

GLOBAL SOUTH FEMINIST SPACE AGENCY, MULTIPOLAR PATHS TO THE NEW SPACE

Por Fabiane M. Borges¹

ABSTRACT: Four feminists from India, Mexico, and Brazil met in Paris on the occasion of an international symposium on Space Art and Culture – “Global Periphery,” held in September 2022. They sat at a sidewalk café and began imagining the creation of a Space Agency staffed by feminists from the Global South. They discussed topics such as astropolitics, geopolitics, imperialism, multilateralism, economics, Global South, new world order, peripheral knowledge, subaltern knowledge, center and periphery, global periphery, epistemicide, power maps, rulers of the world, rulers of the solar system, futuristic policies, ancestrofuturism, knowledge of indigenous, migratory, and diasporic peoples, diversity, and feminism. The dinner actually took place, but the concepts and conversations in the text do not exactly reproduce the discussions at the dinner; they were developed later, with the author's poetic license.

KEYWORDS: Feminism; astropolitics; Global South; Diversity; Ancestrofuturism.

SPACE FEMINISTS' DINNER

Let me tell you a little story about a dinner that took place in Paris with four feminist researchers in Space Art and Culture, shortly after the "Global Periphery"² Seminar, organized by Annick Bureau and Marcus Neustetter at the Cité Internationale des Arts in 2022. The

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² Global Periphery Symposium. Website: <https://www.olats.org/global-periphery/>.

event's theme was "Contemporary Space Imaginaries." The curators were generous in bringing together researchers, artists, and thinkers of space culture from various countries and aesthetic and philosophical backgrounds. There were presentations ranging from purely artistic works to grandiose transdisciplinary institutional programs. The event was held following the International Astronautical Congress (Paris/2022),³ which facilitated the participation of researchers who were still energized by the latest arguments in New Space.

The panel I participated in was called "Perspectives from the Global South," where I spoke about the projects I have been developing in Brazil related to space art and culture, including those carried out at the National Institute for Space Research.⁴ Susmita Mohanty from India, whom I had not met until that moment, was the moderator of the panel. She surprised me with an opening statement that was highly critical of American and European space culture, which she said tries to downplay the global leadership that countries like India and China have been advancing in space matters, while also perpetuating colonial prejudice against the Global South, which once represented poverty and underdevelopment but today is undoubtedly leading space projects in an innovative and progressive way.

Susmita's opening speech had an empowering effect on me. I understood what she meant when she spoke about colonial prejudice, but my reaction was the opposite of revolt—I felt a kind of pride in "representing" the Global South at the French symposium. That pride carried into the evening's dinner.

After the first day of presentations at the Global Periphery, we went to a French restaurant with charming little round tables on the sidewalk,⁵ the kind only Paris seems to have. It was me, the Mexican artist Ale de la Puente,⁶ the Indian artist Rohini Devasher,⁷ and the Indian engineer, also the CEO of at least three international startups, Susmita Mohanty.⁸ We had a gastronomic experience with escargot and other French delicacies. We resumed the controversial topic of the seminar about the Global South, which had caused quite a stir during our presentation. We began to talk about the real reasons behind this distinction: the Global South panel. Why didn't we naturally participate in the seminar as individuals working in space

³ International Astronautical Congress, Paris/2022. Website: <https://iac2022.org/>.

⁴ SACi-E (Subjectivity, Art and Space Research). Website: <http://sacieartscience.wordpress.com>.

⁵ Hôtel le Relais Saint Germain. Website: <https://www.hotel-paris-relais-saint-germain.com/en/>.

⁶ Ale de la Puente. Website: www.aledelapuenteartist.com

⁷ Rohini Devasher. Website - www.rohinidevasher.com

⁸ Susmita Mohanty. The Moon Walker, Website: <http://www.themoonwalker.in/>

art and culture, but were instead highlighted as representatives of the Global South? Was it simply the usual prejudice from Northern Atlantic countries toward Southern ones, or was it the inevitable recognition of the current technological and economic rise of these countries?

There we were, four researchers in space art and culture, discussing astropolitics and thinking about the role of Global South countries in New Space. Between toasts, we imagined what it would be like if we created a feminist, South Globalist space program. At that table, we already had feminists from three different countries—Mexico, India, and Brazil. A Chinese woman was definitely missing from the group. The idea was fun, but it seemed like a lot of work.

I savored the French delicacies while speaking the words "South + Global" with my mouth full, adding even more flavor to the gastronomic experience. As far as I remember, the Indian engineer Susmita, despite enjoying herself a bit, remained somewhat skeptical about all this joy, even though she never doubted the role that these countries were already playing in the new political configuration of space. For her, the Western discursive detachment from the current state of development and empowerment in Southern countries signified that Euro-American prejudice, though uninformed, was still significant. She argued, as she had during the seminar, that this distinction was a way to map, exert power, and perpetuate racism over countries like India.

We knew that prejudice existed, but it was also inevitable to recognize the approach of a new paradigm, that of South Globalist alliances, the expanded BRICS, South-South cooperation and knowledge exchange, and the current stage of these countries' propositions. For me, it was becoming increasingly clear that the colonial paradigm was being overcome by technological, economic, and political cooperation strategies from Southern countries. Because of that, the words "South + Global," mixed with French spices, held a certain pleasure in the mouth. It was a kind of gustatory anthropophagy, a digestion of the systems of repression and domination that the sidewalk table in Paris represented.

In an animated tone, we began talking about the Feminist South Globalist Space Agency, but we found ourselves at an impasse: would we allow feminists from the North to participate in the agency? If so, would we give them inclusive roles in coordination and management sectors? Or would we relegate them to more subordinate roles, such as securing financial resources to support the projects, while ensuring that the main roles of articulation and leadership remained with feminists from the South?

Calm down, dear readers, this was merely an affirmative speculation fueled by wine, in a delightful French restaurant, paid for with the event *per diems*; otherwise, this meeting would have been improbable.

Putting the "gringas" in charge of coordinating our feminist space program seemed unacceptable at that moment! Don't we know that many researchers from the Global South, despite accessing international programs, almost never reach the top of the hierarchy? Aren't we almost always treated as immigrants or strange beings with funny accents, from another race, and don't we suffer the prejudices faced by the different? I acknowledge I am speaking from a place of privilege, but it is important to consider how much worse it is for those who migrate with nothing but the hope of a better life, enduring even more racism and xenophobia. These high-ranking positions are not easily given to those from the South. For this to happen abundantly, we would need to invert the Atlanticist logic, that is, break free from Northern economic and military domination and move toward non-imperialist multipolarity (CHATIN, *et al*, 2019, DADOS, *et al*, 2012).

_ Wow, what a dream!

_ Yes, but before anyone throws cold water on our joy, by saying that there will only be a change in monopoly and nothing will really change, we can still imagine all of this.

_ Another toast!

But someone at the table remarked, if we did that, preventing North Globalists from taking part in the management of our space agency, we would merely be inverting the power map. Is that what we want to reproduce? Are we seeking revenge?

See how a small late-night, wine-fueled joke can bring us ethical and moral dilemmas on a planetary scale.

It is well-known that our own countries are unable to provide their local populations with the same level of access to cutting-edge technologies that European countries and the United States have managed so far. This is due to a historical colonial pact, which today manifests through technological safeguards and protectionist patent contracts that legally prevent us, under threat of fines, sanctions, or even military invasions, from using technologies

patented by Atlantic North allies. This often occurs even when we are willing to pay for these technologies, as is the case with rocket technologies, which are prohibited from being developed in several countries, such as Brazil, due to their protection by technoscientific patents or laws against the development of nuclear weapons, which could easily be mounted on rockets or submarines. As a result, there is a policy of hindering development, including issues related to national security (BORGES, 2022). As far as we know, countries like China and India are surprisingly managing to break through this blockade. How they have achieved this was a controversial topic in our conversation. We discussed nuclear weapons and copyleft on Western patents, secured by the strengthening of strong armies and Legal strategies. While these issues are highly interesting, I will not bring them up in this text, as they would divert us from the main point and lead us into a discussion on the relationship between the war industry and national sovereignty, a highly relevant topic, but not exactly within the scope of cultural space agents, which was what united us at that restaurant.

Let's continue with the inversion of the power map. Simply shifting power from the North to the South, without fundamentally promoting minority knowledge and perspectives, would result in the empowerment of ideologies and values held by the autocratic elites of the Global South, which are also historically tainted by colonialism, corporate globalism, and rampant exploitation, with no real interest in local populations. There would still be many "Souths" within the inverted map. Each of us at the table certainly had a lot to say about this, coming from our own countries, which are dominated by privileged, elitist, racist, sexist, conservative classes, with their surrendering corporations and their colonized, narrow-minded mentality.

It seems that some concepts have intensified here. If in the countries of the South we generally live under the control and domination of these various "Norths" that compose (and decompose) them, including the intrinsic "Norths" within the South itself, what remains relevant for the minorities of our countries to teach the North, or to contribute globally, beyond the survival, resistance, and resilience strategies of these minorities, so harshly affected by colonial and capitalist exploitation?

The two artists at the table, Mexican Ale de la Puente and Indian Rohini Devasher, had something to say on this matter. They had formed a duo for their presentation at the Global Periphery Seminar, showcasing artistic works created, among other places, at ancient observatories in their countries. They presented us with poetic research that created a dialogue between astronomy and their local perspectives, fostering an atmosphere of pause and depth.

They shared stories about the relationship with time, space, and the cosmos that are not highly valued in Western agencies. They emphasized the importance of considering astronomical observation, for instance, as a process, an experience, and an embodiment of knowledge. They spoke about the need to deconstruct the idea that informational data is the only source of knowledge in scientific research, stressing that other sources are increasingly being neglected—such as contemplative immersion, the poetic and aesthetic dimension, the revelation of emotions and sensations in the encounter with what is being observed, the discontinuity of time, the variation of the questions that should be asked in scientific investigation, the creation of new technological languages, the diversity of narratives and interpretations, and the return of wonder, which is so necessary to combat the horror and fear, our current underlying feeling in the face of the horrors of war and climate change. So, during that dinner, we had some glimpses of what could be qualified as South Globalist thinking, worthy of being shared with the rest of the world.

Many debates have taken place in Brazil and Latin America in general regarding the knowledge of the South.⁹ This knowledge has been subjugated by major colonial concepts from the North, such as rationality, capitalism, monotheism, scientific objectivity, progress, colonization, art history, ethics, philosophy, the history of thought, chronology, the Gregorian calendar, vertical evolution, individualism, globalism, among many others. The West is addicted to its own method of knowledge production, bound to its lineage (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, Darwin, etc.), addicted to linearity and self-reference, applying its model to all aspects of reality. Over time, it has developed a formula for interpreting the world and uses it to transform knowledge into power. It shows little willingness to adapt to modes of knowledge production from other origins, which it considers subordinate. The astronomical knowledge of the South was buried under these methodological and technological frameworks, despite all resistance. However, today this knowledge is resurfacing, creating some form of balance (or imbalance) (QUIJANO, 1999).

Bringing these situated knowledge to light means unearthing them, sometimes in fragments, as in an archaeological process, since they are often broken and stripped of their original form (HARAWAY, 2013). This has been done through investment in the production of memory, linking dispersed narrative lines and recovery of forgotten languages. For this

⁹ As an example, there is the "Saberes do Sul Global" extension project, a partnership between the universities UNESP and UNILA, aimed at discussing the Epistemologies of the South and their interface with the fields of Communication and International Relations. You can watch the discussion on TV Unesp (streamed live on April 26, 2021) at this youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FR36d9AQU E>.

information to be updated, it is necessary to create space and time for the evocation and elaboration of affects and meanings (BORGES, *et al*, 2018). Sometimes, it is necessary to reclaim physical territories, such as those of Indigenous peoples, to promote the healing of historical traumas, to generate understandings that relate to the past and the futures germinated in it (KOPENAWA e ALBERT, 2013). These include technological and social survival knowledge, ways of living in community, social behaviors and relationships with nature, which are sources of knowledge that Indigenous, migratory, and diasporic peoples carry with them, even in a transversal way, and have generously taught their contemporaries. Contained in these memories are cosmological wisdom, traditional medicines, food autonomy, soil and springs recovery, old songs, ways of good living and good dying, among many other things. Making present the small and large revolutions against imperialism, the pre-colonial feminist activisms that are currently intertwined with new understandings of gender, race and body is not a whim, but a current need to reconnect with planet Earth and the diversity that characterizes it, even if it seems too late for Homo sapiens. It is important to remember that although Homo sapiens contributed to the extinction of several species, including other hominids like Homo neanderthalensis and Homo denisovans, our species still preserves a notable cultural diversity and a wide variety of ways of living, which must be considered in our projects for the occupation of the solar system, if we survive the current threat of our own extinction.

It is urgent to traverse these ruins of the collective unconscious (ROLNIK, 2018), and enhance our capacity for diplomacy with other species on the planet, such as forests, animals, water, cosmological and terrestrial systems. In doing so, we activate possibilities for coexistence and the expansion of intelligence. Revisiting memory, dream, and imaginative archives seems essential to generate a new world order, one that is pluridiverse and interested in new procedures for the coexistence of different human and non-human societies.

_ It is a polemical dream.

_ Yes, but still a very interesting dream.

Deconstructing hegemonic colonial thought, dismantling the reality of epistemicide, and allowing the multiplicity of perspectives to emerge is part of the process of activating this Global South knowledge. This allows it to appear, flourish, reverberate, and expand, even unlocking the obsessive barriers of contemporary religious fanaticism

(worldwide). This knowledge is not hidden in some secret place in the past, waiting to be revealed, but rather fragmented within imaginary and subconscious networks and the localities that shape it (BORGES, *et al*, 2018).

In light of so many teachings and contributions that the Global South could offer the world, certainly one of the most relevant is to raise new questions, ask new inquiries, and propose new ways of development. It is about promoting technodiversity (HUI, 2017), and promoting the plurality of knowledge. In this sense, we understand the importance of the process. A long path of understanding and diplomacy is needed, not merely an inversion of the power map, swapping North for South, or operating solely within the logic of opposing ideas without changing the structure.

We know that to reach this stage of epistemological empowerment and consciousness, rationality and good intentions alone are not enough; revolution, war, the strengthening of armies, technological appropriation, heavy investment in education, and the reclaiming of economic control by formerly subjugated nations are also required. In this regard, China is currently the most evident reference. What has been lost in terms of wisdom and local Chinese cultures in this process is still being debated and updated in numerous studies, papers, conferences, and discussions within China itself, through thinkers in technology and culture (HUI, 2017).

There are all these Global South peoples who are already on the same quest as China for autonomy and sovereignty. They no longer want to be dominated by the American empire (and its allied countries), which for a time self-determined as the unilateral economic and cultural center of global power. Now, however, they are opening the way to be replaced by corporate conglomerates, whose aim is to take the place of nation-states and dominate the planetary future, turning the world's populations into shareholders, rentiers, and users of this capitalist megamachine.

The neoliberal role has become an expansive system of economic exploitation (both terrestrial and extraterrestrial), in which nation-states are increasingly losing relevance and people are transformed into permanent consumers within a logic of continuous production and consumption. This economic model favors the accumulation of wealth in the hands of an elite that controls assets, apps, and platforms, without generating real productive value. In doing so, it suppresses other forms of social organization and alternative visions of the future, creating generations of new addicted consumers. In this context, rentier capitalism permeates all

spectrums of human desire, making potential resistance against it difficult due to overdependence, especially for new generations.

To overcome this impasse, a series of new political and economic alliances are being proposed among Global South countries. However, what interests us particularly is advocating for cooperation across the various transversal lines of diversity that make up these countries, not to form a unilateral block of thought, but to allow other perspectives to thrive. This is the most effective way to combat the hegemonic supremacies of both the North and the South itself. In this sense, this knowledge from the South also represents a "South of thought," which can be fragmented across any geographical part of the planet, through traces of knowledge from minority and subaltern peoples (SEGATO, 2021).

These Southern ways of thinking have much to contribute in creating alternatives to the corporate future that has been announced, working in favor of other possible worlds that arise from multiplicity. Worlds that many of us desire to be more collaborative, communal, ecological, with equality among peoples, races, genders, cultural diversity, and respect for different worldviews, aiming for a future of existential abundance and planetary care. This vision does not deny interplanetary technoscientific development, but increasingly understands it as a language whose structure is diverse, not univocal and uniform (HUI, 2017). To achieve this, we must rethink research questions in all levels, both in the humanities and sciences, breaking the paradigm of individualistic or corporate competition, so we can invest in structural heterogeneity, global and multiplanetary cooperation.

– It's too much work!

– A toast to the immense task that this multipolar and pro-diversity consciousness requires.

– The path forward to New Space will be very difficult if we create the South Globalist Feminist Space Agency based on all these liberating principles.

_ Oh yeah!

– Cheers.

The dinner ended. Unfortunately, we didn't reach a consensus on the actual creation of the space agency that night, but it had all these tasks ahead: the focus on multiplicity, gender

diversity, race, class, culture (both human and multispecies, taking into account all the species that inhabit Earth and other planets), the restructuring of technoscientific language through open, experimental, unrestricted, and diverse research that embraces interpretive variety, and does not seek a single meaning for all data sets obtained through research, and that is multipolar rather than imperialist. This is how we envision entering the orbits and securing our place in space. Many rituals and no religious oppression (BORGES and FRAGOSO, 2024). And yes, while we would allow others to collaborate, the agency should be fundamentally constituted by feminists from the South, grounded in the demands of minorities and the knowledge of the Global South.

Note: This conversation must continue at some other point, whether by the four of us, feminist space thinkers at the sidewalk restaurant in Paris, or by others pondering the same thoughts at tables around the world.

Maybe the agency has already been made, but not by us. If you decide to create such a special space agency, please invite us to participate.

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