

*DjumbaiALA – Contributing to Polyphonic Dialogues across the Middle Passage by Valerie V. V. Gruber, acrylic on canvas with collage of images from the DjumbaiALA homepage, 2020*

# DjumbaiALA – Contributing to Polyphonic Dialogues across the Middle Passage

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**F**ounded five years ago, DjumbaiALA is a network committed to enhancing intercultural conversations and a non-hierarchical co-production of knowledge in the Global South. Diverse researchers, artists and activists from Latin America, Africa and Europe are contributing to this cause.

DjumbaiALA is a polyphonic network aimed at fostering connections and conversations between Africa and Latin America through arts and the human and social sciences. “Djumba” is a term in Guinea Bissauan Creole which refers to a free and open exchange of ideas. In a similar current, “Ndjumba” in West African Pidgin can also stand for a friend/partner. “Ala” is the acronym for Africa/Latin America, implying the possibility of transgressing frontiers and crossing oceans. “Ala” is also the singular of “wings”

in Spanish, wings which enable us to fly over walls, boundaries and oceans. In the context of Brazilian samba schools, “ala” equally refers to a section where various persons dance together in tune. Such are the symbolic and conceptual bearings that gave form, steam, and substance to the DjumbaiALA network, bringing together researchers and socio-cultural actors from the University of Bayreuth (UBT), Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in Mozambique, the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) and the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB), both in Brazil, and the University of Valle (UV) and Observatorio Distrital Anti-discriminación Racial (ODAR), both in Colombia.

DjumbaiALA is a network of 16 current members committed to enhancing a non-hierarchical co-production of knowledge in the Global South. In a constant effort to transcend disciplinary and socio-cultural boundaries, their different voices engage critically with the realities of their lifeworlds and creatively build bridges of knowledge. A major

component of this partnership has been the desire to reach out to new publics beyond the purview of the university ivory tower. So DjumbaiALA functions as a cross-current network of artistic and academic agents, embarking on a fluid digital voyage that enhances conversations on new trends on both shores of the Middle Passage, linking the academic community with the civil society.

### The Main Axes of DjumbaiALA

The idea of a South-South network with a virtual platform was conceived by Ute Fendler and Eberhard Rothfuß from the UBT. They set the idea afloat through a webpage named “Agora” and over time the initiative has been given new tone and features with the creation of the DjumbaiALA website. Entries on this site constitute the kernel of DjumbaiALA and revolve around four main thematic axes: Heritage and Identity, Territoriality and Inequality, Body and Representation, Artistic Narratives and Transversal Connections. Any web surfer can access contents in both essay and artistic formats on a wide spectrum of themes

comprising fashion, racism/ethnicities, sexualities, memory, urbanscape/architecture, diasporas, bodies, gender, sports, and philosophy. This format is propitious in building encounters in a multiplicity of voices, highlighting meaning-making processes through artistic productions and academic research, without losing sight of the ethical implications of these exchanges.

The audiovisual trails of the DjumbaiALA network, available on its YouTube channel, equally follow the underlying polyphony between documentaries and testimonies by the various contributors. The channel enriches the page with new contents and acts as a bridge between the diverse communities that make up DjumbaiALA, thereby adding visibility to artistic narratives and scientific research as well as socio-cultural productions/mobilisation. The YouTube channel offers videos on demand and can be used for live streaming during conferences with free access. In addition, the crew will produce podcasts as a means of accommodating those who, due to visual impairments, for instance, may only be able to access audio trails. This could be an effort to “de-monumentalise written knowledge” as Boaventura de Sousa Santos posits in one of his manifestos for epistemologies of the Global South.

### Transdisciplinary Encounters

In the past five years, members of this network have organised workshops in Bayreuth, Germany (September 2016), Cali, Colombia (November 2017), Maputo, Mozambique (September 2018) and Salvador, Brazil (April 2019) (facilitated

by BIGSAS and Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies in the case of Brazil), bringing together experienced scholars, early-career researchers, artists, and activists to share and discuss their findings on research related to African and Afro-descendant communities. These encounters have ignited very engaging discussions and cast reflexive gazes on concepts and methodologies, mapping out ways of strengthening the transdisciplinary dimensions of various research endeavours and furthering co-operation between partner universities. The success of these events has been the culmination of long-existing contacts and individual research stays, facilitated most especially by the Chairs of Social Geography and Romance Literatures/Comparative Studies (UBT) and their counterparts in the partner universities. These encounters strengthened acquaintanceships and generated interviews and other content for the DjumbaiALA webpage and its YouTube channel.

### Surfing Ahead: Prospects and Visions

One of the initiatives in the pipeline is the production and circulation of multimedia e-books containing articles, essays, and interviews involving diverse themes by researchers and artists as well as other socio-cultural actors. This would amplify the contents of the network for the promotion and sharing of knowledge through the DjumbaiALA site. The preference for the EPUB format facilitates open access across telematic networks.

At the beginning of this year, the authors of this article participated in a contest of ideas for early-career researchers organ-

For more information on the thematic foci, visit the website

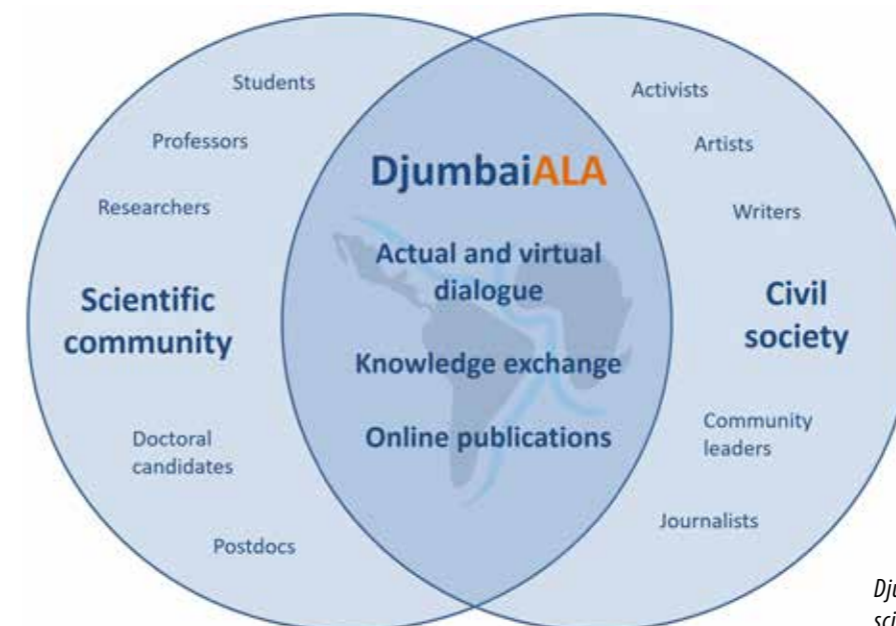
[www.djumbaiala.com](http://www.djumbaiala.com)

and contact the team for contributions at

[infodjumbaiala@gmail.com](mailto:infodjumbaiala@gmail.com)

ised by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with a project titled *DjumbaiALA: African and Afro-diasporic Dialogues in a Multimedia Era* within the framework of *Brasilientag* (Brazil Day). The project was shortlisted but the final selection has unfortunately been postponed due to the current Corona crisis. The project involves a workshop on digitisation to be held in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil and concrete plans to establish “DjumbaiALA Books” as an e-book publishing structure with interactive components that harness texts, sounds, images, and visual displays to reach a wider multilingual and multimedia e-dience. The workshop would bring together early-career academics and a technical team from Germany and Brazil versed in digital designing, programming, curatorial, and publication skills.

The DjumbaiALA crew will continue to approach the Transatlantic as a complex horizontal sphere of separation/connection that beckons us to imagine new ethics of co-existence and relationality. Using creative talents, DjumbaiALA intends to continue contributing to the contrapuntal circulation of knowledge between Africa and Latin America as a subversion of that ignominious page/space of human history, the Middle Passage. 🌍



*DjumbaiALA at the intersection between scientific community and civil society*