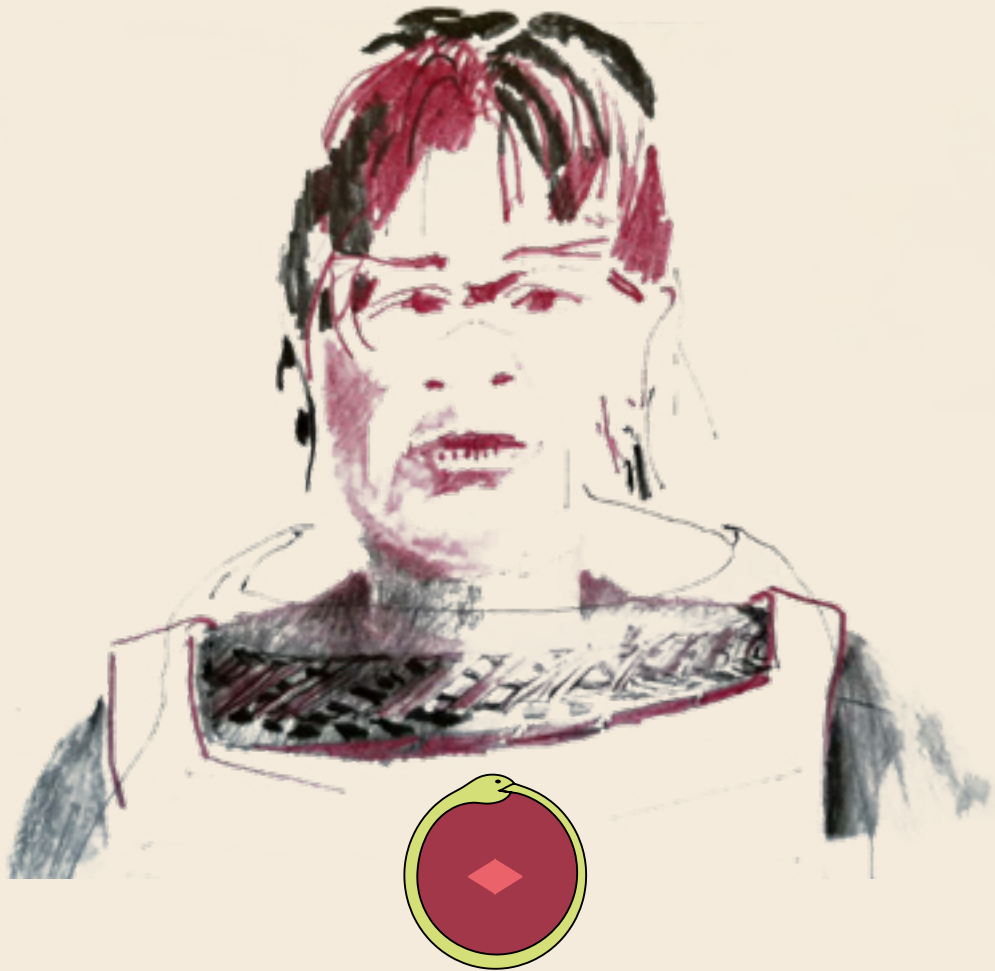
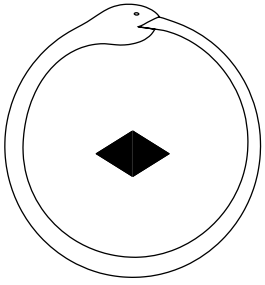


OUR BODY IS
OUR GROUND
Sandra Benites
Body-territory 1



notebooks
SELVAGEM



OUR BODY IS OUR GROUND

BODY-TERRITORY 1

Sandra Benites

“Corpo-território” [Body-Territory] is a series of Selvagem Notebooks.

The result of an online course offered by the “Papo de Bruxa”

[Witch’s Chat] platform, which invited curator

Sandra Benites Guarani Nhandewa to meet with

the women who registered to participate over four Sundays

in November 2020. Each of the notebooks corresponds

to one of the meetings, following the order of events.

This first notebook is the transcript of class number 1,

entitled “Our Body Is Our Ground”.

The richness of the encounter, of meeting different bodies, is precisely that we connect and balance in perception, in difference, in the trajectories, in their different origins, in the way our bodies are produced. The more we identify where we come from, the easier it is for us to see and interact with many others, although this may often cause us pain as well. Especially for Black women and Indigenous women. I’m not saying that non-indigenous women, white women, don’t feel pain, I’m just talking about how it’s specific to these women. I’m not judging non-indigenous women, non-black women, because this has been imposed for millennia. It’s been placed on these bodies and often the mind itself has no way of reacting. The reaction seems to be a reaction that has no reaction. And we, Indigenous women and Black women, have a stronger reaction because of this issue, because we know where we stand.

Firstly, I'm going to tell you a story about us *Guarani* women, and I'm not saying it's our narrative, because what is a narrative? When I started walking, I listened a lot to my grandmother's storytelling. And she had a way of telling it to the boys and to the girls. She was the only one who told these stories. And today I've been able to understand why only she would tell it that way. Because she relates it to her own history, to the way she cared for women. She goes on creating and building another system, another way of looking at women, at children, specifically at women. Why? Because she was a midwife and she told her story.

Today I can understand why she told this version of the story to these children, to these young people, to girls and boys. I remember once, when she started telling the story, tears ran down her face. Sometimes there was a moment when she sang. Then she would say: "Oh, this is to strengthen me, to sing to me. Because all of us women have our own song, we are the masters of the voice". She used to say that a lot: "We own our own voices". Because it is told that we are the shouting masters. And then I would ask her why she said "master of the voice"? Because we have our song, and it's like a bird song. We have our gift of singing and shouting. Sometimes singing, crying, the mind itself and speech are also a scream. The very way she tells this story is also a scream.

For us *Guarani*, there are different ways of telling this narrative, the same narrative. What my grandmother used to say was this: "They say that there was no human being before. There was the world. There were places. There were the earth and the sky, which we call *Ywate*. *Ywate* is the sky". She used to tell us this story – she used to tell us this story a lot. And she said that there was only darkness here on earth and in the sky. I'll summarise it, because sometimes it takes two days, three days to tell this story. According to her, the earth was as if it was hollow, and the sky was just darkness, before the world came into being. The world for us is ourselves, our own bodies, us human beings and non-human beings too, things that exist on earth. She used to say that a man existed, he was *Nhanderu*, who is *Nhanderu Ete*, a spirit being.

Nhanderu could create, generate a male figure who looked like him to come and live on Earth. To inhabit the Earth. And it is said that Nhanderu looked and saw Nhandesy. Nhandesy is the ground itself. Nhandesy was very beautiful, so amazing, and Nhanderu was enchanted by her. Nhanderu, instead of creating another man, became the male figure himself to come and live here with Nhandesy. Nhandesy is Ywy Pygua, the way we understand it is that Nhandesy is Ywy Pygua, which is the ground itself, and Ywate Gua would be the one above. Nhanderu came, started to live on Earth and they began to fall in love with each other. So things were created, Nhanderu planted things for Nhandesy to harvest. Then they had children, they began to fall in love with each other and Nhandesy became pregnant with the children, who are the Moon and the Sun.

One day, Nhanderu arrived and told Nhandesy he had planted all the stuff, the beings, the things to feed Nhandesy's children. And then it is told that Nhandesy said: "Well, how come you have just planted it yesterday and now you say that everything is ready to feed us?" Then it is told that Nhanderu got upset about this, didn't answer Nhandesy and when Nhandesy questioned this, Nhanderu said: "I'm going back to my ambá", which is a sacred place, where there is the nhe'en, where we speak of the spirit, where he came from, which would be his origin, which would be the ypy. It is told that he went back there and Nhandesy stayed. But Nhandesy didn't accept this and she said: "No, I can't stay here with the children. How am I going to stay with the children on my own?" And Nhanderu said: "No, I'll help you, I'll look after you from up there". Nhandesy said: "No, I can't stay with the children".

Nhandesy was very sad and yet Nhanderu left. Then the children started talking in her belly. In fact, the children weren't even born yet. The children were the ones who took Nhandesy after Nhanderu when he went away. And it is told that Nhandesy walked, she walked for a long time, and when she arrived she was already exhausted, very tired. And it is told that she arrived at a time when there were lots of flowers, and the children started asking her for things. They told her: "Look, pick this for me, pick that for me". In fact, the children made this agreement, that the mother would fulfil all their wishes, so that they would show the way

for **Nhandesy** to go after **Nhanderu**. **Nhandesy** went away, and arrived at that moment with the small **Nhanderu**, those we call children.

Nhandesy was very tired and went to collect flowers and various other things that the children wanted, which they were asking her for. Then she was stung by the **mamangava**¹ on her hand. And as she was already very exhausted, she said: “Look, how come you haven’t even been born yet and you’ve already started asking me for various things?”. And she got angry and started to get sad, crying a lot, and then it is told that the children shut up, they stopped talking to **Nhandesy**. She was already very exhausted and took any road she could find, and when she reached a crossroads, she took the road she thought she should take. And then she arrived at the jaguars’ **tawa**. As she was pregnant, the smell of the children could be sniffed and she was virtually devoured by the jaguars. The jaguars devoured her. But the children, the foetuses, were raised by the jaguars. By the jaguars’ **Djaryi**, who is the jaguars’ grandmother. The children grew up orphans, but they didn’t know that **Djaryi** wasn’t their real mother. Then they found out that she wasn’t the real mother and there are various other explanations for what they did – they tried to kill all the jaguars, but they didn’t succeed.

*

The first point I’d like to emphasise is that my grandmother used to tell this story to the children: “**Nhandesy** gave her life and, even though she was tired, she fought to save three men”. Because, in our minds, in our understanding, **Nhanderu** is the male figure and two children, who were **Kwarahy** and **Dyasy**, who would be the sun and the moon, are also boys, in our belief. And she told this story as if it had just happened. It’s important to think about something else: **Nhanderu** is from **Ywate Gua**, he’s from above. So he doesn’t know what the ground is. He knows how to plant. He planted and different things were born. But **Nhandesy** didn’t know either, because she was there, she’s the ground. The body itself was placing all things, all beings, human and non-human, what could feed on its own body. Of course, there’s always a strangeness at first, we don’t know how we’re going to deal with the situation. Of course,

1. A type of wasp, also called a drone or bumblebee.

there is often this disagreement with the other, because everyone has their own way of looking at things and their own way of acting, their own way of understanding, from their own origin, from their own body, from their own journey. I just wanted to emphasise this more ancestral issue. And this was told by women.

I'm not saying that for us *Guarani* there is no gender. Gender doesn't come ready-made. *Kyri*n means to be small. As the children grow and develop, they build up their identity as a boy or a girl. And this is a relationship with their own body, which identifies what it means to be a boy and what it means to be a girl. For example: for us *Guarani*, being a girl means knowing how to look after your body, your own blood cycle, because that's very important, my grandmother used to say. Because our health, our well-being, lies in women's menstrual periods. And that's what's going to make our body harmonious, the menstrual cycle. That's why we respect our menstrual cycle so much. When women stop menstruating, they have more autonomy to move around everywhere. When we menstruate, we have a certain diet, which restricts certain foods, even for going out in the hot sun or in the cold, where it's windy, we can't carry a lot of weight, we can't climb trees.

And with the boys it's the opposite, they're going with the movement of their own bodies – they learn to hunt, they learn to plant, they learn to do various other things that involve constant movement. Always on the move. Women also experience this when they menstruate and stop menstruating. Or those who don't have children, for example, they also have the autonomy to be wherever they want to be. They have autonomy. Not that people who have children don't. Why not? Because we take care of our bodies and children, this requires different places for us to be in harmony with our own bodies.

Back to the question of *Nhandesy*'s walk: Walking is a process for us. It is made up of several trajectories. It also has different origins, except that, for us *Guarani*, my grandmother used to say: "We women are the same, we are one sole body". That's why I say this: "I often find myself in a situation where, like all women, regardless of origin or ethnicity, I feel pleased with myself. And I don't when it's something that comes from outside, that's imposed on us women. For example, in the city, wo-

men find it difficult to exist with their own bodies as women, as women who bleed, as women who have children.

So, you completely deny your own body. You enter a system that has been oriented only towards a male body. In this case, various systems: School, university and countless other things that we know we face. This process, which will tell you who you are, is actually a process – it’s not something that’s born ready-made or, for some reason, we already are. It’s a process, and we call it a *guatá*, a journey. And then, talking about what we call *tekó*: What is *tekó*?² *Tekó* is like the body we carry, the body, the flesh, it’s the earth or the basis of our spirit. The spirit has no colour, ethnicity or gender. It’s this process that we produce according to our experience. Even if we walk, there is always another person who puts limits on our body, to tell us what we want, what we have to do and what steps we have to take to move forward. That’s why it’s very important, as my grandmother used to say, to know what *Nhandesy*’s steps were like.

She couldn’t speak Portuguese, she didn’t speak, she didn’t read, but she always questioned it. She’d say: “Look, we have to respect each other. I’m *Nhandesy*, I’m the ground you walk on”. That’s why you (us women) have to know what a boundary is. Your boundary is³ a certain

2. *Tekó* is our way of being, our way of seeing the world and our way of being in the world. This depends on each form, each person, each trajectory. There is the *tekó* of men, the *tekó* of women, the *tekó* of the *Txe Adjaryi* – of our grandparents – and the *tekó* of children. *Tekó* is a bit of individuality, each person’s path. On the other hand, *tekoha* is the place where we build our way of being, collectively. Where there are more people, different bodies, different *tekós*. That’s more or less what *tekó* is.

3. The boundary I refer to is my way of understanding it. I’m not saying that this is right or a single truth. We can find our boundaries in differences, or sometimes even in ourselves. What is a boundary and how far can we go? Many times, in this system that cuts up our bodies, I’ve had to cross my boundaries, disrespect my own beliefs, my own body, in order to keep up with the system. I was a teacher and, even when I was menstruating, I had to go teach not because I wanted to, but because I had to. In my culture, when we are menstruating we should go to bed to rest. This boundary can be something for us or it can also be for you to understand other people. How far could you go, what is the other person’s boundary, the difference, each one’s trajectory, there is a way of contributing to each other. The encounter is necessary. In order to understand the other person’s boundary, you have to listen to them, to their experience. That’s why I talk about trajectory and experience. Regardless of the place, you need to listen to the other person. And I think that’s the richness of the encounter, of sharing, so that we can balance each other out. Understanding the other person’s boundary and also understanding our own boundary. Often you can

moment and this boundary controls this harmony balance, even though it's a different place. I'm not saying that we live harmoniously. No, we always live in conflict, of course, because we don't know. Because they're different bodies, they're different steps from a different place, and mutual respect grows out of it. But to balance this body in its diversity doesn't mean that everyone has to become the same thing; on the contrary, it balances into several and, even though it's several bodies, we call it balance. So much so that, in our *Guarani* language, there isn't a word for balance, only for imbalance⁴.

As far as we're concerned, the world was born out of imbalance. So we try to balance it. That's why we always try to listen, to understand. That's why I say it's often painful to work as a team. I think that working as a team, as a collective, doesn't mean that everyone thinks the same, that is, everyone does the same thing. On the contrary, that's why listening to each other is a challenge to us. That's why I said that these meetings we have are very important.

So, how are we going to process this body of ours? This body that everyone carries – don't blame yourself for who you are, because this body that you carry is made up of various things that have been imposed on you along the way. And often, when we get to a path, a crossroads, when we're very tired, we just take any path. And that's where we women are symbolically killed. In our language there is *nhemyrõ*, which

cross it, but then you understand why you crossed it and question it. I often question it. I had to cross my boundary as a woman, as a *Guarani* woman – I have my beliefs, but I couldn't allow myself to follow my system as a *Guarani*, because of the system in which I was employed – Mums who study, who go to university – I've met some of them, including Indigenous women – they don't have a place to leave their children to study. They also cross their own boundaries. If you know you're overstepping your boundaries, you need to question. And you need to listen to the other person in order to understand what the other person's boundary is.

4. In fact, in our language, there is no balance, the word balance; there is imbalance, *djoawy*. So that's why, for us, there's no such thing as a perfect being, or, in other words, the world isn't perfect. In other forms of knowledge or other beliefs, we hear stories about a perfect God or perfection. For us, there is no such thing as perfection. There is non-perfection. We build our journey from there, so to speak. That's why I said that there is no balance in our language, but an imbalance. So the world was built on imbalance, on encounters. That's why we have to reverse it when we start talking about balance. We make this journey in an attempt to balance, but in this sense, seeking to know, seeking to interact with the other and listen to the other and so on.

means to *disenchant the balance of our path*. It's on these paths that we sometimes find ourselves at odds with ourselves.

That's why it's important for us to get together with others, to understand each other. In fact, it's not so that I think the same as the other person, but so that I can strengthen myself in what I am and know what's important to the other person. And we get together. And I always say that as a woman, as an Indigenous person, as a Black person, we have these things that we have in common, pieces in common, that can fit in with everyone, but without ceasing to be what our origin, our home, is. There are things that are important to us and that we have to carry forward.

As I said at the beginning, a boundary is exactly what you need in order to understand what the other is. But this boundary is exactly the difference of the other, a different path. That's the boundary. That's why it's important for us to understand the body-space of the other. What is the other? What is the other person's body? It's not the body, I'm not just looking at the body, I'm talking about the spirit, the trajectory, the way it was formed, so to speak. As if it were our body. How was it with our body? What path did our body follow? And I understand that we are women, regardless of the origin we believe in. My grandmother used to tell the men that all women are mothers. All women are your mothers, all women are your sisters and all women will be your mothers. And then my grandmother used to say that our body is the ground. That's why some people are often a little fragile – a lot of what is happening to us Indigenous people – due to all the colonisation that has taken place on our journey. I'm talking about the ones I know, most of them are *Guarani*.

From *Nhandesy Ete's* narrative, the men learn to step on the ground. There's a dance that teaches men to step on the ground. They have to ask for *ldjara*, which we say is the spirit of nature. For example: when they go hunting, when they go fishing, when they go looking for a tree to build a house, or when they go to plough, they always perform the ritual of asking for *ldjara*, that is, for the spirit of nature, because they're going to get that tree, or what they're going to plough. So they're asking the spirit of nature, asking the spirit of *Nhandesy* for a licence to remove certain elements from the forest, the river, the fields, because they know that the ground is *Nhandesy's* own body. That's why I always call it our

ground. In fact the body, from all of us, is the ground itself. A process, which is often not taught outside the space where it doesn't exist. For example, it's the older women who teach, they are the ones who teach the women. The older women teach the children about this story, about this knowledge.

In relation to that, for example, as soon as the children are separated from this knowledge (in a space outside the *Guarani* community) they no longer hear the story of *Nhandesy*. Who's going to tell it? Nobody tells it. And then they grow up, listening, saying: "It's *Nhanderu*". Today I realise that some talk as if there was only *Nhanderu*. *Nhanderu* means our God, it's *Nhanderu Ete*, who is our true Father, who is *Ywate Gua*, who is from above. Today, I realise that *Nhandesy* herself is somewhat forgotten. It's not that she's so forgotten, the story is still told, but she's no longer central to the story, only *Nhanderu* is. And I realise how the story, the narrative told by someone else, that is, other than ourselves, influences and has power. This question of narrative, that narrative, it's not just told by one person, another version. No, there are several versions, depending on who's telling it, who they're telling it to and what they're telling it for. And that's why orality is very important for us. Women usually question this. They say: "Hey, why did *Nhanderu* leave *Nhandesy*?"

I used to listen to my grandmother, she'd say: "That's why men have to do it like this, like that, like this. Why? Because, in the past, *Nhanderu* abandoned *Nhandesy*". She also would say: "If a man raises a finger to a woman, in front of a woman, shouts or speaks loudly to a woman, he is killing seven women". I remember that these women who die are several, they are women they can kill and this can lead to tragedy for them, because they can be left without a ground. Of course, one complements the other, because *Nhanderu* is the wind, it's the air, it's the *Ywate Gua*, it's not what we see, or what we catch. It's something that is our own breath. In other words, the male and female bodies must always be together, in balance with each other, because they complement each other. Although our breath represents the spirit of *Nhanderu*, and our body, which is ground, is *Nhandesy*, one thing always has to be in balance for this harmony to exist – even though they are different places. The *Ywy*

Pygua, which is the Earth, and the *Ywate Gua*, which is from above, one depends on the other for this balance to exist.

So, I told you what my grandmother used to tell the men, the boys, when women start to get upset. You say that women can never shout. She used to say: “You can’t say that women are crazy. Because sometimes they talk like that [referring to shouting]”. We have a moment of madness, of laughing. Sometimes some boys would come in and say that, and my grandmother would always say to the boys: “You can’t call her crazy or say any other word that offends her. A woman, if she’s being called crazy or is going mad, it’s because you’ve made her crazy, because we don’t go mad, we understand”. Then she told this story of *Nhandesy’s* walk, when she went and gave herself up to death, it was actually because she was already exhausted, she was carrying her children alone, she was feeling alone, abandoned.

Sometimes I also get emotional when I tell that, and she would get emotional when she told that. Then the boys would be kind of astonished, looking at me and the other women. When we’re not recognised as women, in any other system, we’re killed, I mean, symbolically we’re killed, because we’re seen as outsiders, as something bad. Because nobody welcomes us. During menstruation, when you go to a place and you are not feeling well, especially if your organs hurt, whatever you are feeling, [they say] that you’re stressed, that you’re crazy⁵. I’ve heard

5. The issue of the menstrual cycle for women, for us, *Guarani*, is very important because it is the menstrual cycle that will determine our feelings. What is a feeling? We talk about *py’á*. I often made this confusion myself, but today I was able to better understand what *py’á* is. *Py’á*, for us, is feeling. It’s as if it were the basis of feeling, which has to do with thinking, with the head. Our blood, according to my grandmother, my mother, they would say that our blood can go to our heads. When our blood rushes to our head, it can harm us. Usually, women experience hair loss, forgetfulness, stress and, often, depression. At the age of 30 you will already have this problem if you don’t respect your blood. Why? Because blood has to do with the foetus of our children. I mean, as I understand it, we women give life and death too. We are life and death. And what is fundamental to this life and death is our own blood. And blood is what controls our emotions too, as my grandmother used to say. That’s why we need to take good care of our bodies. And this story we are telling is, in fact, a narrative that they tell to explain our lives, as feminine and masculine, what each one has to respect in the menstrual cycle. And men also have hot blood, like men’s periods, except they happen every day. It’s not like us, which is per month. They say men bleed too. But they don’t bleed from their own bodies, according to what they

people say that. When we are not respected the way we are, symbolically we are killed. We have this concern, to bring women into any space just the way they are; women are excluded, as if they only had another body and it wasn't the way they were. I mean, every woman has to feel good in the space they're in, the way they are, no matter what, but it's important for everyone to feel good, to feel well supported in the spaces where they circulate.

Today, due to various processes of colonisation, I can see from my research that there is more talk of a man interviewing another man. Various works, articles that have been published, always talk about the *Guarani* in general, but at a certain point they talk more about *Nhanderu* than *Nhandesy*. And then, today, I realise that young people themselves also talk more about *Nhanderu* than *Nhandesy*. And it seems that *Nhandesy* is no longer central. This raises a clear concern for us because, as the narrative has its power, it's important that we bring *Nhandesy* back to the centre of it. Of course, *Nhanderu* is also part of it, but we have to bring in the women's voices and the way they understand it, not the way it was told by a single version.

Nhanderu didn't create *Nhandesy*. *Nhandesy* is the Earth itself. We understand *Nhanderu* from *Ywate Gua*, from above. And *Nhandesy*, which is the ground. They are different things. But from the moment they got together, each one had a body. For example: We understand that breathing, *pytu*, our breath, comes from the air. From the air, that is, it represents the male body. *Nhanderu* went back to the *Ambá*, to his place of origin – he certainly didn't adapt very easily to Earth, he had to go back to the *Ambá*.

Because when men tell this story, they tell it from their perspective, from their way of understanding their own bodies. And when a woman tells it, she tells it from her own trajectory and the way she understands her own body. For example, men don't usually talk about blood cycles. They'll talk, they'll tell how *Nhanderu* made the path, what he planted,

said. My grandmother used to say that men's hot blood is more dangerous than women's, because they don't flow out. That's why the dance rhythm and also the ritual movement for men is very rigid, and it is different from the girls' movement. Girls, when they are menstruating, remain silent and men continue doing activities, often it is very demanding, which affects their emotions as well.

they'll narrate *Nhanderu's* process, what he did, what he created. But the part about the women, what the woman walked, that she got lost on the way, they don't usually tell that. The women are the ones who tell that part. It's them who will tell it. That doesn't mean that they're in conflict with each other – that's just the way it is, the custom of women telling and men telling. When they made big fires to teach, to tell this story to the children, there was always a *Txe Adjaryi*, who is a woman, who is an elder, and the *Txe Ramõi*, who is a male, an elder. They complement what the other person doesn't tell. That's why it's important for both of them to speak and listen. And when I came across the academic world, I read the articles and only found the male voice in them, not the female voice. I mean, the academic world itself brings and adapts the version in the way that white people tell it.

When I came to the city as an academic, I realised that there were many challenges, that I didn't see myself anywhere else, as a woman, as an Indigenous woman. As a woman, it's already difficult. In our custom, when we menstruate, we relax our bodies, we rest. Two days, sometimes three days at most. But from the moment I started working as a teacher, the system doesn't allow that. Whether you're a woman, a mother, an Indigenous woman or a Black woman.

It seems that the system was designed only for a male body, a single body. In our *Guarani* system, in our educational system, there is a law that you have to work on culture, to reinforce culture. I started working in my class talking about the body, about this ritual. I remember a *Guarani* saying: "Why don't you ever rest?" Because he knew that, in our custom, we could rest our bodies. And then he'd say: "Why didn't you stop? Were you never absent?" And I said: "It's not a question of missing work, I had to come. Firstly, because I'm an employee, I mean, I'm an employee of the system, I can't bleed, I can't do anything, I mean, if I bleed, just let it go, I have to carry on working anyway, no matter what I believe".

Anyway, I had to teach, keep teaching. When I got pregnant too. When I started working, I was pregnant and they didn't want to hire me because I was pregnant. The leaders went there, fought and said: "You have to hire her, she's going to work, she's the only person who can do

this job here”. We managed to break down this prejudice. I couldn’t work because I was pregnant, but I wanted to work. Then, when I had a child, the community never stopped me from carrying my child, I taught classes with my child.

When I arrived in the city, I was very impressed; I don’t see mothers supported with their children, the way they are. I often say that our bodies are totally severed, our bodies as women. The system was created to cut up our bodies as women. As an Indigenous woman, you don’t even exist in that place, you have to play into the system’s hands. This is very violent. I always say: “How do you talk about public policies, or talk about the system, talk about the university, the school, where the female body is not included?” Because most of them are designed for the male body. Actually, for the white male body. It’s not for any male body either.

That’s my question today. I talk about it a lot because I know there’s often a questioning about it: “But what are you talking about?” I’m talking about my own impact, the impact I have got. How are you going to have balance when you exclude, that is, you violate a part of the body? I think it’s also violence against us women. Because I see many mothers in the city, running back and forth, having to get there, pick up their child. To those who study, for example, who are in the academic world, I don’t see any nursery to support women with children, where the children can stay.

I knew a colleague who studied with me, who always had to leave early and would arrive very late and tired. She couldn’t concentrate on her work or her studies. She would have to leave early and run back to pick up her son. How can you be healthy if you live this life? This rush, you don’t let it pass to yourself only, it also affects the spirit of your children. My grandmother used to say that: “The rush, the outburst that we often have, is not because the person went crazy from one day to the next, because it was also a process of the children living like this, in the rush with their mothers”. Because children, in our knowledge, also breathe our breath. The feeling of breathing, of the rush, the anguish, is also breathed. How are we going to be healthy in this rush? We no longer feel our bodies. We’re out of our bodies and it feels like we’re just

running around. I once didn't feel my body any more. That's where we feel the impact of all this running around.

And the body-space, precisely our body, our identity. In other words, she wears clothes according to the system imposed around her. Because we often blame ourselves for certain things. You say: "Well, why didn't I do that?" It's because it was imposed for you to be recognized in this way. And then you question yourself. For example, sometimes I keep thinking and I watch my own friends say to me: "Wow, I also want to follow rules, I want to rest when I have my period. But in my house no one talks about my period." There were some people who said this: "I was ashamed of my blood, I had to take medicine to never bleed, because in my house blood is disgusting, blood is dirt and no one knows that this is important". But these are the conditions of the body-space, where the body, the process of your own body, was introduced. It is in this sense that I say that it is important for you to understand your body-space, so that you can question what is important to you and what is not important.

Today I no longer menstruate, but that doesn't mean I've stopped talking about the issue of menstruation, the importance of menstruation. Why? Because I know that others are going through it. Today I can go anywhere, I have more autonomy, but that doesn't mean I'm going to stay quiet. I'm going to question it. My children are already grown up, but I'm not going to stand still; I'm going to question because I know how difficult it is, how much I've been denied the right to exist as a mother. I've been denied space. The fact that you are sometimes prevented from circulating the body-space; sometimes it can be in a positive or negative way, but the space itself has contributed to the design of it in this way. So don't blame yourself: "Is it me?" – this has happened to me a lot – "Am I wrong? Am I doing the wrong thing? But why is it like this? Does it only happen to me?"

That's exactly the point. For example: Indigenous women, in general. On the First March of Indigenous Women, the work on "My Body, My Spirit" began. In fact, the name of the march is called *My Body, My Spirit*. My Body, My Territory, My Spirit. They started talking exactly about ancestry. To preserve ancestry and represent the future for our

children. Our children are the world. Because the ground is our path. We know that our emotional imbalance or the issue of violence that happens to the female body can directly bring imbalance to the world. This is happening, and we know why it happens. We know that. Like the mother who begins to notice the imbalance, because our body is what is there, subjected. That's why we always talk about the issue of preservation.

From a young age we teach men how to step on the ground. Because they have to learn to step on the ground, although their space, in fact, is not the ground. But they also need the ground and we also need breathing and air. That's why I say, using a metaphor: both the air and the ground need each other to balance themselves. That's why we always use this metaphor to teach boys, from childhood, to understand the world in which they walk. That's why an elderly woman is super important, for us, *Txe Adjaryi*, the experience of women, especially older women. Not that new ones aren't valued! My grandmother used to say this a lot: "If you want to talk, talk. You don't have to be quiet, really talk, we always have to take a stand, because we are mothers, because we were the ones who breastfed you". She said this very strongly, she hit her chest and really said it. You had to listen to her. The young boys always listened to her. There is harmonious listening there. And today I believe that this way of listening still exists, to balance between the two bodies, because we are also in one body.

I came from a village as a *Guarani* woman, carrying this path, this way of taking care of my body. I arrived at university and once, during my master's degree, I realised that there was a girl who was non-indigenous, who considered herself white. She said she was a high school teacher, at the time she wasn't getting paid and was doing her master's degree – she was working, studying for her master's degree and doing something else at night. And she would never get any rest. One fine day, we were just entering the room to start class. She arrived so pale and sat next to us, all sweaty and very small. I said to her: "Are you feeling okay?" She said: "No, I'm not well, I want to drink water". She drank water and we went inside. She was there, I saw that she was not well.

Then, at the class break, we went out. During the break, everyone would usually get together, get a cup of coffee, one or the other would

smoke... It was our meeting place. For everyone, it was a time to relax and talk. She went out, asked another colleague for a cup of coffee and sat down and I realised she wasn't well, I knew she was in her period. When she got up, she fell, passed out. Everyone was scared, including the boys, they were all terrified. They took her to the doctor, nothing much had happened, she just passed out, she was very tired, she was exhausted. She had talked about how she was doing at her job, that she wasn't getting paid, that she was working a lot and studying a lot. Afterwards, she didn't come to class for fifteen days. She asked for a leave of absence, because she was very fragile – not fragile in body, her spirit was already very accelerated. Sometimes our body explodes. And that is not only for women.

Specifically, I'm mentioning this because later I talked to her and she said she was bleeding a lot, she didn't want to go to school, but she had to because she had to present her work. And since in the *juruá*⁶ system to be menstruating is considered absolutely nothing, how was she going to justify it? Then I said it! I got up and said: "I want to talk! How come we study, talk about science, knowledge... what for? Are we studying to travel in the world of books? What is this for?" People started to get to know me and said: "Wow, you are brave". I said: "Oh, I have to speak up". I don't see her any differently than I see myself. I now see her as myself, as a woman. I'm talking about that experience. I think I started crying, I went into a crying fit – my friends came, hugged me, said: "What happened?" I will speak up. They told me, the very boys who were there with us told me: "So, let's talk. Let's talk!" There were other relatives⁷ and non-relatives, the women started to argue about it and we had a gossip meeting. I remember that we created a gossip meeting in the place to talk about what we could do, how we could get together to organise something bigger from that, because we really need to look at each other through that regard.

At what we are as one, regardless of where we are. And several other questions came and I said: "What about those that don't bleed? Who are women but don't bleed?" I don't bleed anymore, but I will speak out in

6. *Juruá* is the term in *Guarani* for non-indigenous people (TN).

7. Indigenous people refer to the other Indigenous people as "relatives" (TN).

favour of blood, I will be with the women who bleed, with these women who have children. I no longer have young children, but I will be with them and wherever they go, I will be talking about it. For instance when it comes to legal abortion, I will be there. Once someone asked me: "Hey Sandra, are you in favour of this?" I didn't even listen, because I'm for the women's fight. And because I'm not going to have an abortion it doesn't mean that I don't have to be there, up front, in the fight. I think that's the point. At least I identify myself that way. I always try to be there, I fit in everywhere: With that woman who is fighting for the issue of legal abortion, with the woman who menstruates, with the woman who has a child, the woman who doesn't have a child, because I know it's not easy to have a child.

Everyone has their own way, but as women we need to be together in the fight, fighting head-on, facing it, sharing. That is the question. That doesn't mean we're going to do the same thing. It's not that. That's why I say it this way: Each person's trajectory, experience and point of view is important, regardless of their origin. At least in my opinion – I'm not saying that this is true, I'm saying what I get from it, from this confusion that sometimes really takes place. I don't really know where I am in the academic world, I got there and didn't find my place. I could not find a *Guarani* woman, an Indigenous woman, I could not find a woman. So, what do you call that? These things that I also see. I cried. I cried a lot. And when I see some bad news it always affects me, my body is affected by all these women because I know that we are one body, that we are discriminated against, we are not accepted, we are not well regarded in society. Many times, it seems like we are the problem, right?

I was very happy to share the questions that make me think. The idea was this: We bring up those body-territory issues based on our own reflections.

SANDRA BENITES

Born in 1975 on the Porto Lindo Indigenous Land, municipality of Japorã (MS), Sandra Benites is a mother, researcher and activist from the *Guarani* people. A descendant of the *Guarani Nhandeva* people, she works as an anthropologist, researcher, art curator and educator. She is also the Director of Visual Arts at the National Arts Foundation in Brazil (Funarte), being the first Indigenous person to hold a board position at the foundation. Sandra stands out for her struggles in defence of the rights of Indigenous peoples, especially the demarcation of territories and *Guarani* education.

BODY-TERRITORY COURSE

Curator and Teacher: Sandra Benites

Creator: Romina Lindemann

Participants: Aline Bernardi, Izabel Goudart, Tatiana Jardim, Tainá Veríssimo, Fernanda Cristall, Camila Durães, Gilsamara Moura, Dalmoni Lydijusse, Dasha Lavrennikova, Karlla Giroto, Carla Gamba, Julia Sá Earp, Lívia Barroso de Moura, Jaya Paula Pravaz, Juliana Nardin and Lau Veríssimo.

KARLA GIROTTO

Artist, teacher, researcher and writer. Her artistic practice has been marked by a plurality of actions – performance, text, object, installation, video, photography and especially, by the creation and opening up of processes of experimentation and production. She has a Master's degree and a PhD from the Centre for the Study of Subjectivity at PUC/SP in Clinical Psychology course, and has been awarded CAPES (2013-2015) and CNPq (2019-2022) scholarships.

ALINE BERNARDI

Artist, researcher and teacher of body and performance arts, interested in the paths between dance and writing in the creation process. Artistic Director of Celeiro Moebius. Creator and Proponent of Lab Corpo Palavra. Author of the performance book *Decopulagem*. She has a Master Degree in Dance in the PPGD/UFRJ Programme and Postgraduate from PCA/FAV. Further training in Performance through the F.I.A. Programme at the c.e.m. in Lisbon. Graduated with a Full Licence from FAV. Technical training in Contemporary Dance at Angel Vianna School. Certified in the Introductory and CS1 Modules of CranioSacral Therapy Techniques by Upledger Brasil. Training in the Bertazzo Movement Reeducation Method. Substitute Dance Teacher at Colégio Pedro II – Realengo II Unit [2018- 2019], being founder and member of the team at NACE - Performing Arts Center. Creator of the *Contato Improvisação Brasil* website. Curator, artist and manager of the program *Entre Serras* [Between Mountains]: Artistic and Poetic Residencies of Sustainability.

TATIANA JARDIM

Researcher and artistic and cultural producer. Master in Visual Anthropology at Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Nova FCSH), she researches decolonial feminism, memory and heritage, focusing on visual and shared anthropology methodologies. She has a degree in Social Communication, with a qualification in Advertising, at ESPM-SP. Born in Santos (São Paulo, Brazil), lived for four years in Lisbon (Portugal), where she worked in the management of cultural projects focused

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TAINÁ VERÍSSIMO

Member of the Totem Group since 2004, collectively developing a scenic language that starts from performance and rituality, in which she works as an actress-performer, producer and art educator. She teaches, along with the group members, the *Corpo Ritual Workshop*; She has also been a researcher at the RecorDança Collection since 2010, covering the safeguarding, dissemination and production of knowledge about Pernambuco dances. She investigates the dialogue between art, healing and spirituality in the performing arts and audiovisual in terms of the body. She is a Postgraduate in Educational Dance – CENSUPEG, a Yoga Instructor – ANYI, and has a degree in Artistic Education/Performing Arts – UFPE.

IZABEL GOUDART

Alchemist, artist, curator and researcher of collaborative network learning processes and methodologies, as well as affective and poetic textures. Graduated in Chemistry at UERJ (1989), she has been composing a multidisciplinary score in the mix and hybridization of natural sciences, arts and contemporary and ancestral technologies. The intimacy and conflicts of a lesbian dissident body integrate her poetics from the autobiography of her own body and relationships. The geometric and fractal patterns of nature and the connection with ancestry and spirituality dialogue with the poetics and delicacy of life and other existences. The power of the collective is present in collaborative art propositions. She combines various techniques and practices such as photography, video, installations, sound art, objects and performance to give materiality to the shape of her work. She is the curator and manager of the Somas residence. Master in Education (UERJ), PhD in Communication and Semiotics (PUC/SP) with a post-doctorate in Interactive Media (UFG) and, currently, a graduate student in Visual Arts (UERJ).

DALMONI LYDIJUSSE

From Minas Gerais, she has a licentiate degree in Fine Arts at FAAP, a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at UFMG and a specialization in Integrative Art at Universidade Anhembi Morumbi. She has also taken courses in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, New York and Canada. Since 2003, she has managed and maintained Arte Ziriguidum, teaching classes and courses, promoting various initiatives with other professionals, executing curatorship, offering space for cultural activities, as well as individual and collective exhibitions. As an artist, she participated in solo and group exhibitions.

The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial direction is by Anna Dantes, and the coordination is by Alice Alberti Faria. The design is by Tania Grillo. In this series of notebooks by Sandra Benites, we had the special collaboration of Karlla Giroto, Aline Bernardi, Tatiana Jardim, Tainá Veríssimo and Izabel Goudart in organising, transcribing and revising the speeches from the Body-Territory course, which gave rise to the materials. We would also like to thank Dalmoni Lydijusse for the illustration and Daniel Grimoni for the final revision of the notebook in Portuguese. The coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br/en/

All Selvagem activities and materials are shared free of charge. For those who wish to give something back, we invite you to financially support the Living Schools, a network of five educational centres for the transmission of Indigenous culture and knowledge.

Find out more at <https://selvagemciclo.com.br/en/apoie/>

TRANSLATION
MARCOS MORAES

Dancer and choreographer, Marcos Moraes works as artist, teacher and cultural producer. He has created and directs, since 2013, The Performing Kitchen - Collaborative Platform for Artistic Research and Creation. Graduated in Languages - English by FFLCH-USP; translates books and texts and takes part in Comunidade Selvagem since its beginning. He currently lives and works between São Paulo and Lisbon.

TRANSLATION REVISION
CARLOS RANGEL

I'm a translator living in São Paulo, proud to help Selvagem spread the culture and the ancient wisdom of Brazil's traditional communities

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