and instead exercise its potential to serve as an agent of dialogue and transformation.

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Notes

- ¹ For more on the international network: <https://www.globalgrace.net/> (accessed on 12 February 2025). To access the Brazilian work package actions: <https://youtube.com/@globalgracebrasil5819?feature=shared> (accessed on 12 February 2025). Funded by the UKRI's Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) delivered through the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
- ² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Dc442-75sc&list=PLi7fSptgAgeasIXNDNm8o0RBYjkAtJ0g> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ³ <https://arenadicro.org.br/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/passinhocariocaofc/?hl=pt-br> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ⁵ <https://arenadicro.org.br/quem-somos/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/mulheresaovento/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ⁷ GlobalGrace Brasil, Estreia do espetáculo Na Manha—Bate-papo com Passinho Carioca e Mulheres ao Vento Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-8fuW71sO0&t=4354s>. Accessed on: 30 March 2025.
- ⁸ Iansã/Oiá is an orixá in Candomblé and Umbanda, Afro-Brazilian religions with roots in Yoruba traditions. She is known as the deity of winds and storms, revered for her strength and transformative power. Oiá symbolizes change, communication, and resistance. In Yoruba mythology, she also transforms into a buffalo and a butterfly, representing the intensity of transitions. Her figure inspires the name of the collective, as, like the wind, its members break barriers and occupy spaces, redefining narratives and identities within the diaspora.
- ⁹ <https://mareonline.com.br/quando-o-vento-danca/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ¹⁰ Available at: <https://traduagindo.com/2022/05/24/certidao-de-obito/>. Accessed on: 2 February 2025 (our translation).
- ¹¹ For more on the School, its exhibition catalogues and educative material, Available online: <https://www.belamare.org.br/ela-escola-livre-de-artes/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ¹² For more on the Observatory of Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Available online: <https://observatoriodefavelas.org.br/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ¹³ For access to video-memory of the 2020/21 residency: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEeD6o3NmEc&list=PLi7fSptgAgdJG4Uv9PTNEnG6_gEFuclB (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- ¹⁴ In original spoken language, Portuguese: “O Galpão Bela Maré é um local muito importante para minha trajetória. Desde a minha primeira exposição, que foi aqui no Galpão Bela Maré, até a minha formação na ELÃ foi um período muito curto. Então, chegar nesses dois momentos aqui nesse mesmo espaço é muito interessante também pela potência que esse mesmo espaço consegue agregar de formas diferentes. Então, a ELÃ faz parte de um amadurecimento na minha pesquisa, da minha construção e dessa minha busca por uma descentralização do processo educativo da arte. Não só da arte em si. (...) Entender que a gente

faz parte de uma cena, que a gente faz parte de muita gente que está produzindo muitas linguagens diferentes e que a gente tá chegando, tá ligado? Então a escola foi muito importante para esse amadurecimento, para essa compreensão de que é tudo nosso e a gente tá vindo com tudo". This account by the artist-in-residence, Mulambö, can be found in the video-synthesis produced of the project; available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ckod_5cwek&ab_channel=BelaMar%C3%A9 (accessed on 12 February 2025).

- 15 For more on the concept of the intersectionality of power, refer to Patricia Hill Collins' (2013) synthetic work on black feminist thought and methodology. Within the Brazilian context, refer to Lélia Gonzalez's (2018) work on the imbricated workings of the coloniality of power.
- 16 By taking recourse in the language of "counter-archives", we work with a conception of archival practices that departs from a political understanding of their role in legitimating the status of memory and knowledge, as systematized in Achille Mbembe's (2002, p. 20) work, "The power of the archive and its limits"; in his words: "The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status".
- 17 For more on the concept of the pedagogy of coliving, refer to Jorge Barbosa, Fernando Fernandes and Jailson Souza Silva's (2018) transcription of the guiding paradigms of the Observatory of Favelas.
- 18 For more, access the exhibition catalogue here: <https://observatoriodefavelas.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Catalogo-Ela-2019.pdf> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- 19 Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ke4mhIBxuA&list=PLi7fSptgAgdJG4Uv9PTNEnG6_gEFuclB&index=3 (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- 20 For more, access the exhibition catalogue here: <https://observatoriodefavelas.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CATALOGO-ELA%CC%83-2021.pdf> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- 21 Available here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPI397EJCQ5/> and <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=258787286038679> (accessed on 12 February 2025). Also on the GlobalGRACE virtual museum platform: <https://exhibition.globalgrace.net/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- 22 Available here: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1655205894673912> (accessed on 12 February 2025). Also on the Global-GRACE virtual museum platform: <https://exhibition.globalgrace.net/> (accessed on 12 February 2025).
- 23 For more on the concept of the territorialization of art, refer to Barbosa and Teixeira's (2019) systematization of the cartographic methods of the Observatory of Favelas in the field of cultural production.

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