

## Deep in the Mato-Virgem: Macunaíma as a metaphor for a decolonial mathematics education

### No Fundo do Mato-Virgem: Macunaíma como uma metáfora por uma educação matemática decolonial

### En el fondo de Mato-Virgen: Macunaíma como metáfora de una educación matemática decolonial

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#### Resumo

Macunaíma, o herói sem caráter de Mário de Andrade, é ressignificado neste texto como o ponto de partida de uma discussão sobre a Educação Matemática do ponto de vista decolonial. Nossa proposta é entender a matemática hegemônica e sua relação com a colonialidade a partir de duas palavras: sagrado e terreno. Elas, enquanto metáforas, são utilizadas para discutir a essência de como se ensina matemática na escola e na universidade. A partir dessa problematização inicial, propomos formas de pensar alternativas, embasadas não só nas referências da decolonialidade, mas na literatura e na música. Trabalhamos, então, outras metáforas que podem servir para refundar a matemática escolar e a formação de professores em um novo paradigma, que supere a dicotomização, o amálgama com o pensamento hegemônico ocidental e uma avaliação que segregue.

**Palavras-chave:** Raça e Educação Matemática. Matemática Decolonial. Literatura e Educação. Macunaíma.

#### Abstract

Macunaíma, Mário de Andrade's characterless hero, is re-signified in this text as the starting point of a discussion about Mathematics Education from a decolonial point of view. We propose to gather hegemonic mathematics and its relationship with coloniality based on two words: sacred and earthly. They, as metaphors, are used to discuss the essence of how to teach mathematics at school and university. From this initial problematization, we propose alternative ways of thinking based not only on decoloniality references but also on literature and music. We then work on other metaphors that can be useful to restructure school mathematics and teacher training in a new paradigm, which overcomes dichotomization, the amalgamation with Western hegemonic thinking, and an assessment that segregates.

**Keywords:** Race and Mathematics Education. Decolonial Mathematics. Literature and Education. Macunaíma.

#### Resumen

Macunaíma, el héroe sin carácter de Mário de Andrade, es ressignificado en este texto como punto de partida de una discusión sobre la Educación Matemática desde una perspectiva decolonial. Nuestra propuesta es comprender la matemática hegemónica y su relación con la colonialidad a partir de dos palabras: sagrada y terrenal. Ellos, como metáforas, se utilizan para discutir la esencia de cómo se enseñan las matemáticas en la escuela y la universidad. A partir de esta problematización inicial, proponemos formas alternativas de pensar, basadas no sólo en referencias a la decolonialidad, sino también a la literatura y la música. Luego trabajamos en otras metáforas que pueden servir para refundar la matemática escolar y la formación docente en un nuevo paradigma, que supere la dicotomización, la amalgama con el pensamiento hegemónico occidental y una evaluación que segregue.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Racial y Matemática. Matemática decolonial. Literatura y Educación. Macunaíma.

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## 1. Greetings to the ancestors

Deep in the virgin forest, Macunaíma, the hero of our people, was born. He was dark black and the son of the dark of the night. There was a moment when the silence was so great, listening to the murmur of the Uraricoera, that the Tapanhumas native woman gave birth to an ugly child. This child was called Macunaíma (Andrade, 2022).

A good story is an event, a window of opportunity for a collective gathering. It is the past and the present merging, stirring time; and life, a collective experience, becomes a more bearable burden. We arrived here, you and I, full of stories. But every story told is a choice. So let us bring laughter to party with us. Life is a party. Who is interested in a serious, straightforward, organized, obedient, clean text without contradictions? This aseptic, innocuous, and tasteless experience kills all the purulent microbes that transform death into a “re-life,” “re-turn,” reincarnation. There can be nothing new in repetition. We need mold, bacteria, viruses, insects, worms, blood, and dirt. We need life, noise, uproar, sharing, and the courage to build something new. Let us bring our ancestors, their drums, dances, songs, and wisdom to this celebration. Let us salute the matriarchs, the spirits of the forests, the shamans and their prayers, herbs, and struggles. For eternity, let us chant, let us sing:

No one heard a sob of pain in the corner of Brazil. A sad lament has always echoed since the Indigenous warrior went into captivity and sang from there. The black man sang a song of revolt in the air of Quilombo dos Palmares where he took refuge. Apart from the struggle of the *inconfidentes* to break the chains, nothing came of it. And from war to peace, from peace to war, all the people of this land, when they can sing, they sing in pain (Duarte & Pinheiro<sup>3</sup>, 1978).

Amid the mixed multicultural broth of Brazilianness, in the unlikely lines between literature, a hero of misfortunes stands up, the hero of our people, Macunaíma, *an impudent hero*. Andrade (2022) innovates in form and content, creating a puzzle (or would it be a tangram?) of Indigenous stories and legends in a chain of absurdities that connects Mato-Virgem to São Paulo in the 1920s in the search for *muiraquitã*, a gift of love; stories stolen from the Afro and Indigenous American oral tradition that acquire layers and meanings, pulsing with a Brazilianness that had been tarnished until then but which Andrade brings to the center of the narrative. *Macunaíma*, the inverse opposite<sup>4</sup> of José de Alencar's (2006) Indigenous Iracema, is a land of mockery, jokes, games, slyness, and creativity.

Almost a century has passed since the release of *Macunaíma*. The verb *to steal* in the previous paragraph must have caused emotions in the most attentive reader. Someone more disciplined might argue for the use of other words like *assimilate*, *contextualize*, *be inspired*, or the dumbest of all: *appropriate*. All of these options aim to keep Mário de Andrade as a select member

3 This quote refers to the first part of the samba *Canto das Três Raças* [Song of the Three Races], famously performed by Clara Nunes, which celebrates the struggles of Indigenous, Black, and White people in the formation of Brazilian identity. The text of this article, as we will see, is based on metaphors from different languages, literature, and music, in dialogue with mathematics and decolonial references. In this case, we are highlighting the character Macunaíma, who undergoes transformations throughout the story, becoming Indigenous, Black, and White. The song can be heard at <https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=90BBkQxMtxs&si=UQxWM7GB1YJBFybl>.

4 When we say this, we highlight that Indianism, a movement in Brazilian literature of which Alencar (2006) is the main representative, deepened stereotypes about Brazil's formation. Iracema (an anagram of the word America) is an Indigenous woman in love with a European man (Martim, who represents the god Mars), to whom she submits and sacrifices herself for love. Considering this plot, Macunaíma, with all its criticisms, is a great step forward.

of a group that holds the privilege of silencing certain discomforts in the name of something that is defined as art or, more specifically, *rhapsody*, where white and Southeastern<sup>5</sup> men are overrepresented<sup>6</sup>. It is theft not only for having rewritten creation myths from the Afro and American Indigenous oral tradition but also for having transformed that collective construction into an element for commercial gain and reaffirmation of stereotypes of the black and Indigenous population: laziness, indolence, slyness, animality. Although probably with his best intentions, Mário de Andrade eventually created a work that reaffirms colonial principles.

Do not get us wrong. We, the authors of this article, love Macunaíma<sup>7</sup>. We love him for representing rebelliousness, criticism, absurdity, and contradiction. If Mário de Andrade intended to keep him confined to the pages of a novel, Macunaíma managed to escape and acquire a life of his own. The anthropophagic was eaten, digested, dumped, turned into stench, shadow, and eventually vanished<sup>8</sup>.

What if Macunaíma wrote his exploits himself? What words would he use to describe himself? Would the stories he chose be more real or more invented? Literature is the ultimate realm of fantasy; there is literature anywhere words are used to tell a story. Let us leave it at that for now.

What does Macunaíma have to do with decoloniality and mathematics education? If that question is not in your head yet, let us ask it now. And let it stay there, for now. Take your time. We will get there. Trust us, we promise you that.

## 2. Piaimã, the people-eating giant

So far, we may have left you a little lost. We must confess our goal is to shake things up a bit with this text. We will do this through interpellations, including questioning the limits between what is academic and what is literary. We do not believe in these barriers. The structure we will use in this article does not follow traditional standards for presenting academic research. Indeed, we are here talking to you, our reader, straightforwardly, without intermediaries, looking into your eyes so that you can perceive the truth behind our intentions. The decolonial theoretical lens will help support the impertinences we will make throughout this text. We will provoke, be ironic, use

5 In the Brazilian context, the Southeast region, composed of the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo, is the richest and most industrialized, holding control over Brazil's cultural industry and, consequently, representing the realities of other regions in a stereotypical manner. Emphasizing that Mario de Andrade is from the Southeast region shows that, even if unintentionally, he is part of an internal process of cultural domination.

6 In the specific case of Mário de Andrade, his whiteness (and his sexuality) were the target of contestation, as discussed in detail in Couto and Carvalho (1993) or greater depth in Camargo (2018).

7 Not only us, we would say. In the research process for this article, we were surprised to come across a classic text (Lins, 2011) by Rômulo Lins (1955-2017) in which Macunaíma is the starting point for a wonderful essay on the role of literature in mathematics education. Although our argument goes in a different direction and began completely independently, we cannot refrain from explaining this happy coincidence and paying homage to the author who left an invaluable legacy for mathematics education in Brazil.

8 We hope our language does not shock you. There is a reason for that. The anthropophagic movement, of which Mario de Andrade is a part, was an expression of the first phase of Brazilian Modernism. The idea for the movement came about when Tarsila do Amaral painted the work *Abaporu*, which inspired her husband, Oswald de Andrade, to write the Anthropophagic Manifesto. The language we use in this part is a dance with Macunaíma's irreverence, but it is also a provocation. To say that the anthropophagic, *the cannibal, was* eaten and then vanished is, literally, to say that the character Macunaíma does not fit within the limits of Mário de Andrade's novel and has the power to walk on his own two feet, so much so that we are invoking him in this first part.

metaphors (several in this paragraph already), and cause some discomfort. We will be honored to have your company. Enough explanations: let us move on.

Words are an open battlefield. This is true in vocabulary and grammar, validation and deletion, and content and teaching. The power of coloniality is imposed by hegemonies that are configured in various aspects, such as knowledge, being, power, and gender, as explained by authors such as Quijano (2005), Mignolo (2003), Lugones (2014), and Mcclintock (2010). Acting in a counter-hegemonic way and challenging a secular, consolidated, global, homicidal, ecocidal, and ethnocidal structure requires tangencing, evading, mocking, snooping, and scorning.

In other texts where I translated the ancestral knowledge of our great-grandparents from oral tradition to writing, we brought some names that people in academia call concepts. We followed from there using the names of modes and speeches to counter colonialism. This is what we call the war of denominations: the game of opposing colonial words to weaken them (Bispo, 2023, p. 13).

Emptying the words that determine coloniality from their hegemonic (and often false) meanings and imposing new ways of communicating (or acknowledging traditional grammars that result from erasure) requires action, reaction, originality, and courage. It demands articulation, re-creation, dance, refinement, beauty, and audacity.

Over the following few sections, we will problematize two words: *sacred* and *terrene*<sup>9</sup>. We aim to show how these words are fundamental in consolidating hegemonic ways of teaching mathematics in primary schools and universities, in this case, both in the education of mathematics teachers and in the education of professionals who use and create mathematics in their work. With this, we want to propose an emptying of its hegemonic meanings and a redefinition of the ways of teaching and producing mathematics in different contexts based on the principles of decoloniality, which we will do with our friend Macunaíma's help.

Before that, it is necessary to conceptualize and criticize the term hegemony. Gramsci uses this term to understand how the socialist revolution occurred in Russia and not in the most advanced capitalist countries. The philosopher believes civil society controls the political class, and therefore, controlling civil society is necessary for a qualitative social transformation. These elements are representative of how coloniality operates. In fact,

Gramsci states that a social group often subordinates to another group to adopt the latter's conception of the world, even if it contradicts its practical activity. Furthermore, he emphasizes that this conception of the world imposed mechanically by the external environment is devoid of critical awareness and coherence and disaggregated and occasional. This uncritical adoption of a conception of the world of another social group results in a contrast between thinking and acting and the coexistence of two conceptions of the world, which are manifested in words and effective action (Alves, 2010, p. 74).

<sup>9</sup>In Portuguese, the words *sagrado* (sacred) and *terreno* (terrene) can be seen as antonyms. In fact, the word terrene (rooted in the idea of earth) contrasts with the idea of heaven, which is where paradise is located. Therefore, terrene can be understood as a synonym for mundane. The ambiguity of meanings here is intentional. We could have translated the word *terreno* as earthly, which is more common in English, but as we will explain later, it is important to us preserve the root "ter" to maintain coherence with the word *Terreiro*.

To supplant the group that occupies capitalist power, Gramsci proposes that people occupy spaces in culture, intellectuality, and popular political bodies to create a new historical bloc. Gramsci, therefore, does not want to overcome hegemony as a concept but to create conditions for the emergence of a new socialist hegemony.

At this point, we need to deviate a little from Gramsci. Piaimã, the man-eating giant, introduces himself to the *paulicéia desvairada*<sup>10</sup> [frantic São Paulo] as the rich and powerful Venceslau Pietro Pietra, owner of a mansion and prominent member of the local aristocracy. Macunaíma antagonizes him, but his goal is not to destroy São Paulo society or impose an imperial domination over the city: he only wants to recover the *muiraquitã* –a reminder of Ci, the mother of the forest–, have fun, and go back to his domains. Macunaíma is not seduced by the machines, lights, and colors and remains in São Paulo only for the time necessary to retrieve the sacred amulet. His power as emperor of the virgin forest does not come from force, coercion, but from the recognition of his authority through love with Ci.

The counter-hegemony (and decoloniality) we advocate is not about taking power or supplanting ways of thinking. These are precisely the colonizer's weapons. Hegemony imposes a mono world: monotheism, monopoly, monoculture, monotony. Our task is to question the validity of these *monolithic* instances and propose alternative ways of being and existing in the world. We understand that how mathematics is produced and taught are means to this end.

When we use the term *hegemonic mathematics* in this article, we want to refer to mathematical cultural practices representing the dominant culture: capitalist, colonial, Western, etc. We propose to overcome hegemonic ways of thinking in the classroom (and teacher education) context to let emerge pedagogical practices based on diversity, heterogeneity, and school mathematical practice supported by a complex and diverse cultural melting pot, such as schools and universities in Brazil.

### 3. Resacralization: a new meaning for the sacred

The cultural hegemony defined by the enterprise of coloniality imposes ways of being, existing, and knowing, among others<sup>11</sup>. On the issue of *sacred*, it goes beyond the obvious field (religion) and internalizes hierarchies of knowledge, values, and beliefs. Such hierarchies occur among other spaces in the field of discourse, with the imposition of adjectives such as *erudite*, *superior*, *advanced*, and *pure*, always following instances that have a higher social value in the hegemonic group. *Erudite* music, *higher* education, *advanced* thinking, and in our case, *pure* mathematics are examples where the imposition of a hierarchy in discourse favors hegemonic colonialist ways of thinking and knowing.

Therefore, the meaning of sacred that we will discuss below is broader than a critique of Judeo-Christian monotheism. We will discuss the sacred from another perspective. Let us resume the core of the previous section. Our approach is based on grammar, prefixes, and suffixes (mono,

<sup>10</sup> Here, we refer to another classic book by Andrade (2019), where the city of São Paulo, "*paulicéia desvairada*," [frantic São Paulo] becomes the main character.

<sup>11</sup> In this article, we chose not to delve into classic references to decoloniality that highlight these and other colonialities, such as Quijano (2005), Mignolo (2003), Lugones (2014), and McClintock (2010). Our goal is to bring alternative ways of thinking, in an attitude of questioning even decolonial canons.

uni, archi, and omni) and the imposition of the superiority of instances from the language because an *omnipresent*, *omnipotent*, and *omniscient* god of a *monotheist* belief is fundamental in the *architecture* of the imposition of a *universal* domain of the beings, knowings, and spaces of the world.

Sacralization, as we understand it, occurs in the discursive prohibition on certain instances, imposing founding elements of the organization of the world that cannot even be questioned, as they are *sacred* identity elements. The sacred will impose non-negotiable dichotomies: heaven/hell; us/them; good/bad; right/wrong; just/unjust; saint/sinner; order/anarchy; normal/degenerate. These dichotomies are based on the moral superiority of an *enlightened*, *wise*, *literate* class from which the power to create standards on those issues is invoked. What is the perfect field of dichotomy? Hegemonic mathematics.

The principle of the third excluded is not an obvious idea, mainly because most of life's conflicts, dilemmas, and contradictions have more than two answers. When you have exactly two answers, they may or may not be mutually exclusive, they may or may not be equally important, they may or may not be mathematized. Learning from an early age that there is a single answer and that it is correct (as we do when we teach mathematics traditionally in school), in a world where most conflicts are decided based on hierarchical morality, is using a concept to impose discipline on minds and bodies that rebel against hegemonic ways of thinking.

The sacralization of hegemonic mathematics does not stop there. The *Queen of Sciences* is presented (at school, at university, and in the media) as the field of perfection, beauty, sophistication, and accuracy. Hegemonic mathematics is considered objective, impersonal, and above human ethical dilemmas. Would Hippasus of Metapontum, Evariste Galois, and Hypatia<sup>12</sup>, mathematicians who suffered martyrdom for political or philosophical reasons, agree with this?

Before *her excellency, holiest, noblest* erudite mathematics, we bow our heads and reduce ourselves to the insignificance of small beings. However, it is made of human stories, stitches, and patches of ideas and ideals, broken or accomplished dreams. Something very familiar: it smells of blood and sweat, corporeal things, not sacred things. Being presented as an entity of incomparable beauty that inhabits the universe of the imaginary and abstraction, hegemonic mathematics distances itself from the everyday, mundane, perishable, tactile, and enters another world: ideal, perfect, sacred.

It encourages reflection on where this science, with a feminine name<sup>13</sup> by definition –mathematics– lives. Created or discovered, it confuses our perception, which does not understand its place in this perspective. This is a purpose in itself: to dehumanize, idealize, distance ourselves from the sensitive, complex, and multifactorial world, and impose a logic, a structure, a way of seeing the world, and a grammar. To understand this, we must delve into the roots of hegemonic mathematics (or at least the story she tells about herself).

<sup>12</sup> Hippasus is believed to have been murdered for discovering the irrationality of radix two; Hypatia was brutally executed in Alexandria for opposing Christian interests; Galois' career was hampered by his direct or indirect associations with the French republican movement. We could give several other examples, including in the context of mathematics in Latin America.

<sup>13</sup> In the Portuguese language, many words related to the arts and sciences, such as Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Sociology, Music, Fine Arts, and specifically Mathematics, are feminine names

The tradition of this mathematics is usually described as having begun in Greece with Thales of Miletus and Pythagoras of Samos. The latter is credited with creating a *sect*<sup>14</sup> that spread throughout the Hellenistic world after his death. His influence on Plato is visible, as he met with the disciples of Pythagoras in Crotona, in present-day Italy. His philosophy is based on the hierarchy of forms of thinking, in which the world of ideas is at a higher level than the world of the senses.

We wish to make two considerations about this: one of a political nature and the other of a theological nature. Both will intersect in our argument. Platonism and Pythagoreanism are political ideas convenient to those in power then and now. In fact, so-called *higher-level* ways of thinking and, more specifically, *men* who could dedicate themselves professionally to their development (therefore, *men of a higher caste, that of philosophers and mathematicians*) agree in keeping with a stratified, hierarchical, and unequal society. Both Platonism and Pythagoreanism impose ascetic worldviews of controlling passions and desires and temperance in search of spiritual *purity*.

From a theological point of view, Platonism and Pythagoreanism come close to the Apollonian ideal. In Greek mythology, Apollo is the god of Reason, Beauty, Justice, Law, and Order and is the counterpoint to Dionysus, the god of chaos, drunkenness, and madness. Which of these traditions is usually associated with hegemonic mathematics? In his analysis of Greek tragedy, Nietzsche explored the tensions between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in depth (Nietzsche, 2000). Those tensions are the starting point for discussing the insufficiency of Socratic philosophy (and consequently Platonic, by genealogy) to understand the essence of life. We believe that hegemonic mathematics suffers from the same problem.

The opposition to the ideals of God *and the Devil* of the Judeo-Christian tradition feeds on many –and convenient– aspects of the Apollo-Dionysus tension. What is Paradise? It is the place of peace, tranquility, perfection, love, virtue, and eternal life, while hell is the place of sin, degradation, grotesque, and eternal suffering. When we expose the sacralization of hegemonic mathematics, our intention is to make distancing from the sensitive and real world explicit and, therefore, from the substantiality of students' lives. If conceived by humans, mathematics then remains in the realm of mortals, where mistakes, successes, setbacks, and new beginnings are possible, where man is portrayed as an active character in its construction and maintenance: "To the spectacle of the most interesting, most astonishing phenomena, man naturally goes with all their desires, with all their passions, with their whole soul. It is, therefore, no surprise that the first objective knowledge is a first error" (Bachelard, 1996, p. 68).

Would a counter-hegemonic mathematics then be a Dionysian mathematics? No. Our argument does not involve profanity or *desacralization*. Our point is the resacralization of mathematics with another radicality, another historical root, and another formative myth. Pythagoreanism is a theft of a much older, practical and popular mathematical tradition from the Egyptian and Phoenician peoples steeped in a cultural broth that invented the West in the first place and, consequently, influenced the philosophical roots of coloniality. Theft is the original desecration when it hides the practical and mundane roots of mathematics and imposes the narrative that rationality, logic, is a certain higher thinking that creates *true* mathematics. This is corroborated by Diop, who says:

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14 From a practical point of view, Pythagoreanism was a group that professed doctrine, ideology, and an alternative philosophical and political system, with a doctrine and cult of a central figure. Thus, the term *sect* is more than adequate.

Pythagorean mathematics, Thales of Miletus' theory of the four elements, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islamism, and modern science, are all rooted in the cosmogony of Egyptian science. We only have to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer god, who sacrifices him, dies, and is resurrected, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ. (Diop, 1974 apud Nascimento, 2022, p. 275)

Who is interested in hiding the African roots of Western sciences and philosophies? Who is interested in hiding the raciality of the Egyptian people and their protagonism to invent a history of the creation of mathematics and philosophy centered on the figures of Pythagoras and Plato?

Sacred is not only the religious tradition fused with the Judeo-Christian god. Sacred, in our context, are ideas that impose themselves as founding axioms. There is no discussion of money as an unequal exchange for working time. Private property is not discussed. Inequality and scarcity are not discussed. The right to inheritance (privileges and impossibilities) is not discussed. Abstract concepts of homeland are not discussed. Understand that those sacred things equate. Without any of them (for example, money), the others weaken to the point that the entire colonial-capitalist-liberal edifice collapses. This is why they are sacred. This analysis is corroborated by Benjamin (2013), according to whom

Capitalism must be seen as a religion, i.e., capitalism is essentially at the service of the same concerns, afflictions, and worries to which so-called religions once sought to provide an answer. [...] Capitalism is a purely cultural religion, perhaps even the most extreme that has ever existed. In it, all things only acquire meaning in their immediate relationship with worship; it has no dogma, no theology. [...] Capitalism is the celebration of a cult *sans trêve et sans merci* [without truce or mercy] (Benjamin, 2013, p. 21-22)

Antônio Bispo dos Santos<sup>15</sup>, in *A terra dá, a terra quer* [The earth gives, the earth wants], dictates the difference between the desire to be needed and the desire to be important. The author defines them according to his experiences. In his view, "the people from the city" are concerned with being important and bring with them the premise of usefulness; but despite being useful, they are replaceable. On the other hand, necessary people are "missed," and "[they] must be present, [they are the ones] we go after." Hence, Bispo went "to school to be necessary, not important" (Bispo, 2023, p. 25). However, he finds schools different from those he had experienced, those "of inspiration" and "of play." In the city, he finds a school that ultimately considers his people's masters of orality not only unimportant for them (from the city) but also unnecessary. For his people, orality is the primary way of sharing ancient and ancestral wisdom through generations, and they do so to strengthen their life trajectories. "In the big city, however, only what becomes a commodity has value. There, stories are not told, they are only written: writing stories is a profession" (Bispo, 2023, p. 25).

So, when reflecting on the people of the city and their way of organizing and living, one expects the label of market value (and, therefore, sacralized) of everything and everyone: their time is priced, and this product cannot be exchanged or reimbursed. The logic of utility is stamped on precisely everything around us, and knowledge cannot be different. Knowledge becomes a com-

15 Antônio Bispo dos Santos, popularly known as *Nêgo Bispo*, was a Brazilian philosopher, poet, writer, teacher, quilombola leader, and political activist. Considered one of Brazil's greatest intellectuals, he reflected on contemporary issues based on quilombola experiences. He gained prominence with the concept of "counter-colonization."

modity; it has a price, and thus, only those who hold economic power can access such a privilege. The school plays a role in maintaining this power status through knowledge that should be offered to everyone to strengthen our trajectory. However, it leaves aside many brothers and sisters who suffer from economic and social exclusion systematically. The proposal is insubordination. Human and historical knowledge is everyone's heritage and must be shared with all.

Mathematical knowledge should not be different: we should gather around the bonfire to joyfully tell the stories of the world just like Nêgo Bispo's people. Mathematics must be torn from its elitist character and shared as a necessary, not an important, science. It is necessary in all its endless ways of being: the mathematics of the streets, the mathematics of theorems, technologies, and art, among many others.

"Macunaíma took advantage of the wait to perfect his skills in the two languages of the land, spoken Brazilian and written Portuguese" (Andrade, 2022, p.158). He understands there is a difference between spoken and written language; both need to remain alive and be perfected. Mathematics is similar. Because being alive means pulsing in people's hearts and not locked away in dusty books on few shelves, mathematics must be alive, pulsating, passing through all hands, dirty with earth, sweat, and tears, a mathematics of all colors that subverts the power of alienating value.

To this end, mathematics must escape the trap of the dichotomous, impersonal, and exclusionary sacred and be resacralized in a new format rooted in the plurality of ways of being, existing, and perceiving oneself in the world. The foundations of the colonialist enterprise (the market, money, power) do not need to be sacred, but the tangible, communal, tactile, sensitive things do: trees, rivers, mountains, affections, shared stories, community ways of living, and dances. We can learn this from Krenak:

When we say that our river is sacred, people say: "That's some folklore of theirs;" when we say that the mountain is showing that it's going to rain and that this day will be prosperous, a good day, they say: "No, a mountain doesn't say anything." When we depersonalize the river, the mountain, when we remove their meanings, considering that this is an exclusive human attribute, we expose those places so that they can become waste from industrial and extractive activity. Our divorce from integrations and interactions with our mother Earth results in her leaving us orphans, not only those who, in different degrees, are called natives, Indigenous, or Indigenous peoples, but everyone (Krenak, 2019, p. 33).

How can this be implemented in pedagogical practices? The first step is for school mathematics to give up the comfortable position of being the privileged criterion for defining truths about the world to be one of the bases for constructing shared stories of people with and about their world. It is not to be an imposition but an integration since the complex experience of life imposes multifactoriality, multiplicity, and multidimensionality. It also imposes the transcendence of monolithic barriers (disciplines, curricula, times, and spaces) toward a perspective of curiosity, integration, sharing, and *transubstantiation*.

A hero who transcends, transforms, and metamorphoses himself. The charming part of Macunaíma's narrative, which does not see boundaries or limits, disorganizes the reason for the truth of things, it cuts across enormous distances, bringing them very close: a boy who turns into *guaraná*, a woman who turns into a star; the world in constant transmutation, a circular world in continuous flux; a transfiguration between myths, beliefs, and flesh where everything becomes

possible; the poetry embedded in this whole mixture that stumbles in the vastness of tropicality and gets tangled up and in a magic potion that contains many ingredients of itself, Brazil. The metamorphosis between natural and organic elements in Mário de Andrade's work does not perceive any distinction between the world's components. Everything is made of one material, so it must become possible to transmute. The world, society, and its organizations in constant movement. An opportune time to reinvent yourself. An opportune moment to "*pensamentear*" [thoughts snaking] (Andrade, 2022, p. 199), to let thoughts flow freely like the movement of a snake deep in the virgin forest, to try to reconnect with the earth. Reestablish simplicity and, by being humble, listen to what the people who resist from inside their ancestral wisdom have to teach. Share knowledge in a pure and free way:

It makes no difference whether the school is public or private. The difference is whether the knowledge is public or private. Public schools privatize knowledge. What is the function of the university if not to take organic knowledge distributed for free and privatize it? And after knowledge is privatized, it does not matter whether it comes from public or private schools. That is the question. So for us, public or private schools are not important. We are interested in the school itself. The word is different. We want our own school with our trajectory within the school. The rest? You can set it on fire! (Bispo, 2019)

Nêgo Bispo's "own school" brings this concept of belonging, participation, and confluence, a term that evokes the encounter of the waters, which refers to two becoming one. Encounters that sometimes go in opposite directions and take different paths but converge and expand.

In this statement, the author problematizes the issue of the privatization of knowledge: the school taking the rightful legacy of all people, transforming it into a priced product. Knowledge is perceived as a form of exchange, thus becoming a tool for maintaining power in an unequal and segregating society. So it is up to the school to decide its path: to maintain the *status quo* or break the parameters of what is being done. To finally break parameters, one must reinvent oneself, metamorphose, become a butterfly and then, come back to earth and live again. To return to oneself, rethink one's thoughts, and rework one's body and soul. Merge one's "synthetic" knowing (Bispo, 2023, p.43) with the "organic" knowing (Bispo, 2023, p.43) of the original peoples. In this way, knowledge can truly belong to everyone, for everyone, and with everyone, without the limits of walls or figures.

According to Antônio Bispo dos Santos, in this synthetic knowing, knowledge is the fruit of theory. "The being has little value in synthetic knowing, despite being the creator of having" (Bispo, 2018, sp). It does not accumulate experiences nor involve errors and stumbles; it is established and done, while the organic governs the opposite, a knowing built through calloused hands. Humanity ends up building a synthetic world for itself, disconnected from nature, and thinks it no longer belongs to it. It builds walls and machines, where "the machine was the one that killed the men, but the men were the ones who controlled the Machine..." (Andrade, 2022, p.78), an unacceptable contradiction and possibly irreversible. It is urgent and necessary to stop these machines, breathe, put our feet on the ground, and rethink the true purpose of school: "Humanity is against involvement; it is against living involved with the trees, with the earth, with the forests. Development is synonymous with disconnecting, taking away from the cosmos, breaking originality." (Bishop, 2023, p. 30)

It is where the waters meet, in the transmutation of knowledge, “Eparrei Oyá! Beautiful Oya! With your strength, no one can stop us!”<sup>16</sup> that a more beautiful path can be cultivated, where the boundaries between the organic and the synthetic can become imperceptible. The school floor must become immense and shelter beings that share and join hands to find an embracing future.

In ancestral culture, people ask permission from those who have already been here. They show respect for the wisdom and masters of the past. Mathematics education is taking steps along a path from a decolonial perspective: Professor D’Ambrosio’s ethnomathematics and Carl Rogers’ humanist theory. Inspired and learning from the native peoples, we then ask permission and go on to understand what still needs to be thought about and where we must act so that mathematical science becomes a right for all.

Following this path does not mean renouncing acquired mathematical knowledge nor denying that much of what hegemonic mathematics has produced has helped humans feel comfortable, understand how nature works, and generate creative and surprising ways of modeling phenomena. Mathematics is a fundamental tool in the world. We defend a *resacralization*, a new ritual of mathematics in the school context that removes it from the inaccessible pantheon of miraculous and magical things, which are consequently incomprehensible, dogmatic, and hierarchical, and puts it in a popular, shared, palpable space. May it leave the adored altars of the saints and come to the circles of the *terreiros*, where people sing, clap, dance, play the drum, eat, kiss, sweat, and live. How much good would it do us if the gods could walk among men again?

#### 4. Terreirização: the terrain as a space of passage and not of domination

Let us momentarily maintain the analogy of the *terreiro*, but now not as a sacred place, of the celebration of diverse rites of syncretic cultures amalgamated by colonial force and erected through resistance. For us, a *terreiro* is an outdoor place used to celebrate. In this metaphor, the *terreiro* can be a terrace, backyard, slab, square, yard, playground, corridor... A *terreiro* is more than a place; it is a meeting *perspective* since what defines it is not its physical existence but the social possibility into which it is transformed.

The *terreiro* is constantly changing. During the day, it can be a place where people meet to process cassava and make flour, where clothes dry on the clothesline, where children play stop, hopscotch, tag, and goal, where dogs and cats wander around, sluggish and slow, escaping the sun or a place where nothing happens and the silence of human voices is filled by the wind that shakes the trees. At night, it can be the place where people warm themselves around a bonfire, where they play capoeira or dance carimbó, where couples sit and eat *beiju*<sup>17</sup> and make vows of love under the stars, where you put your hammock to sleep in the cooler dew. See, over time, a same *terreiro* can be all of these things, a mixture of them, or none of them. But what is the *terreiro* not? It is not an indifferent, aseptic, lifeless place. A *terreiro* is a space of affection, of building shared stories, of

16 Excerpt from the 2023 representative song *As Borboletas Encantadas da Bela Oyá* [The Enchanted Butterflies of the Beautiful Oyá] of the samba school *Acadêmicos da Rocinha*. The song can be heard at: <https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=EOzIFAKgUMQ&si=AYjeH2446vBd2wsz>.

17 *Beiju* is a typically Brazilian delicacy of Indigenous origin, made with cassava (starch extracted from cassava, usually granulated), which coagulates when spread on a heated griddle or frying pan and turns into a type of dry pancake or crepe.

encounters. The *terreiro* is the outdoor place, the street, the crossroads, the world. Even though it is “inside a plot of land,” a *terreiro* is a space of intersection where “those inside” can be seen or see “those outside,” inviting people to chat, gossip, live. It is a place of flourishing:

What is the most necessary part of a quilombo house? It is the backyard. The kitchen is indeed necessary, too; everyone arrives through the kitchen. But the backyard is essential because it is where children learn to do everything. It is also where we save space to build the homes of those who will be born, the homes of the next generations. [...]

If the backyard is essential in the quilombo, what is the most necessary part of a house in the favela? It is the slab. The first slab is for the first son or daughter who gets married, and the second slab is for parties (Bispo, 2023, p. 59-60).

The traditional, industrial, hegemonic, verticalized, hierarchical, and sacralized classroom is the opposite of this. Let us move on from the *terreiro*, this place in eternal transmutation, and go, for example, to a Calculus 1 classroom: the books, if we are lucky, have been written decades ago; the students’ bodies are disciplined, seated, submissive; the teacher talks and talks and talks and fills boards and boards with *the subject matter*; the students copy; maybe the teacher will call the roll, maybe not; three times a semester, the silence is even greater, when the teacher’s voice falls silent and he/she begins to observe, bored, all those students, all in the same position, doing the same thing in inhuman silence: it is assessment time. Not everything is the same. Students gradually become scarcer, even more so if the teacher “does not call the roll.” Either because they get so bored of seeing everything always the same or because they give up, they do not adapt, they do not fit in. Those who remain at the end of this long, intricate, and impetuous process of collective torture are prepared for flunking. Or in the same *subject*, in case they flunk, or in dozens of others that are always the same, the same, the same. This is how mathematics subjects are taught at universities. It is not surprising that educated in this way (or in this model), many mathematics teachers aspire to replicate it in their workplaces: to *pass on* the content, keep the class *disciplined*, and defend until their last breath the *school failure* of the rebellious, those who question, who ask what that formula is for. Such teachers see themselves as *talking books*:

What is a talking book? It is the teacher who thinks he/she must talk, in that official period of the course, about things that are in some book. And they write everything on the board so it does not seem so silly to just stand there, talking non-stop. Worse: many Macunaímas copy what is already printed somewhere. But they know that if you take the book out of the book, it is over (Lins, 2011, p. 326).

Here is the anti-*terreiro*. Here is the terrain.

The terrain antagonizes the *terreiro*. There is a law, a rule, a time, an owner, a price, a guard, a deed issued and signed in three copies with a notarized signature, a door, a lock, a fence, a limit, a use, a wall, a fierce dog, and a king: it is mine and my kins’. A *terreiro* is a place where one feels at ease. A plot of land is a place to follow etiquette. A *terreiro* has improvisation, money collection, and division of tasks. A *terreiro* has pleasure. A *terreno* has status. A *terreiro* has drumming. The *terrain* has silence or sometimes ambient music. The *terreiro* pulsates. The *terrain* oppresses. The *terrain* is industry, monoculture, and soy culture. *Terreiro* is the bush. It is *the virgin forest*.

Macunaíma finds charming old companions deep in the forest, beings that crawl, suck, expel, share, and even save his life. In an almost visceral incorporation, the boundaries between bodies where a dissonant dance seems to guide the narrative of integration between the hero and all things in nature are not recognized. A mystical mixture between Heaven and Earth entwines Macunaíma, forcing him to persist step-by-step in his mission. Without the forest animals, the great magic would be doomed to a few pages without the right to mercy for the protagonist. "A mouse in the forest is a sharer" (Bispo, 2023, p. 37). No matter how much man insists on undoing it or on going away from it, the earth wants it, the earth demands from its children the result of ingratitude.

The *terreirização* of the school is a way of recovering this vital connection, feeling life, listening to beings, being a sharing being, understanding that we cannot be alone. Open the windows, feeling the sun and the breeze, feeling that the limits of walls and fences cannot be prisons for the soul. It is a great sin to waste many years of youth tied to identical chairs arranged in symmetrical positions based on profit. Our schools have long reflected this sad and alienated reality of a society that sees itself as omnipotent, disregarding and wasting the dialogue that can bring us closer to the things of the world and even save the world from us. How am I supposed to fight it? Do differently? We believe it has to do with telling stories, postponing the end indefinitely, in line with Krenak: "And my provocation about postponing the end of the world is exactly always to be able to tell one more story. If we can do this, we will be postponing the end" (2019, p. 19).

In a market and productivity logic, we must understand that it is not necessary to "have planning, only confluences" (Bispo, 2023, p. 37), come down to earth, and exchange energies to recharge. Exhale and inhale into what is within arm's reach. Immerse ourselves in the Brazilian and tropical aspects of a country colored by the sun. Thus, exude creativity to experience and discover the world again.

Decoloniality can be a lens for re-founding schools and education by questioning the premises of these territories. What should a school be: a piece of land (terrain) within a community where a specific *literate culture*, as a *virus* that inoculates and selects docile bodies and minds through the industrial repetition of models and premises until they are assimilated as natural, or space for meeting and permanent reconstruction in which the internal community (students, teachers, employees) and external community (families, small businesses, the community in general) have their knowings and flavors created, shared, and appreciated?

"Power requires sad bodies. Power needs sadness because it can dominate it. Joy, therefore, is resistance because it does not surrender. Joy, as a power of life, takes us to places where sadness would never take us" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 23).

The school should not be a place to exclude, fail, select, imitate, or copy but to transcend, support, sow, care for, and water. It should not be about controlling and imposing subjects, schedules, curricula, or knowledge but about adapting, listening, improvising, dribbling, swinging, and exercising the lack of control that is life. It should not select the best, the capable, or the enlightened but assume that no one will be left behind. It should not be a place to sit at desks, staring straight ahead, following a slideshow, but to sit on the floor in a circle and share stories, looking around.

We will see passion rekindle in our students' eyes when they mirror family traditions and world stories that populate domestic spaces and give us recognition and belonging rather than the hegemonic and genealogical tradition of systematized knowings organized in a logic that does not dialogue. The passion that will make the school *our* public space instead of an ownerless place. Therefore, the *terreirização* is a proposal for an experiment in belonging and intimacy to spice up the dust on the ground with clapping and songs, which presupposes valuing ancestry over authority, speech over writing, and commitments over signed contracts.

How does it work? It works by losing the illusion of control, enlivening unpopulated spaces, creating layers of affection in loving details, making school a place of care and affection, and valuing pleasure above ego. In this regard, school mathematics must undergo deep transformation since its curricular structure is based on the systematic accumulation of content. Their pedagogy is based on fear of getting low grades, being judged, and flunking. Its formation presupposes the selection *ad eternum* of those apt to teach that knowledge. Its status as a school subject is one of privilege. Its methodology is to homogenize rather than diversify, which also presupposes that the assessment occurs with the same instrument, simultaneously.

How different would the mathematics of the *terreiro* be? It would be a mathematics in which some learn from others, and everyone has something fascinating to teach. Mathematics in which students do not need to ask, "What is this for?" but create knowings and social meanings based on their places in the world. It would not be mathematics *from the talking book* anymore but from the history shared in time and space. After all, the *terreiro* is not a place of passage but a place of being and living.

Perhaps this way, the *terreiro* will no longer have the dimension of fear; it will no longer be supernatural, strange, and full of prejudices. We want the figures in these spaces to be no longer portrayed as "an old black woman with a century of suffering, shabby and scraggy."<sup>18</sup> Instead, it will pay its due respect to those who are the holy references that constitute us, which involves understanding the rituals of spaces and entering unknown spaces. It means opening oneself up to experience with the other.

Everyone was restless, eagerly wishing a saint would come to the *macumba* that night. It had been a while since anyone had seen it, no matter how much the others asked. Because Tia Ciata's *macumba* was not like those fake *macumbas*, in which the father of the *terreiro* always pretended to be any Xangô Oxóssi, to please the *macumba* practitioners. It was a serious *macumba* and when the saint appeared, he truly appeared, without any falsehood. Tia Ciata did not allow such demoralization in her *zengu* (Andrade, 2022, p. 111, emphasis added).

A *terreirizada* mathematics is a space for bodies that move; a space for listening, for dancing, for singing, for surprise, for the unexpected. It is a welcoming and engaging space. It is a space for radical status change that demands the construction of a new pedagogy of diversity, heterogeneity, affection, and dreams.

18 This is how Mário de Andrade describes Tia Ciata, the great matriarch of samba and one of the most important black figures of the early 20th century. In this chapter, Macunaíma visits Tia Ciata's *terreiro* in Rio de Janeiro and meets with several personalities, such as President Wenceslau Brás. Unfortunately, the chapter is full of prejudices, associating Exu with Satanism, exposing a stereotypical and superficial view of African-based cults.

## 5. Confluences

It is no coincidence that the words chosen for this article –*sacred* and *terrene*– can be interpreted as antagonistic. Apollo and Dionysus, virtue and pleasure. We have argued above against the dichotomy. Let us stay like this, but first, another song:

Be careful when turning a corner. A joy, attention, lad. You come, how old are you? Attention, you must keep your eyes steady for this sun, for this darkness. Attention, everything is dangerous, everything is divine, wonderful! Pay attention to the chorus, wow! We must be attentive and strong; we do not have time to fear death!

Pay attention to the verse and the chorus, the swear word, the watchword! Pay attention to the samba exaltation. Attention, everything is dangerous; everything is divine, wonderful! Pay attention to the chorus, wow! We must be attentive and strong; we do not have time to fear death! (Veloso & Gil<sup>19</sup>, 1968)

The supposed academic objectivity aligns with a vision of the world that separates realities into watertight containers so that they can be analyzed. This involves separating body and mind, work and spirit. More than that, it proposes that the mind, the world of ideas, is superior to corporeal, mundane, tactile reality. For those who see the world this way, in units, individuals, and test tubes, a reality that cannot be subjected to theory is inconceivable. Developing science is, in this analogy, refining the theory so that it increasingly approaches the observed reality.

The point is that reality is too complex to be understood regarding interaction between modelable subjectivities. Logic is not the reason for all decisions, and chance, passion, encounter, and the construction of a new story are elements too complex to be understood objectively. In short, *everything is divine and wonderful* because existence is a miracle in itself. Mathematics is in the world, but it is incapable of encompassing the complexity of the world. This is not just a matter of better modeling or more computing power. It is a question of impossibility. All the cracks will never be covered. There will always be a song, a tambourine, a hand, and the words so that the echoes of ancestry have a seat at the table.

We authors open a range of questions without easy answers. We know that the romanticized version, or rather, *literalized* version of hegemonic mathematics that we present in this article, is, very generously, a hyperbole<sup>20</sup>. However, we must remember that cultural hegemony is constituted by imagery, mythification, and consequent metaphorizing that become filters to mediate our interpretation of reality. Our provocations are intended to help us see together the invisible walls that protect hegemonic mathematics, allowing other ways of mathematizing the world to emerge. This article, therefore, is not a starting point but a pause for reflection that we allow ourselves before moving on.

There is much to be done. This article did not understand literature as a mere stylistic accessory but as a method for questioning while dialoguing. Literature is the pulsating center from

<sup>19</sup> Here we are also referencing a song called *Divino Maravilhoso* [Divine and Wonderful], composed by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso and immortalized in the version by Gal Costa. The song can be heard at <https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=Emu4JrrfpM0&si=ypV5PSYXSVrqZzR9>.

<sup>20</sup> In Portuguese, a hyperbole or auxesis is a figure of speech, more precisely a figure of thought, that indicates the speaker's intentional exaggeration.

which we see the process of reading and constructing intertexts with academic references. It would sadden us, as authors, if our stance were seen by you, who read us, as arrogant. Our intention is just the opposite. The truth we hide deep inside only becomes evident when we make ourselves vulnerable to the point of saying what makes us fragile. When we propose a questioning of the foundations of hegemonic mathematics, doing so through an article that also fundamentally distances itself from academic forms, languages, and assumptions, embracing literature (with Macunaíma as a symbol), we do so for no other reason than pure, enchanting, necessary, and simple passion. In passion, we are always incomplete, so we move ahead without definitive answers. This article is not an end but an idea in motion.

It is time to hear “the whisper of pain in the corner of Brazil” (Duarte & Pinheiro, 1976) and make the stories of the struggles of *the three races* a celebration of the persistence of diverse ways of life against colonial authoritarianism that imposes categories for being and existing in the world. Decoloniality is not a theoretical lens for understanding the world; it is a form of resistance that allows us to *exist* in the world. Therefore, the diversity of worldviews, languages, rituals, and spaces for meeting and contemplation is a wealth that should not be understood as appropriation and monetary accumulation but as sharing. We need to sacralize what is beyond price and not rate what is sacred so that we can overcome the ecocidal crisis we are experiencing.

When we depersonalize the river, the mountain, when we remove their meanings, considering that this is an exclusive human attribute, we expose those places so that they can become waste from industrial and extractive activity. Our divorce from integrations and interactions with our mother Earth results in her leaving us orphans, not only those who in different degrees are called natives, Indigenous, or Indigenous peoples, but everyone (Krenak, 2019, p. 33)

Thus, we must be permanently alert. We must understand that marginal cultural practices, mainly African and Indigenous ones in Brazil, have survived and continue to survive due to ancestral altruism and resistance that have occurred at many levels for hundreds of years and, even so, the genocidal stance of coloniality has forever silenced countless voices from diverse cultures. Much has been lost, and much is rebuilt daily in the echoes of this resistance.

What we have been discussing does not mean we should be sad and mournful. There is no time for that. Being *attentive and strong* is a combative, not a conformist stance. We must be brave enough to propose another way of teaching mathematics. We must educate teachers who teach through passion and encounter and not through silence and fear; teachers who learn to act transdisciplinarily, who pay attention to the role of political as well as scientific education of our students, and who enjoy teaching and playing this social role. May they not be afraid of being seen as vulnerable but be altruistic enough to feel, doubt, rethink, and learn. May they know that in our redemptive end, we can look at the stars and touch them, sacred as our sources of storytelling. May it be a beautiful and hopeful end like Macunaíma’s last words:

So, Pauí-Pódole felt sorry for Macunaíma. He did some witchcraft. He grabbed three sticks, threw them up in the air, made a crossroads, and turned Macunaíma, from top to toe, rooster chicken cage revolver and clock, into a new constellation. It is the Ursa Major constellation.

They say that a German professor (sure) went around announcing that the Ursa Major's only leg proved it was the Saci...

We say it isn't! Saci is still in this world, spreading bonfires and braiding horsehair... the Ursa Major is Macunaíma. He is indeed the lame hero who, after suffering so much on earth, unhealthy and with many ants, became bored with everything, left and spent his days alone in the vast field of the sky (Andrade, 2022, p. 303).

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