

NODES THAT BOND

A FEMINIST COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY
PROJECT IN THE MANTIQUEIRA FOREST, BRAZIL,
SUPPORTED BY APC



The project

Nodes that Bond is a feminist project of the Portal sem Porteiras community network. In this project, we gather, discuss and work for the communication and technology debate in our community. We are located in the Souza's neighborhood, in Monteiro Lobato, which is in the Mantiqueira Forest, southeast of Brazil. We live in a rural area with traditions and ways of its own. However, the internet, what's app, google, all of that has arrived here, and affects how people interact with each other.

With a funding from APC and a partnership with Coolab, we are in a process of deepening our knowledge on technology and communications, and bridging the gap between rural women and communication's powerful tools. Our aim is to do so through personal encounters in afternoon coffee meetings, where we listen to their stories and understand how they relate to technology and communication.

How was this project developed?

Once we got the funding to start our work, an open call was made to gather neighborhood women and present the Nodes that Bond project. Our work consists mainly in two aspects:

1) Research: We built a team of researchers, who are going to field work, meeting and interviewing an array of different women from the neighborhood and listening to their stories. With this information, our collective will design a map of the neighborhood through women's voices. Not only that, but these researchers will take the information about Portal sem Porteiras, our community network, to those people.

2) Women's Circle: Every month, we met in women's circles, in which a tutor, Tania, taught local women about communication in our era: how computers and the internet work, how websites collect our data, how information circulates around the globe... in those meetings, a lot about global and local communication was learned and discussed. For each Women's Circle we had a local woman as a cook, who made vegan snacks, and the "arteira", who made an artistic minute of the meeting, so we could share the knowledge online.

July - I Women's Circle

In the first Women's Circle, there were 28 women present, and it was a sunny day, so we had the meeting in the garden. The theme was: "The internet and its female key players". Our tutor, Tania, first asked us: what did we think the internet was? "It's like a basket where you put all the envelopes with information inside, and everyone can pick up any envelope as well as contribute with their own"; "it's like a spider's web that connects all of us"; "it's a parallel universe, something abstract". And the tutor, Tania, added to the debate: it is a place, and it has its own infrastructure: paths, streets... but, who is occupying those paths and streets?



The debate led to a beginners technical understanding on how the internet works. How does an email go from a cellphone to a computer? The group learned how companies own access to internet and data, and that their services are in the devices (phones, computers) through which our data is sent. But, for the information to arrive, it meets servers, internet providers.. these work as tolls between devices for data to pass through. The group also learned how all the internet network is connected through underwater cables, in the deepest oceans, and that most of these services and connections are in the hands of a few companies with monopoly power of our communication channels.



On this day, we were glad to learn that, despite these companies charging tolls and owning our data, there are several alternatives already in progress across the globe! Initiatives reducing intermediates between people, alternative and smaller websites, women's collectives creating safe pages and tools, free community webs, independent worker's tv channels.... and that through Portal sem Porteiras' community network we could integrate this network of alternative communication channels!

August - II Women's Circle

In the II Women's Circle, we began the meeting with an activity proposed by Ju Fiebig, who works with group dynamics, theater and technology. She proposed that each of us made a movement that described ourselves, and we all imitated that same move in a circle. Then, we closed our eyes and took each others hands, without knowing whose hands they were. Once experiencing this hand-to-hand communication, we went to blindfolding each other and one taking another to walk around the garden without seeing or speaking, using only our bodies as a way of communicating where to walk one another.



In these activities, the goal was to get us to communicate in alternative channels, connect to each other in ways we usually don't, and bring our other senses to the discussion about communication. If we are going to discuss global and local networks, how are the networks we build between each other?



Furthermore: if we are entering personal information, photos, locations and habits to powerful companies who own the major communications websites and apps... how are we contributing for their power and wealth? If they offer us free services, how do they make money? There it was: our personal data is a product that can be sold and used. How are our relationships? How do we talk? What do we value? This information is sold to mass producing information companies, and transformed in what is called Big Data, which becomes a product that any company can buy to know their consumers. So, the group learned a new challenge that we have as a society: are we for sale? How do we take a different path?



September - III Women's Circle



In our III Women's Circle, also a warm sunny day with a back yard meeting, the theme was "Google, where are my socks?". Before Google, what tools did we use to search for information? The group remembered encyclopedias, radio, dictionaries, yellow pages, magazines, asking older people... But, now, we simply ask Google anything. Do we live in a Google-dominated society? How does this affects us? How can we decentralize Google's domain over information power? How can we create a variety of references in our society?

And so Tania, our tutor, taught us an entire lesson on alternative websites for most things we turn to Google to find: research, file sharing, web browsers, free alternative videos, free alternative music, translator, maps, studies, forums and tutorials on fixing things, task organizers... and a whole new world opened up to all of us. It was quite a discovery for each one, as well as finding out that most of these websites are funded by people and initiatives who also want other references for our society, and aim for a non-domination of global information by any company.



On this meeting, we created maps of our neighborhood using all kinds of graphic resources. The results are creative and beautiful. The group discussed on the importance of mapping places, geographically and emotionally.

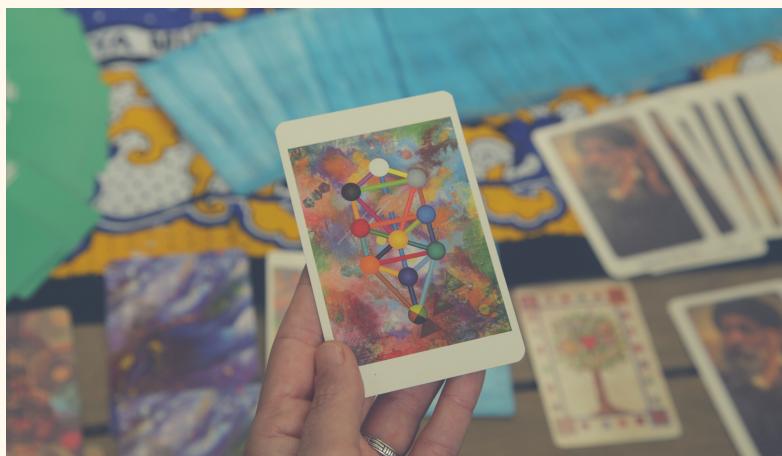
It led to the reflection on how we have the power to create our own information and references, with our own language and aesthetics.

October - IV Women's Circle

In October, we had our fourth women's circle, and its theme invited all of us to look at a more subjective side of things: we discussed symbology and artcraft. Our meeting was named: "Digital Artisan". We began by trying to define what symbology is and what it means to humanity. How symbols have always surrounded us, and how they can provoke us in many different ways. How powerful can symbols be? The works of Campbell and Jung were brought to the discussion.



To deepen the debate, the women who came to our circle were asked to bring their tarots and oracles. Among several different oracles, we raised questions on how powerful this group can be, and saw our project illustrated in all kinds of symbols, colors, representations.



But... why were we doing symbology and oracles activities in a meeting for a community network? Well, together, we have a task of creating the project's website, create an online representation of our neighbourhood, its highlights, and our remarkable people who live here. How can we represent all this universe graphically? How can we make this a creative, symbolic process?



Our tutor, Tania, added: making something handcrafted is making something with our bodies and souls. It cannot be copied, automatized, or have a protocol. It is unique. Just as it is our task to create our website, our map, our online representation of our place and all the affection it keeps. This task is an artcraft in itself, a symbology exercise, an abstraction of our reality created by this collective, in this project, to empower the community through the technological language.

October - IV Women's Circle

Tânia told us all about websites and different artistic digital initiatives that are happening everywhere. For instance, the hand-held scanner, which gives people the possibility to scan anything anywhere. She also showed us Led-light clothes, and many more technological and manual artcrafts that people are doing! She also told us about the Extreme Biopolitical Bistro, where the anarchist-technological world enters the food world. They have the Food-Tarot, or make personalized data analysis to create menus..



During our meeting, we reflected on how much of what we used to do ourselves is being given away for machines and apps to do. From simple math, to our sense of ethics, to the way we relate to one another... so much that we now do on our phones and computers used to be things we did by hand, and were handcrafts.



So, how can we maintain a relationship with the technological world, and therefore, the technological side of ourselves, also keeping our artcrafty selves, and handmaid world? Moreover: how do we maintain our manual, alchemical and symbolic capacities while living in this virtual world we are in? How can we experience data using, information technology, social networks, systems and devices, without ever losing who we are as arcrafters, creative, empathic, critical humans?



November - V Women's Circle

Our V Women's Circle, in November, was a very special meeting. We had guests from different countries, entered deeper subjects and unreaveled technological objects.



The theme of our Circle was Body and Technology, and we had a Eutony practice with Paula Baptista. Laying down, standing up, stretching. Paula navigated with us through imaginary colours around every piece of the body. If we look closely, what can we find in the details? The deeper we can see things, the more sensitivity and autonomy we have in our actions.



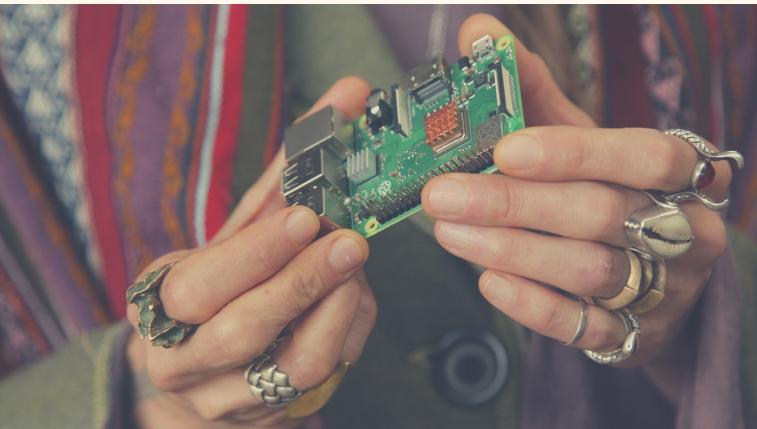
Our foreigner guests were women that had come for the Coolab Camp, an event that gathers people who work with Community Networks all over Latin America. The Portal sem Porteiras Association is part of Coolab, and we were responsible for organizing the event. As our V Women's Circle happened in the same week, the women from Coolab Camp were with us, and added so much to our circle!



Once we were all in sync with our bodies and minds, our debate went to deeper and more sensitive issues from our feminine and feminist perspectives: there is a tabu in our society around women's relationships with their bodies. Women are afraid of looking at their own nudity, of touching their own bodies. There isn't yet a culture of female body autonomy. Cutting our own hairs, making our own shampoos, or giving ourselves pleasure... And, finally, of being able to build and fix our own machines!



November - V Women's Circle



As we discussed the matter, we realized we are afraid of opening, discovering, messing with machines and daily objects. We are afraid of breaking them. When talking about the possibility of fixing our showers and computers, we understood that we would like to have such knowledge, but that was never a possibility of learning.

Why are women a minority in the technological universe? Engineers, IT, programmers, hackers... those are extremely masculine universes. Somehow, we were disconnected from the machines – and from ourselves.

The building, the fixing, the opening of objects, structures and systems, in our culture, belong to the masculine universe. So, how can we break this pattern? Learning and entering this universe for ourselves! Learning from other women, searching for people who know, can teach and do understand gender issues related to this theme. It is us for ourselves!



Tânia, our tutor, presented us an idea: the whole circle gathered around the computer – “let’s open it!”. None of us had ever opened a computer, and just a couple had opened any machine before. It was fascinating. We learned where each part was, what it was for, how it works.



Getting to know something in a deeper and more detailed level leads to autonomy. That applies to our bodies, souls, ourselves... as well as technology and the internet! Knowledge is the first step towards active autonomy!

December - VI Women's Circle



We began our meeting talking about collective protection. About our wish to take care of the people, the families and the groups from this neighborhood, about the union and energy that protect this place. We followed on to what would be one of the most beautiful activities we took as a group in the Women's Circles.

Divided into groups, we shared forms of personal protection. Each one of us shared experiences we have been through, how we safeguard ourselves, safety mechanisms.

With the beginning of December, our last Womens' Circle was upon us. Our VI Circle was very special, for several reasons. The fact that we are already a group with our own dynamics and consistency to build a project like Nodes that Bond, is very powerful and important to us all.

Our theme was also very special: security and protection – in both the real and the virtual worlds. A very delicate and strong theme, since every woman on the planet has something to say about it.



Throughout the conversation, each sentence that was beautiful and representative would be written in a piece of paper, out of its initial context. So, we started collecting beautiful and strong words. These sentences would become a song. When we put them together, we saw matches of things that were said in completely different contexts and started creating verses. The music came in and brought a sense into the entire activity: in a circle, making sounds and rhythms, we started putting music into our verses. Organically, our women's circle composed a beautiful and powerful song.



December - VI Women's Circle

The Circle followed the debate on security and protection. What do we consider valuable? Our project coordinators, Marcela Guerra and Luisa Bagope, had asked us to bring our digital treasures. Those would be the files, music, books, films, pictures... our digital assets that we collect over time. Some of our most valuable memories are up "in the cloud"...

But, in our Circles, we learned how uncertain the virtual world can really be. Unknown corners, robots, invasions from viruses, devices that simply stop working... how can we protect our digital treasures?

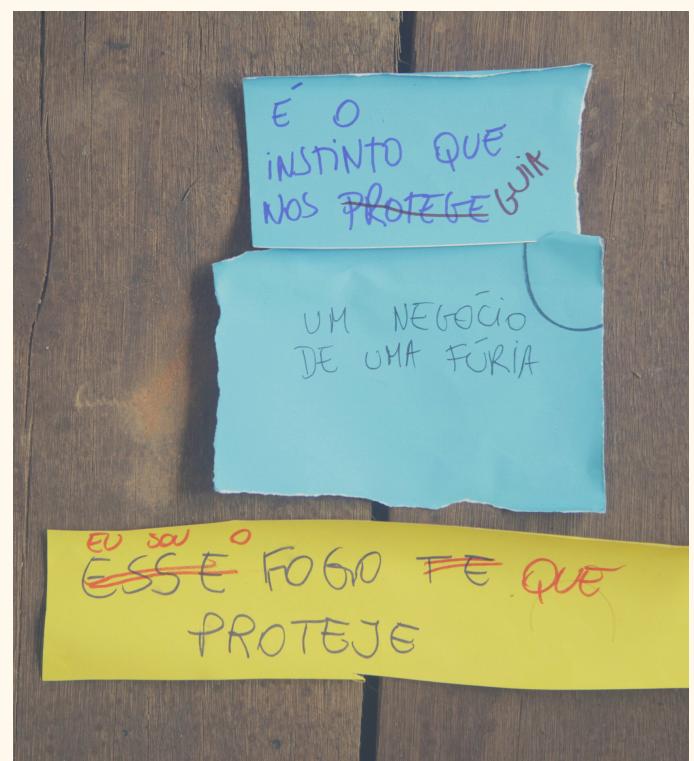


Marcela and Luisa then let us know why they had asked us to bring our digital treasures. In the Portal sem Porteiras Intranet, we can build our own neighborhood's cloud! We can have documents, films, books, music, photographs that are collective. Making our own Netflix, radio, playlists, online library... Our Community Network has so many possibilities, and it is ours! It is empowering to close the Nodes that Bond cycle having learned the true value and the building of a Community Network.



Tânia, our tutor, started bringing out the questions: how do we organize our files? How do we take care of important pictures we trade on WhatsApp? How to protect secret pictures and files? How to separate the temporary files from the important ones? And, moreover, how to store our most important files?

In earlier days, we would have our photos on photo albums, on shelves; our videos would be on videotapes; our most important writing, on notebooks and letters. Now, we need to have virtual shelves, which should be kept clean, safe, with backups!



The research & content creation team

Our Research and content creation team includes local women who are anthropologists, artists, active community members. These researchers did field work, going to community women and interviewing them. Those are women who were born here, or who have been here for some time, as well as community key women. Our team interviewed them to get to know their stories, so that through those we could design our community's online map.

Our aim was to have this map on the Portal sem Porteira's intranet. This way, when someone comes to visit our community, they can enter our website to get to know the Bairro dos Souzas neighborhood through the people from here.



The team would gather every two weeks for a meeting. As the weeks followed, each researcher would arrive with different news: interviews that had gone great, women who had given up being interviewed, pictures and videos they had made for the project, funny and interesting stories...

At some point, the team started to design the neighborhood map from the stories they already had. Each researcher designed how they imagined the webpage of their interviewees. This was firstly made by hand, so the imagination of the design could flow freely.

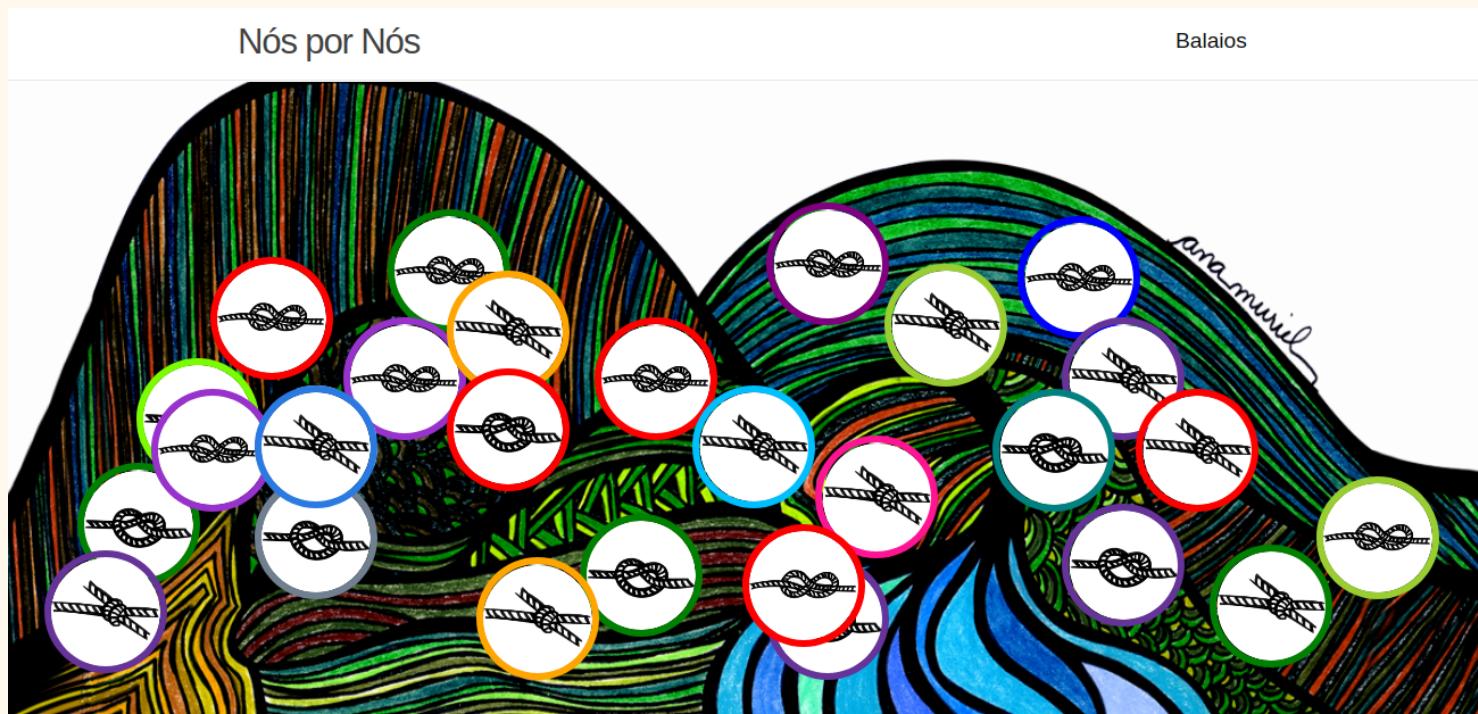


The women's map

Tânia, who is not only our tutor, but also the project's web developer for our neighborhood map, got the ideas our content team created, and turned them into the map of the Women in the neighborhood.

Each researcher interviewed, photographed and filmed selected women from the neighborhood, and our web designer transformed the ideas, materials, symbols and meanings into our online feminist map, which can only be accessed from our community network, Portal sem Porteiras.

In the map, each node represents a different woman, and when you click on a node, you open a page with the woman's interviews, their stories, pictures, symbols. The pages for each woman tell quite a few stories, and the whole team was very happy with the result!



Benedita

Ouça a entrevista com Benedita

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The women's map

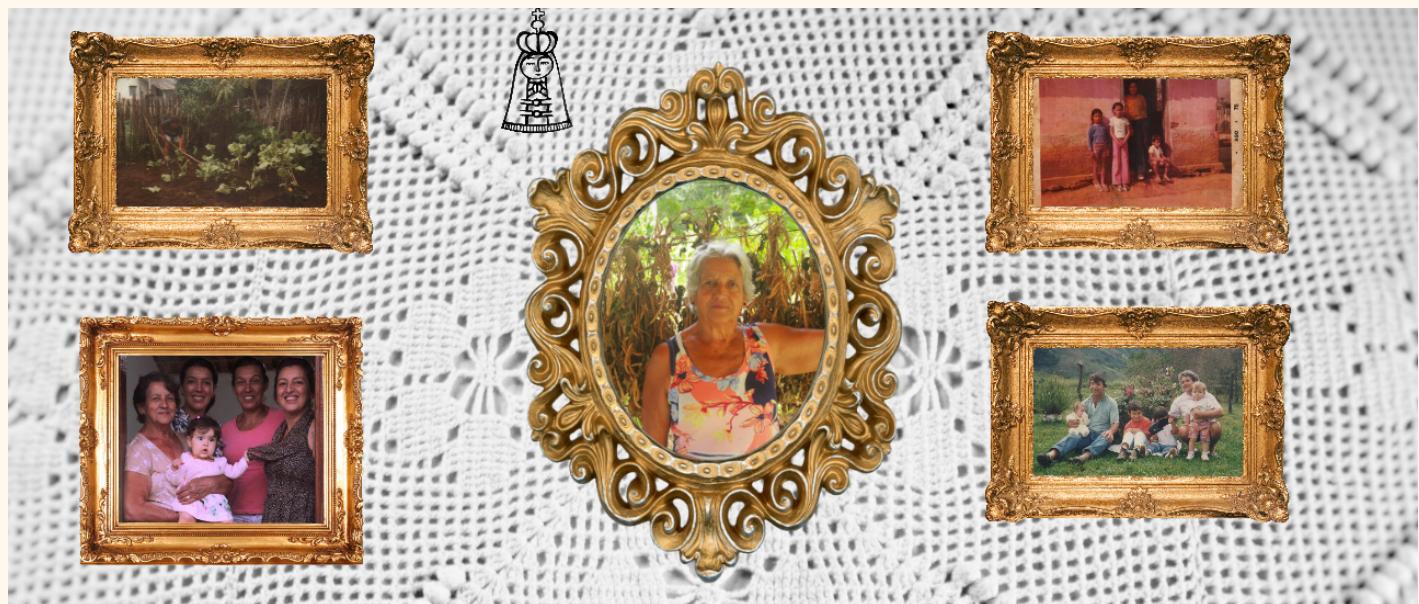


Mara

Ouça a entrevista com Mara



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Ana do Bar

Ouça a entrevista



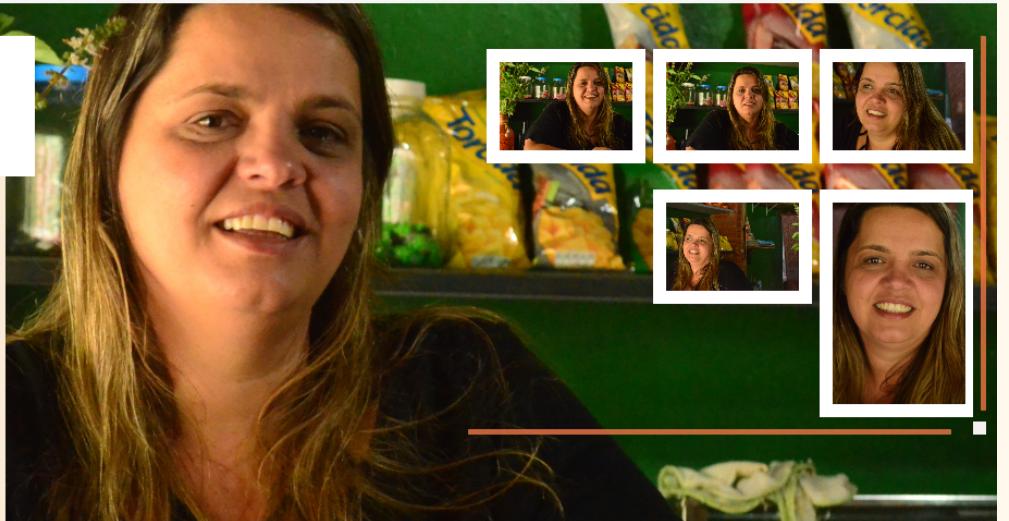
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a Ana. Ana do Bar. Bar da Ana.

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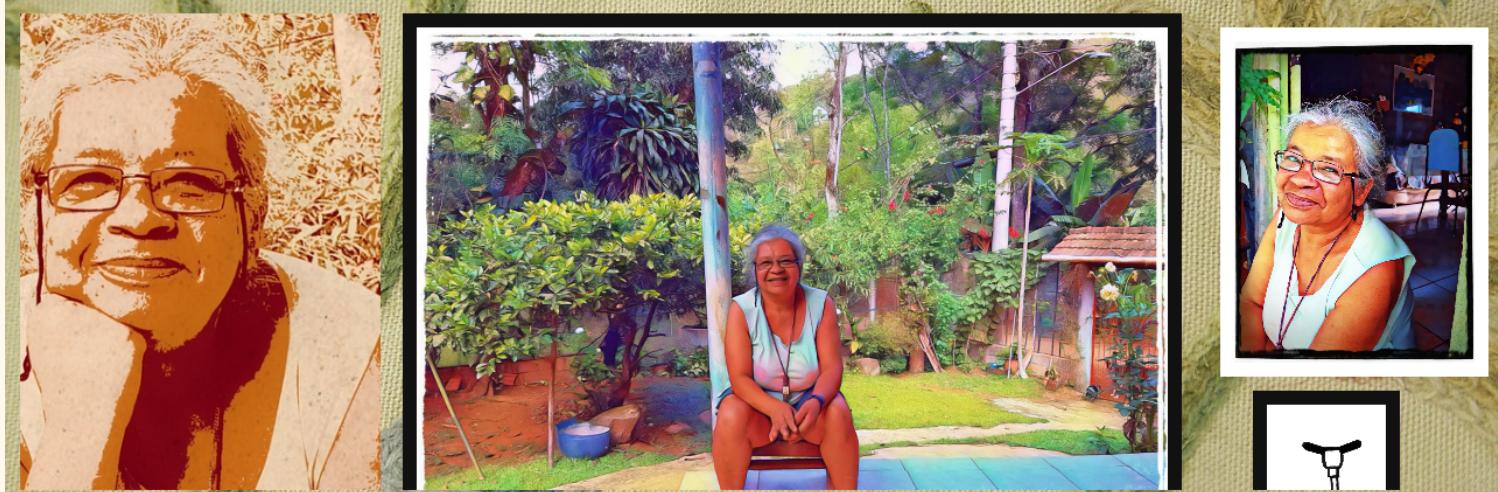
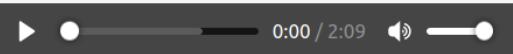


The women's map



Maria José

Quando era meia noite- Cantadeiras do Souza



Juliane

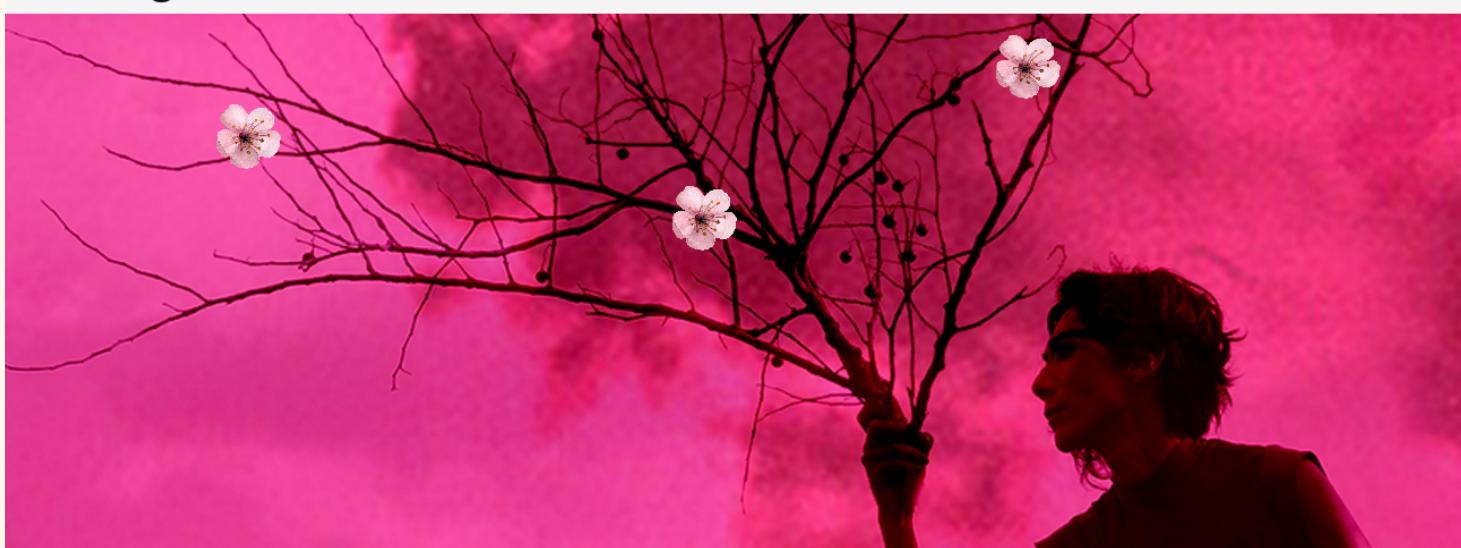
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Lígia Kamada

Entre

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The Portal sem Porteiras Nodes that Bond Celebration

On December 15th, we had a community Portal sem Porteiras celebration on our main square. There was lunch served for all, musicians were hired to play traditional songs from the region, and a computer with a large screen was opened in the square so people could sit there and see the women's map and our website.

Some of the interviewed women were able to come to the celebration, and were truly happy to be a part of the neighborhood's map, and see themselves portrayed with beautiful symbols and artcrafted webpages.

It was a beautiful celebration, the square was filled with community people and the Community Network subject was the main part of the event!



The Portal sem Porteiras Nodes that Bond Celebration

