Questioning Environmental Racism among Ruins and More-than-human Landscapes in Goiabal Park

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What can a body do when it questions the colonial capitalist system (Rolnik, 2018) and its neoliberal ramifications around our lives? In what ways do art and education move us to think and act amid racism, climate change, and environmental disasters? How can we cultivate ways to postpone the end of the world (Krenak, 2019)? Based on these questions, we—two Black cisgender students in the Bachelor's program in Biological Sciences at the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU), Pontal Campus, and a white cisgender professor in this same program—are attentive to the possibilities of experimenting, through a formative process, with writings, performances, and images in an engaged, problematizing, and propositional visual essay.

This inspiration arose in discussions that took place in the Biology and Culture discipline, a mandatory component of the Bachelor's program in Biological Sciences at UFU, Pontal Campus. This discipline taught by the third author of this text who has sought "[...] to take seriously the power of the arts to move education in science and biology, to question scientific knowledge and its contemporary interconnections, to allow us to feel, listen and act in

the world" (Sales, 2024a, p. 18). Thus, the first two authors decided to carry out a photographic and performance essay amidst the ruins of an Environmental Protection Area (EPA) popularly known as Parque do Goiabal, located in the city of Ituiutaba – MG – Brasil.[1] This EPA is one of the only remaining areas of the *Cerrado* biome still partially preserved in a region intensely marked by agricultural exploitation. Despite the importance of Goiabal Park to the city and the Pontal do Triângulo Mineiro region, it was abandoned by recent municipal administrations. Its structures are in disrepair and beyond repair. Furthermore, the area suffers from waste disposal and a sense of insecurity, which compromises the permanence of its spaces. Faced with the government's neglect of Goiabal Park, a group of people concerned with ecological practices and education created the Goiabal Vivo Collective (Alive Goiabal Collective), of which we are members.[2]

We understand that the continued abandonment of Goiabal Park explicitly demonstrates the manifestation of environmental racism, a structural phenomenon that affects marginalized communities. We also recognize that environmental racism is inseparable from the advancement of agribusiness, which disproportionately threatens human and nonhuman lives, and from the mechanisms of scientific knowledge production that we seek to highlight and critique in this essay. In this essay, we materialize artistic experiments driven by Black bodies concerned not only with denouncing the perverse mechanisms of racism and colonialism, but also with engendering possible solutions in more-than-human landscapes. Like Donna Haraway (2022, 2023), who calls on us to see nature as inextricably linked to culture, we believe that the landscapes of this time, now called the Anthropocene, demand a responsive capacity committed to the world. This response-ability is fundamental for us to continue creating worlds amidst landscapes filled with ruins, as Anna Tsing (2019) teaches us.

The current planetary condition surprises and hurts us. The entanglements of the Anthropocene threaten us. The only path seems to be the end of the world. Climate change, environmental crises, and scientific deniers are the new constants of our time, as anthropologist Bruno Latour (2019) rightly points out. Human and nonhuman peoples removed from their lands, devastated, decimated… all in the name of "progress," "development," and the "future." Absences, voids, precariousness, violence, segregation. Storylines that end existences. Black bodies, female bodies, poor bodies, gender and sexual dissident bodies, bodies with disabilities… all at risk. Also environmental areas, nonhuman animals, plants and fungi, more-than-human

[1] Various initiatives and investigations have been carried out in Goiabal Park, such as the work of geographer and professor Rildo Costa (2012), which highlights the biological and geological diversity of that location and highlights environmental issues already evident during the research period—which we believe have changed and perhaps intensified in the years since the publication of his article. More than ten years ago, Costa (2012, p. 81) warned that it is important to develop "[...] public policies for this area, aiming at the well-being of the population and the preservation/conservation of Goiabal Park, also bringing a better quality of life for the population, with the goals of environmental education and leisure capable of establishing harmony between the needs of society and those of nature." However, even today, we perceive a lack of initiatives that take seriously the care of this area and the human and non-human beings that interact with it.

[2] Affiliated with the Federal University of Uberlândia, Pontal Campus, the Goiabal Vivo Collective is an organization of individuals working to care for the park, promoting teaching, research, and outreach activities related to ecological issues and education. For more information, we recommend visiting the collective's Instagram page: < https://www.instagram.com/goiabalvivo/ >. Accessed on May 10, 2025.

existences. And how can we situate and position ourselves? Perhaps we need to ground ourselves, as earthly beings, in this complex and winding time (Latour, 2019).

As the Brazilian Indigenous thinker Ailton Krenak (2019) reminds us, "[…] they preach the end of the world as a possibility of making us give up on our own dreams." Inspired by him, we believe that it is possible to practice decolonial ecologies (Ferdinand, 2022) and anti-racist learning in the movements between arts, sciences, and education, and that these movements have the power to distance us from the paralyzing pessimism that only looks to the end of the world. Thus, we have proposed practices for experimenting with the arts in the training of science and biology teachers.

All of this may seem banal, but it is not: they are ways of taking seriously our engagement with these issues, with these landscapes and beings, with ourselves and with the world; creating together and breaking out of inertia, moving in search of possible escapes to, at the same time, postpone the end of our world—as Krenak (2019) proposes—and, perhaps, hasten the end of worlds that no longer fit (Sales, 2024b). These experiments are ways of cultivating artistic, scientific, and educational practices engaged in responsibly inhabiting a world in ruins; they are ways of articulating educations that cultivate self-care and well-being (Sales; Rigue, 2022), of working with teacher training as works of art (Sales, 2024a) that are metamorphosed (Rigue; Sales; Dalmaso, 2024). In short, experimenting with the arts in teacher training helps to position science teaching and learning in/with/amid life (Sales; Rigue; Dalmaso, 2023).

All of this resonates with what the *quilombola* thinker Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2023) teaches us about confluence and the urgency of paying attention to the practice of *quilombola* knowledge, organic and circular knowledges, which are to be shared, not sold. This perspective is an invitation to entangle popular knowledge and our ancestral roots in *confluências (confluences)* with scientific knowledge, artistic affections, and educational mobilizations, always from a *contra-colonial* perspective. This is precisely what Isabelle Stengers (2023) also calls us to experiment with: cosmopolitical relations with science to heal so many capitalist wounds; even slowing down the processes that drive our academic, scientific, and educational training and work.

In this essay, we seek to disrupt the historically constructed way in which subalternized subjects see and position themselves in the world. Thus, orality, indocility, the arts, dialogues with science, and education present themselves as a confluence of knowledge and practices, of movements capable of experimenting with possible paths. These are nuances that fracture racist and genocidal networks, allowing us to dream and create sensitive relationships with the Earth/land and with human and nonhuman beings, even in times of climate change and environmental disasters.

Walking around Goiabal Park, we learned how this space is part of the community, intertwined with people, plants, animals, and a landscape that differs from the rest of the city, so impacted by neoliberal capitalism. Thus, we believe that contact with the park, the beings that inhabit it, and their stories was not only academic-scientific, but also affective-creative-formative.

Using a digital camera abandoned for years, we prioritized framing that could highlight the devastation but also highlight the resistance and possible re-existence. The confluence of

popular, artistic, and scientific knowledge made it possible to use performance and photography as instruments of visibility, memory, and reconnection with the ancestry of a space that is as much ours as we are it. Our essay aims to provoke, problematize, and propose. Here is the Black body experimenting with ways of performing to live, resist, engage with the world amid its ruins, persisting.

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Image 1: Target.

What body is this?

Marked and imprisoned in the agony of slave ships to the ruins of subalternity

What body is this that accumulates scars and external marks on its identity?

What kind of existence is this that has been deterritorialized, that has constructed and resisted the appropriation and illegitimatization of its knowledge and ways of living?

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Image 2: What color produces legitimate knowledge?

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Image 3: Throat: painting doesn't change the "truths" that need to be told.

This body doesn't fit in a lab coat... so clean, white and sanitized

This body is the object of study for those who have scientifically validated knowledge

Could this body also be the protagonist?

Does this body have no pain, hunger, will, intellect, and past?

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Image 4: Looking at something bigger, erasing overly human, white, colonial impositions.

Without spaces, hollow, hidden, subjected to scrutiny

A body needs to perform and fit in

A body can also experiment, play and rehearse ways of escaping.

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Image 5: Social paresthesia.

Colonialism, racism and all their tentacles screamed, determined and thought they won

But life is greatness, our ancestry is strong and nature insists on us.

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Image 6: Marginalized ruins, margins to be occupied.

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Image 7: Breachs: Nature-Cultures Resisting in Ruins.

In more-than-human collectives, even in the ruins of the Anthropocene

These bodies resist and remind us that we are, that we are

And our knowledge we will share to create other worlds.

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