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MANDUME¹: Rap's visuality as resistance against epistemic violence

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Abstract

This paper discusses the chorus from the music video Mandume (2016), guided by the notions of metapicture, image-text and the performative effects of the acts of seeing, associating the contributions of Visual Studies to television stylistic analysis. By approaching rap's audiovisual production, this work intends to centralize historically silenced voices and perspectives, highlighting the relations between the visual experience's formal and cultural elements. The excerpt analyzed comprises the choruses, in their recurrences, and their visual narratives, inquiring what this popular culture expression reveals about racial relations in our society.

Keywords

Rap; Racial relations; Racism; Visual culture; Epistemicide.

Introduction

This paper discusses the music video *Mandume* (2016), performed by the rappers Emicida, Drik Barbosa, Amiri, Rico Dalasam, Muzzike and Raphão Alafin, and directed by Gabi Jacob. The title is a reference to the King Mandume ya Ndemufayo, leader against the Portuguese and German evangelizing missions and colonial invasions in the region later named as Angola, evoking the cultural memory from their African roots in order to uphold, among Black people, a heroic vision of power and resistance regarding their own ancestry and culture. The music video does not directly address Mandume's story, but rather its symbolic value, appropriating its erasure from traditional historiography to discuss the contemporary violence against Black people – highlighting what is left from Mandume in us and what must remain from Mandume's history in our own.

The music video *Mandume* was produced as a fashion film for the Yasuke collection, by the designer label Lab Fantasma, a collective of urban art admirers and hip hop fans who, in addition to the fashion label, also produce CDs, music videos and music events¹. The collection's name is a reference to Yasuke, an African warrior forcibly taken by the Jesuits to Japan in the 16th century, later becoming the first foreign samurai and achieving legendary status due to his skill, strength and invincibility². The collection was presented in São Paulo Fashion Week's 2016 edition, combining African and Oriental references in the fashion pieces' composition.

In an interview for *Le Monde Diplomatique Brazil*³, Emicida explains that Lab Fantasma gives preference to Black people throughout the entire production chain, "from the seamstress in Vila Brasilândia to the model on the catwalk", moving the whole structure and putting "Black people alive in Brazil's newspapers covers", in opposition to the usual representation of Black people as confined to violence and poverty. Thus, afro-entrepreneurship emerges as a way to disrupt whiteness' economic domination, making work relations more inclusive and fair, as well as a means to create other narratives, other ways of occupying visibility spaces.

The following sections present Visual Studies' contributions to address visibility, the notion of metapicture, the interactions between image and text, and the performative effects of the acts of seeing. Then, the analysis questions the visual materiality over what it reveals about race relations in our society, using television stylistic analysis.

Visibility, image-text interactions, and metaimages

In William J. T. Mitchell's perspective (2017), the experiences of looking are cultural processes socially constructed through the interaction between the sense of vision and Art History, technology, communication media and the social practices of seeing and showing; of positioning oneself as spectator and constructing forms of showing seeing. In this sense, the author proposes a dialectical concept for "visual culture": instead of thinking about the social construction of a visual field, he encourages the investigation of the visual construction of a social field.

While emphasizing such visual dimension, Mitchell (2005) points out that all media are mixed media, composed by its sensorial, perceptive and discursive-semiotic inseparable elements. That does not indicate that the media are indistinguishable: according to the author, it is precisely in the different mixtures between sensory perceptions that lies the medium's specificity. For Mitchell, this approach allows to better analyse the technicities, practices, and functions in visual construction, as well as the

¹ Retrieved from www.labfantasma.com/noiz

² Retrieved from bit.ly/2QoL4hm

³ Retrieved from bit.ly/2KwwjUc.

production and consumption conditions that constitute the medium – not limited to a single sense, but tackling the materiality as a hybrid combination, the way it is presented to the spectator. The author argues that visibility should include its inseparability from textual, verbal, and sound aspects, approaching it as a combination of image-text, observing the ways in which they interact, combine and intertwine. Mitchell points out that the sensorial portion of vision becomes even more complex when we consider an emotional dimension, regarding the affections and intersubjective encounters intrinsic to the visual field that permeate the acts of looking, seeing and showing.

Taking visual practices as social acts instituted through culture, José Luis Brea (2005) proposes a deconstruction of the social and cognitive connection that constitutes them. The author argues that there are no purely visual objects, phenomena or media, but instead complex acts of seeing that are crossed by sensorial and symbolic-discursive imbrications. In his perspective, such *acts of seeing* result from crystallizing the interrelations between textual, mental, imaginary, sensorial, mnemonic, media, technical, bureaucratic and institutional operators; merged with the conflicting social relations of representation, which Brea specifies as issues of race, gender, class, cultural difference, beliefs and affinities, among others.

Thus, Brea (2005) defines the acts of seeing as hybrid cultural constructions, instituted through social practices, in dialogue with relations of power, domination, privilege and subordination. The importance of the acts of seeing lies in their ability to produce realities and promote subjectivation and socialization effects, which Brea describes as a performative force – one that takes place in the interaction between the subjects and visibility in a culturally structured manner, through identification and differentiation processes regarding dominant, minority and counter-hegemonic imaginaries in circulation in society. The author highlights the relevance of critically interrogating how such performative effects can promote political impact in their production of sociability and subjectivation forms.

The encounter with visibility is addressed by Brea (2005) as an encounter with the *other*, in which the subject constitutes his/herself in relation to this other, who also looks back. This encounter, permeated and complexified by identification and differentiation dynamics, establishes identities and politics of positionality regarding visibility, its values and significations. The author thus highlights the intersubjective nature of images, socially inscribing the presence of this other and structuring the socialized, collective dimension of the identity processes performed in the acts of seeing. Brea identifies the existence of scopic epistemes in which such acts are inscribed, a set of knowledge that culturally regulates the regimes of visibility and the subjects' actions concerning them. According to the author, such actions take place in a social dimension of interaction with otherness, in which they can either reiterate or redefine, subvert, and disrupt the existing codes.

For Brea (2005), therefore, visual experience is constructed in the interaction between the observer and the visual materiality, permeated by cultural determinations, preconceptions, and memories. In dialogue with Lacan's theoretical contributions, Brea argues that there is something between the subject who looks and the one who is looked and looks back: some sort of screen, a repertoire of culturally produced imagery and imaginaries through which the subjects constitute themselves and others, differentiating themselves in terms of structural identity categories, either reinforcing or contesting dominant representations. The ways in which this screen permeates the subjectivation and socialization processes, therefore, establish the need to historicize the visual experience in consonance with the determinations of social life.

Based on the notion that language says something about itself, Mitchell (2009) creates the idea of *metapicture*: self-referential pictures, with the ability to show something about themselves or about other images, forms of image production, ways of seeing and showing – composing a second order discourse that reveals something about images, their production processes and visual representation practices. Mitchell argues that metapictures show themselves to make themselves known, staging the self-knowledge of

images and engendering the self-knowledge of the observer, who completes the picture⁴ in his/her encounter with it.

In the author's perspective, by opening up possibilities of different readings, the metapictures' multi-stability arouses the emergence of the observer's identity, in dialogue with cultural stereotypes, ideologies, and imaginaries in circulation in society. This way, by asking "what am I" and "how do I look", the picture demands that the observers ask themselves the same questions. The dialogue between the spectator and the metapicture does not take place in an abstract terrain disconnected from history, but inscribed in speeches, disciplines, and specific knowledge regimes (Mitchell, 2009). Thus, the visual experience is permeated by the cultural, epistemological, and subjective apparatuses that constitute the subject's socio-historical insertion.

In this line of reasoning, Mitchell (2009) differentiates three categories of the metapicture's self-referentiality in visual representation: the picture which represents itself in a referential circle; the generally self-referential picture which represents a class of images, in other words, a picture about pictures; and a contextual or discursive self-reference, in which its reflexivity involves considerations about the nature of visual representation. The author highlights, however, that the self-referentiality is not an exclusively formal feature of specific pictures, but instead a functional, pragmatic element of use and context – so that any picture used to reflect on the nature of images can be considered a metapicture.

For Mitchell (2009), the metapictures' main function is to explain something about images, to stage their self-knowledge, which, in turn, leads to self-knowledge of the observer. The author considers this ability to destabilize identity as a phenomenological matter, which takes place in the interaction between the spectators and the visual materiality due to its multistability effects, in other words, its ability to contain different forms of being seen; conflicting and even paradoxical ways of being perceived. Therefore, the metapictures use their self-knowledge to trigger the observer's self-knowledge, interrogating the identity of such position.

More than merely the encounter between the eyes and images, Mitchell (2009) emphasizes that the questions surrounding the effects and identities involve the metapictures' position in the cultural dimension, its place in relation to the disciplines, discourses, and institutions. According to the author, the metapictures can occupy many different spaces, from popular culture manifestations to the literate knowledge of science, philosophy, and art history; from marginal and secondary positions to central and canonical ones. Mitchell's metapicture, therefore, "is the place where pictures reveal and 'know' themselves, where they reflect on the intersections of visibility, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorizing on their own nature and history" (2009, p. 77); not merely illustrating theories, but *picturing* theory.

Analytical propositions for televisualities

Although music videos' consumption have migrated from TV music channels to online platforms, Thiago Soares (2007, 2013) argues that this format has maintained its main cultural and musical characteristics linked to its origin as a television genre. The author underlines that music videos' plastic and mediatic dimensions are circumscribed to the universe of television, following television logics and modes of meaning production in close dialogue with the music genre – operating relations of recognition, consumption, and identification in a hybrid manner, conforming to this double disposition.

⁴ Mitchell differentiates the terms "picture" and "image": the first refers to the domain of material images, graphic and optical, which are embodied through a material support "that can be hang on the wall, printed on a page or destroyed"; while the latter concerns immaterial images, mental and verbal, such as phantasies, dreams, memories, and visualizations of similes and metaphors. On the author's conception, pictures and images intersect on the domain of perceptual images, located at the border between material and mental realities (Melo Rocha & Portugal, 2009, p. 5-7).

For Jeder Janotti Júnior and Thiago Soares (2008), studies on music videos must consider both the visual and musical dimensions, due to being originated precisely from this encounter. The authors propose to tackle music videos as an extension of the song, which arranges meanings, references and institutes visual principles which are specific to each music genre. In their perspective, hip hop music videos are usually set in the cultural universe of urban outskirts, streets, walls, and asphalt, operating elements such as diverse graffiti practices. Thus, their visuality references other aspects that permeate that particular musical cultural grammar, conveying what Janotti Júnior and Soares (2008) describe as the forms, styles, and traits of the practices of production, circulation, recognition, and consumption of each music genre. In this sense, Soares (2013) proposes to approach music videos in *relational* terms between image and sound, seeking to apprehend their in-between places.

Grounded on Visual Studies, Simone Rocha (2016, 2017) proposes an analytic frame anchored on the non-disjunction between the formal and cultural dimensions of television products, operating the meaning construction in the encounter between the spectators and the materiality as interactions permeated by culture. This perspective centers the cultural specificity of visuality, contextualizing vision, the ways of seeing and showing seeing as culturally structured social practices. The author combines the notion of visuality to television style formal analysis, as proposed by Jeremy Butler (2010), showing the complexity of television products and its contextual interweaving.

On Butler's perspective (2010), "style" refers to the modes in which the formal aspects of the arrangement of image and sound are operated in order to fulfil certain functions, systematizing how stylistic codes – both technical and social – act in the construction of cultural signification. According to the author, these patterns concern stylistic conventions that constitute socially shared grammars, operating the production and consumption practices of television products. In this context, Butler proposes a reverse engineering, deconstructing television production and observing how such techniques are used.

Butler (2010) adapts David Bordwell's contributions for film studies to the specificities of television style, systematizing four dimensions of analysis: descriptive, analytic (or interpretative), evaluative (or aesthetic), and historical. The description of framing, camera movements, editing, and other aspects of the audiovisual composition is the first step pointed by the author, operating the technical dimensions together with the social codes and cultural values. Butler underlines that the stylistic description usually ends up leading to the interpretation, initiating and grounding the next phase, the analytical one.

The analytical dimension, according to Butler (2010), involves the purpose of the stylistic elements and the accomplishment of functions in the audiovisual text. Based on Bordwell's definition of the four functions of style in cinema – denote, express, symbolize, and decorate – Butler adds other four, specific to television: persuade, hail or interpellate, differentiate, and signify liveness. The evaluative step presents itself as a challenge, since the author argues that television studies have not systematized norms beyond elitist aesthetic hierarchization. The historical dimension consists on taking a step back in time to reveal a wider context on television style, showing how the economic, technological, industrial, and aesthetic-semiotic aspects interfere in its patterns.

The analytical proposition formulated by Rocha (2016, 2017) establishes that the ways of seeing and showing seeing instituted in visual experience can reveal political, historical, and cultural determinations. For the author, televisual analysis allows the emergence of something beyond its limits, in circulation on power relations, regimes of socialization, and conflicting cultural imaginaries. Therefore, it is observed how the material features of the arrangement of image and sound can fulfil specific functions on the devices alongside with the immaterial and cultural conditions that permeate visual practices.

Combining television stylistic analysis to Visual Studies, Rocha (2017) proposes to approach the relations between image and text as an opening in representation, a breach through which emerges the history that sews the image-text composite. The author points out that television stylistic analysis (Butler, 2010) is compatible with the image-text composite (Mitchell, 2005), considering that both go from the

formal description to the functional analysis of the arrangement of image and sound, which demands answers that are not universal, but historically, socially, and culturally contextualized. In Rocha's perspective (2017), the focus on the functional analytical dimension allows to address the relation between image and text as a *locus* of conflict, in order to catch a glimpse of the political, institutional, and social disputes intertwined to representation.

Mandume

This section discusses the music video *Mandume* (2016), performed by the rappers Emicida, Drik Barbosa, Amiri, Rico Dalasam, Muzzike, and Raphão Alaafin, and directed by Gabi Jacob. While handling a extensive volume of television material, Rocha (2016) proposes to delimit shorter units in order to focus the analytical exercise. For the author, the researcher can select a group of specific narrative events that compose a plot or sub-plot, which can be on the same scene, or sequence, or combining sequences that took place on separate moments. For this paper, I chose the choruses of the music video *Mandume*, aiming to observe what the orality and visuality of these excerpts can reveal about race relations in Brazilian cultural context. The discussion focus on the descriptive and analytical steps, considering the difficulties faced by television studies in systematizing criteria for the evaluative analysis, as pointed out by Butler (2010), and the limited space that restrains the observation of previous products for the historical analysis. On the relation between image and text, this paper focuses on the visuality aspects and the lyrics' semantic dimension.

Here follows the translation for the chorus' lyrics:

They want someone

Who came from where we came from

To be more humble, keep our heads down

Never fight back, pretend we forgot the whole thing

*I want them to go **** themselves!*⁵

The chorus is performed in pairs, making three pairs in total. After the visual opening that goes along with the song's introduction, the first chorus' scene begins in fade-in, showing two women facing away from the camera, with an exposed brick wall covered in graffiti on the background (frame 1). One of the women has long braided hair, while the other wears her coily, voluminous hair in a Black power style. Both wear outfits from the designer label Lab Fantasma, with the word "Ubuntu"⁶ printed on one of the shirts, and they slowly turn around to cast their looks to the camera (frame 2).

⁵ This is a free translation from the original lyrics in Portuguese: "Eles querem que alguém/Que vem de onde nós vem/Seja mais humilde, baixe a cabeça/Nunca revide, finja que esqueceu a coisa toda/Eu quero é que eles se ----!". Retrieved from bit.ly/2DZORf1.

⁶ The term "ubuntu", from the Zulu Southern African language, means humanity towards others, or the idea that "one person is a person through other people". It refers to the basis of African philosophical tradition grounded on the notion of humanity as an ethical principle of respect to the community, to the collectivity of other human beings. In this perspective, a person is aware that he/she is also affected when his/her peers are oppressed. Retrieved from bit.ly/2GeJV7W.

Frames 1 and 2 - Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

The next scene shows seven men and women in front of an exposed brick wall, with natural coily hair, in Black power style and dreadlocks or caps, while one of the women proudly lifts her hair in order to increase its volume, and another holds a baby (frame 3). The previous composition, which showed the women from their backs slowly turning to look back at the camera, now gives way to a frontal angle. Besides two shirts with the “ubuntu” inscription, one of the men wears a shirt with the phrase “hip hop rules!”⁷. The sequence moves on to close-ups of two of the men (frame 4) in a low angle; and then returns to frame the seven people, who keep casting their looks to the camera with intensified facial expressions and their arms crossed. During the line “I want them to go **** themselves!”, one of them puts his middle fingers up while facing the camera (frames 5 and 6).

Frames 3 and 4 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

Frames 5 and 6 – Mandume



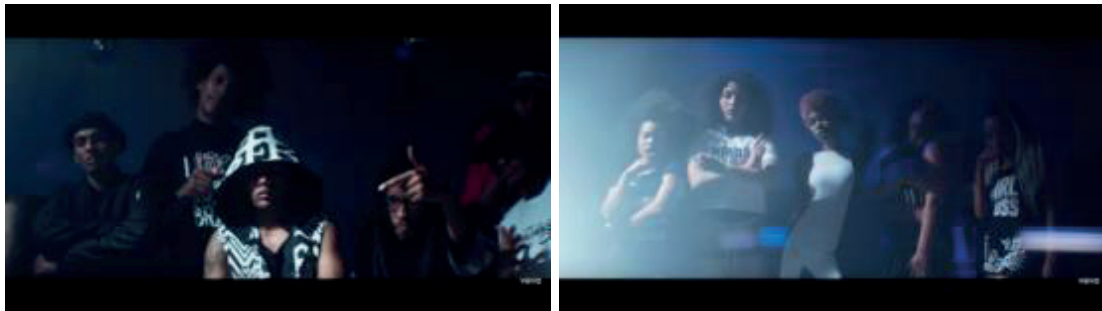
Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

When the chorus repeat, the scenario changes to a nightclub with a blue-ish light at the background, alternating between a shot framing a group of women and another showing a group of men. As the camera angle zooms out to fit more people on the screen, the scene reaffirms elements from Black

⁷ This is a free translation from the original “o hip hop é foda!”.

culture aesthetics: natural curly and coily hair, in Black power style and dreadlocks; and besides “ubuntu”, their shirts have inscriptions such as “#muse”, “hood” and “I love da hood”⁸. The scene also reiterates the stares directed to the camera, with their arms already crossed or being crossed (frames 7 and 8). The next scenes alternate a shot of two women dressed in red in front of a hedge, looking at one another sternly, and a couple wearing Lab Fantasma shirts in the same model, but different colors. The couple is framed in a low angle, with tree branches stretching in the background behind them. In all these shots, the camera maintains the frontal angle, privileging the subjects’ faces, postures, and staring eyes.

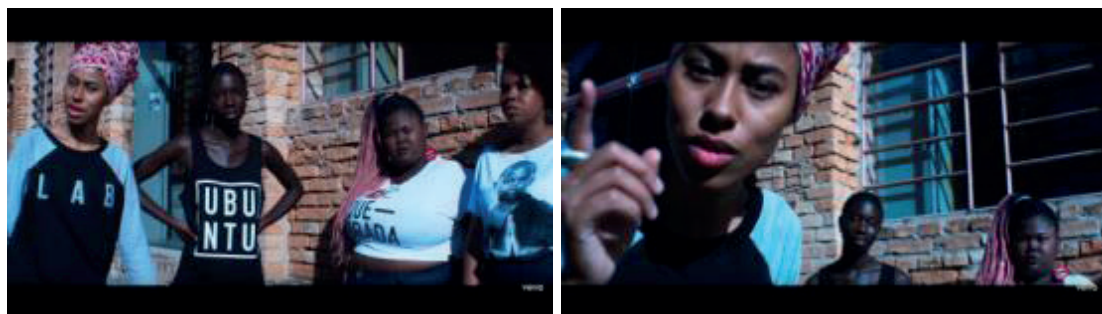
Frames 7 and 8 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

The sequence moves on to a frontal angle shot of four Black women, standing in front of an exposed brick wall, with different skin tones and hair styles: one wears a red and white turban and a shirt with the inscription “LAB”; the next one has short coily hair and wears an “ubuntu” shirt; another has pink box braids and wears an “I love da hood” shirt; the last one has curly voluminous hair and her shirt has a print of a Black boy dressed and sitting like a monk (frame 9). Other elements suggesting the diversity between them are the different positions, poses, and angles they take on the screen, while their looks and facial expressions bring them together under the notion of a shared struggle – which, due to the song lyrics alongside with their racial identity, we know to be racist oppression. This chorus ends with the woman in a turban approaching the camera making a negative hand gesture (frame 10) while the others firmly gaze at the camera from behind her, then this setting starts alternating with the rapper that performs the first solo.

Frames 9 and 10 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

After the solos performed by Drik Barbosa, Amiri, and Rico Dalasam, the second chorus begins with a shirtless man’s chest, zooming out to frame his serious face. Then the scene focuses on a man who firmly stares at the camera, positioned slightly ahead of a woman with short coily hair who also stares and looks back at the camera (frame 11); the sequence moves on to another man with a similar expression,

⁸ This is a free translation from the original “#musa”, “quebrada” and “I love quebrada”.

slightly ahead of a woman with dreadlocks (frame 12). The next frame shows the four of them sitting on a stairwell, its sides covered in graffiti and writing, with trees on the background, being the two women positioned at the center and apparently one step above the men (frame 13).

Frames 11 and 12 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

Frame 13 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

The men seem to guard and protect the women from something or someone either just out of frame or standing at the position of the camera and the observer – someone not shown, left for the representations that compose the spectators’ repertoire and imaginaries to inform who is out there that causes such defensive positions. Then the scene shows a woman with short coily hair and a man wearing a Lab Fantasma cap, standing in front of a metal gate, looking firmly at the camera. It is followed by a close-up shot, in which they intensify their facial expressions, building up to hand gestures with their middle fingers up, together with the chorus’ last line: “I want them to go **** themselves!”.

When the chorus repeat, a woman with braided hair kisses a man with coily hair in a green-grassed scenery with trees at the background (frame 14). The two women who opened up the first chorus’ scenes come back to the narrative now completely facing the camera, with intensified looks and body gestures, one of them placing her hand on her waist (frame 15). The women in red in front of the hedge also return, now directing their serious looks towards the camera, one of them with her arms crossed at first (frame 16), but then, they look at each other warmly laughing (frame 17): by uniting against the common enemy,

an affectionate and friendly relationship is built between them. The group of seven people also returns to the scene with their arms crossed and intensified looks, followed by a shot focusing on four of them in a slightly low angle, showing negative gestures and facial expressions even more emphatic.

Frames 14 and 15 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

Frames 16 and 17 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

On the next scene, the couple wearing the same-model outfits affectionately intertwine their fingers (frame 18), on a frontal low angle shot, with their heads tilted toward each other (frame 19), so that their necks' angles and the black tone of their skins seem to merge with the tree branches on the background, shown by the camera moving upward (frame 20). Although the scene does not show the tree's roots, they make themselves present metaphorically, constructing a poetics of homage to their own roots through afrocentric affective relations, leading up to living ramifications, which extend upward beyond the frame. This shot is alternated with and followed by a shot of a Black shirtless man, also on a frontal angle, putting on a cap with the inscription "LAB" and crossing his arms, staring fixedly at the camera (frame 21).

Frames 18 and 19 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

Frames 20 and 21 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

This scene is followed by the solos performed by Muzzike, Raphão Alaafin, and Emicida, who calls up the last chorus and steps away from the microphone. The sequence alternates shots of the rappers in a dark scenario under a red light, dancing and singing with firm looks, expressions, and gestures toward the camera; which point, provoke, call upon, and question the observer; so that their performance demands attention and urges the spectators to move and position themselves as well. When the chorus repeat, the scene shows a white character, dressed and geared as a riot police officer, with a helmet on and holding a truncheon, on a low angle shot, suggesting authority and power (frame 22). Positioned in profile, he does not face the camera/the spectator, but looks fixedly at something beyond the frame, further away to the left, from which two women appear; a white woman with short, pink hair and a Black woman with curly hair (frame 23).

Frames 22 and 23 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

At first, only the women's foreheads are visible on frame, showing their small stature compared to the police officer. As they approach him, however, they occupy more and more space on screen, staring fixedly at him with defiant looks. Verbally the chorus operates the subjects' positionality through an explicit delimitation between "they", "we", "I", and "them", emphasizing these distinct social places, differentiated in terms of their racial identity. Visually, the Black woman walks forward and stops in front of the cop, in a direct confrontation, while the white woman positions herself between them, where she seems ready to protect the other one (frame 24). The characters' positioning seems to surround the observer, who finds him/herself in the middle of the confrontation placed between the Black woman and the police officer and, therefore, pressured to position him/herself. The clue to the appropriate position is right in front of the spectator, on the posture of the white woman who enters the conflict and approaches the police officer with a firm look (frame 25). The scenes' final shots show the rappers and the characters, once again privileging frontal angles, reaffirming the pattern of looks, facial expressions, and body postures, ending up with a Black woman in a white turban, *Candomblé* ceremonial clothing and beaded necklaces, looking fixedly at a bonfire, which disappears fading out.

Frames 24 and 25 – Mandume



Retrieved from youtu.be/mC_vrzqYfQc

Based on the metapictures' multistability, I propose a shift from my position as spectator to explore other ways of interpreting this audiovisual materiality. This exercise is grounded on race relations studies (Furtado, 2019) and other forms of knowledge developed in Black social movements, as well as my own experience as a Black academic researcher. In this sense, it is worth reflecting on how the Black social movements' claims and discourses are viewed by our hegemonic white society, instituting restrictions and constraints to discussions about race and racism. Positions located on this cultural, ideological, and political spectrum, being permeated by racist notions and the racial democracy myth, present the potential for discomfort, disagreement, or even repulsion regarding the issues presented in *Mandume*.

In such setting, the line that ends the chorus, "I want them to go **** themselves!", could be interpreted as "gratuitous" aggressiveness – in opposition to a historically grounded and justified protest – and as an example of "revanchism" and "desire for revenge" attributed to Black social movements in their claims for racial equality. Through the lens of linguistic prejudice, the use of colloquial speech, slang, swearing, and constructions that deviate from grammatical norms could be taken as a sign of ignorance, illiteracy, and lack of literate knowledge. The clear division between Black and white people, verbally operated in specific behaviours and actions attributed to "we" and "them", in other words, racially constructed identities, could be interpreted in terms of another recurring accusation made by white groups against Black social movements: perpetuating racism by persisting on (re)constructing Black identities, in opposition to the mixed race national identity that aims to whiten the population and to erase the "black stain". From this angle, the postures, gestures, and looks would be taken as supposedly confirming racist stereotypes such as "cheeky n*****" and "angry Black man/woman", as demonstrations of an animalistic and irrational aggressiveness supposedly natural to Black people.

However, for the spectators who recognize that racism not only exists and persists, but also determines our cultural formation, the interpretation will be entirely other. This consciousness about race relations can be constructed through many ways: based on the critical observation of everyday experiences; in community and family ties; on activism aligned with Black social movements; on formal education; on the knowledge production through music, art, and dance; or, rather, on all or many of them simultaneously, allowing them to permeate each other and mutually improve each other. On this spectrum, it is located, for example, the construction of knowledge positioned from structurally subordinated social places, emphasizing the connections between Black *subjectivity* and Black *intellectuality* on the consolidation of antiracist and decolonial thought. It is this aspect to which I return hereafter, highlighting another field of possibilities in the encounter with the music video.

This strand of thought completes the audiovisual materiality of *Mandume* with effects and perceptions aligned with Black resistance: the meanings attributed to the looks, facial expressions, gestures, and postures are the ones of self-respect, gravity, self-confidence, strength; disgust, indignation, anger, hostility, and distrust regarding the observer; pride, defiance, provocation, questioning, non-conformity, and resistance. The intensification of these features throughout the music video highlights the

growing understanding of racist violence and the vehement opposition to this system, metaphorized in the interaction between the lyrics and the performed pattern of looks and postures.

Historicizing the colonial structures of seeing, Paula Amad (2013) cites Jacques Leenhardt's theoretical contributions to emphasize that one of the ways in which the colonial order's power relations emerge in visual culture is in the materialization of the right to *look without being looked back*. In the author's view, some studies that focus camera-directed gazes tend to constitute a visual riposte, defined as a gesture that goes beyond formal or stylistic analysis, incorporating the ethical objective of returning or interrogating the gaze. In her perspective, the act of returning the gaze manifests itself in two dimensions: in the filmed subjects' gaze cast towards the camera and the viewer, and in the interpretation of this look as a gesture of rejection concerning the unidirectionality of Western ways of looking at the Others.

In this sense, the gaze is related to the act of seeing as concerning the agency to define, respond, communicate, produce knowledge, and position him/herself in relation to epistemic regimes. Amad (2013) considers that, in the context of postcolonial studies, the return of the gaze materializes not a role reversal – which would imply a false symmetry in the power relations between subject and object, self and otherness – but the embodiment of a space of exchange, interaction, dialogue, in which subordinated subjects construct their own perspectives, their ways of seeing and knowing, their own view of their world. For the author, the power of the visual riposte lies in its ability to interrogate the relation between colonial vision and power, taking the gazes directed to the camera as a starting point without being limited to them, also contemplating the political, historical, cultural, and intellectual context that permeates visual production and encounters with visibility.

By maintaining the frontal angle, the music video emphasizes the constitution of Black people as subjects, capable of reacting, expressing themselves, and speaking up, including in ways other than literate discourse – through sensitivity, music, performance, visibility and orality, as well as the counter-hegemonic political literacies operated in Black social movements. The many Black people shown in the music video are diverse among themselves, with different skin tones, hair textures and styles, occupying different scenarios. However, they all maintain the pattern of looks, expressions, and postures before the camera, and while the outfits are different, they are part of the same designer label collection. It is thus expressed that we are not a homogeneous crowd as intended by the colonial narratives: we constitute a rich variety of subjectivities, and yet we remain united under the shared experience of racist oppression; united in our positions and actions to interrogate whiteness.

Although the lyrics state that they want us to be more humble and keep our heads down, the music video does not show a single humble expression, nor heads down. This discrepancy between the verbalized order and the visual emergence shows that Black people never passively accepted our own oppression, but were rather coerced into subordination by the power structures, the use of force, and institutional mechanisms of exclusion, hidden under historical narratives that naturalize this domination. It has been so since colonization, when our ancestors did not come to the Americas voluntarily, but abducted and victimized by the intercontinental trafficking of enslaved people. Since then, we have been forced to erase our history, culture, and epistemes in a process of assimilation that has given us a social place of subordination as the only form of peaceful integration into society, alongside with genocidal and mass incarceration policies (Furtado, 2019). Given this scenario, there are no other possible looks and postures than those of hostility, defiance, and resistance.

The aim is not to construct a totalizing and dichotomous formula regarding the possible interpretations for this audiovisual narrative, but to identify two opposite strands that create conflicting imaginaries, which permeate and give meaning to the socialization processes. This confrontation is present on the discussions, knowledge production, and representations about the interactions between Black and white people, about the structural dynamics and ramifications of racism in social life. These imaginaries are in constant interaction on the cultural processes of appropriation, adaptation, negotiation,

and resistance. It is precisely this conflict that is seen in *Mandume*, the symbolic dispute that is recurrent in our daily lives and occupies a central place in antiracist struggle.

The lines “they want someone/who came from where we came from/to be more humble, keep our heads down” evoke, on Black spectators, memories of their own experiences with the sort of racism that these orders represent – whether in interpersonal relationships or, more broadly, in the structural dimension of the confinement to subordination. These lines can also evoke images of Black people in inferiority positions, crystallized in social imaginaries through stereotyped representations on television, cinema, painting, and literature; as well as in everyday situations, considering that, due to structural racism, it is common for professions regarded as subordinate to be occupied mostly by Black people.

The clash between these imaginaries and the set of proud postures and confident looks, in reference to King Mandume, represents the gestures of resistance that defy racist order. The reference to white society’s desire, for Black people to pretend they have forgotten “the whole thing”, highlights that the conflict is not limited to an individual sphere, but concerns the historical continuity that structures society. If whiteness narrates race relations on their own terms, selectively hiding the past and the ways how the racist system operates in the present, the very acts of remembering, investigating the tracks, and producing knowledge about this historical continuity are gestures of resistance – manifested in their expressions of resilience, anger, hostility, and defiance. The chorus staged not by a single subject, but always by groups, emphasizes the relationship between personal experiences and their collective dimension.

Despite the discursive control operated by the hegemonic white society – expressed on the enunciation of what “they want” –, elements that demonstrate the resistance to racist order domination end up escaping through visibility. While the chorus’ voice reveals that “they” want our subordination and inferiority, the visual composition shows who we are and what we want: in the scenarios, hairstyles, and outfits full of references to the preservation and appreciation of Black culture and aesthetics; in the contrast between the gestures of hostility to the camera and the ones of affection, solidarity, and respect among each other; in the facial and body expressions of pride, strength, self-respect, and resistance. The interaction between the verbal and visual dimensions reveals the dispute between racial oppression and resistance, continuously strained until it explodes in wrath on the line “I want them to go **** themselves!”, combined with the gestures.

The conflict constructed on the chorus of *Mandume*, therefore, reveals the relations between the individual and collective spheres, shedding light on the social, political, and structural dimensions of our experiences and identities. This movement operates relations of recognition and belonging between intensely diverse subjects, who present very different accounts about the ways through which they know and understand racial oppression. The chorus, sung by all of them, shows how the diversity of experiences of racism – interlocked with gender oppression; literacy, historical representation, and epistemic violence; LGBTQphobia; class inequality; religious intolerance – can find a shared, common ground on antiracist struggle.

In an interview⁹ about the music video and *Mandume*, Emicida stated: “Since the first time I heard his story, I believed it could be a metaphor for the many descendants of kings and queens around the world who live with their heads down, unaware of their greatness”, emphasizing his goal to raise Black people’s heads through the knowledge about their ancestry. In this sense, ancestry is not only about direct lineage: in the Black diaspora, due to its formation conditions in which the intercontinental trafficking of enslaved people made it impossible to directly track people’s origins in the African continent, ancestry developed a broader sense of Black collectivity and tribute to the ones who fought the antiracist struggle before us.

⁹ Retrieved from bit.ly/2DObZvY.

In the same interview, Emicida highlights that he came to know Mandume's story not through formal education, but hearing it from a friend and, from then on, further researching about it. By bringing Mandume's name but not telling his story, the music video incites its viewers to do the same, which leads to a photograph from the early twentieth century (photograph 1) that enriches the spectators' repertoire and, hence, the visual experience of the music video, by disclosing the origin of the body posture performed by the Black musicians, activists, and artists who stage Mandume's legacy with their arms crossed and their heads up high. Through the frontal planes, as well as the looks, facial expressions, and body postures of self-respect and pride, the music video highlights the recognition of Black people in their individual and collective, historical and contemporary, subjective and epistemological dimensions.

Photograph 1



Retrieved from bit.ly/2DObZvY

Mandume's figure emerges, then, as an inspiration: antiracist political subjectivation is the awakening of Mandume inside each one of us. This association is emphasized by the very composition of the song, which carries his name on the title but chooses not to tell the story of this King, giving way to testimonial accounts of racial oppression interlocked with other axes of subordination as experienced by these rappers in their everyday interactions with whiteness. Although there are possible interpretations that reinforce racist imaginaries and stereotypes, these accounts through visual experience hold the potential to operate relations of recognition, belonging, and identification of Black people regarding Black collectivity, or to call up other people to take a position of responsibility in face of racism.

Therefore, there are two conflicting imaginaries in play: one of the humble Black figure with his/her head down, evoked by the enunciation of what "they want" and reinforced by racist regimes of representation; and that of King Mandume's figure, evoked by the characters' visual performance and by artists, musicians, teachers, Black social movements activists, and many other Black people occupying prominent positions in social life. These imaginaries are related to the spectators' perspectives on racial issues, their awareness about the cultural and structural dimensions of racism, and their expectations about Black people's behavior and positions in their social interactions. Such imaginaries, which are circulating in society, intertwined with subjects' views, forms of cultural production, and representation regimes, permeate the encounter with this audiovisual materiality and are brought to light through the gesture of interrogating the metapicture.

These imaginaries also concern the power relations that define Eurocentric knowledge as superior

to African and Native American thought, which continue to be silenced and marginalized. *Mandume* interrogates and criticizes this dominant strand of thought, which claims to be universal and egalitarian while it excludes and subjugates certain groups. In the midst of this genocidal social and historical process, Eurocentric rationality deprives subordinated groups even of the ability to claim their recognition, by disavowing their ways of communicating, expressing, and reasoning, their ways of doing politics and their epistemes, defining them as illegitimate and inferior in relation to literate knowledge. In this sense, the metapicture made it possible to reveal the power hierarchies established not only between racialized regimes of representation, but also between epistemic traditions, between forms of seeing/knowing and showing seeing/knowing in society.

More than protesting against Black genocide, *Mandume* challenges the process of epistemicide against our knowledge traditions, our forms of sociability, reasoning, expression, and political practice. Thus, *Mandume* claims the legitimacy, validity, and autonomy of our thought, the recognition of our ways of operating knowledge and resistance through music, performance, art production, orality and visuality, as well as the disruptions that Black epistemological grounds promote by entering previously consolidated spaces of knowledge production. Thus emerges the scene of a conflict between these different ways of thinking, constituting ourselves as subjects, narrating, making ourselves seen in society – underlining Black social movements as fully capable of self-defining, naming oppressions, and constructing perspectives, worldviews, and political actions through our own references and epistemes.

Final remarks

The analysis of the choruses of the music video *Mandume* revealed a narrative about the construction of images and knowledge about race relations, about the role of Black social movements as protagonists on the reconstruction of these regimes of visibility and epistemes – revealing the resistance not only of Black subjects individually, but as a collectivity, located in Black epistemological value. Allied to Visual Studies, television style analysis made it possible to approach the visuality of social movements that interrogate and defy, using their looks, voices, and body expressions as interpellation instruments. The arrangement of image and sound revealed broader issues about how Black people are seen and showed, and the social implications of the performative effects of being looked at, looking back, and interrogating through the gaze.

In this visual experience, the historical continuity of racism is presented from Black subjects' point of view, calling up and interpellating the observer. As highlighted by Mitchell (2009), when returning the viewers' gaze, the picture also returns the question, interrogating them about their self-knowledge and inviting them to take a stand regarding the issue being discussed there. The music video enhances the pictures' potential to challenge these viewers, highlighting the racialized aspect of socially constructed asymmetries, demanding them to know and position themselves in their subjectivity concerning racial issues.

Recognizing racism and the way this system operates inequalities, violence, and privileges is an imperative condition for this dialogue. The encounter with otherness – both its abstract conception and the subjects who represent this notion and occupy this social place – requires the subjects to reflect on their own identities, on their positions in face of this otherness. In this sense, the dynamics of positionality operated in the music video through the explicit division between “they”, “we”, “I”, and “them” interacts with the visual dimension so that it emphasizes its potential to destabilize the idea of a single, neutral, universal subject.

The music video claims the legitimacy and agency of our oppositional gazes, as argued by

bell hooks¹⁰ (1992), as insubordinate acts of fully capable subjects who stare and critically interrogate, contesting the others' gazes, naming and affecting the observed reality. In this sense, the oppositional gazes are not limited to the posture in relation to cultural products, but also operate concerning hegemonic epistemes – through the orality and visuality on cultural production and the theoretical-methodological instruments from social movements incorporated into academic science, allied with Black presence and antiracist activism in this context, producing new literacies that enrich academic knowledge and bring it closer to social justice.

In the testimonies from the survivors of Black genocide and epistemicide, and also in its own formal aspects, the music video seeks to disrupt the cruel and elitist norms for pacifist, cordial, and passive political argument and debate that govern the ideals of whiteness' public sphere. These silencing regimes make it necessary to expose that we are not included by this Eurocentric rationality that forges the notion of equality while it simultaneously excludes, subordinates, exterminates, and silence us. Thus, the exclusivity of Eurocentric thought is questioned, demanding that we be heard through our ways of narrating, affecting, operating sensitivity, and communicating, so that society can comprehend the violent nature of race relations; so that society can understand that, if we protest and dissent so vehemently, it is because we are constantly violated physically, verbally, and symbolically in our interactions with whiteness.

The lack of comprehension concerning these matters, including in relation to the responsibility of self-proclaimed leftist or progressive white people, is an obstacle to racial equality. Such alliances made by the racial dominant group ensures their privileged access to social opportunities through the continuity of prejudice, violence, exclusionary processes, regimes of representation and visibility that keep our genocide naturalized – which, as we have seen in *Mandume*, is also a process of epistemicide. The music video call up for rupture with the invisibility of racism in its diverse manifestations, interlocked with other forms of subordination as interconnected systems of power, especially concerning the dimension of knowledge traditions.

Therefore, more than addressing the visibility regimes and racialized norms of image production, the metapicture in *Mandume* reveals aspects about the epistemic erasure and hierarchization in our society. In a rich scheme of self-referentiality, *Mandume* reinforces, through its own formal elements, the importance of the modes of knowledge production that go beyond the hegemonic intellectual circles, academia, History books, and Eurocentric rationality. In addition to seizing and appropriating words and images, the right for self-definition, and producing knowledge positioned from the subjectivity of Black social places, the music video exposed these processes of conflict and exclusion through its own materiality, pointing the orality and visuality operated on rap as a source of knowledge about the impacts of racism on Black people's sociability, as well as about their intervention strategies and Black resistance. The music video *Mandume* legitimized and strengthened decolonial thought, highlighting its potential to reveal the historical conditions that institute racialized social interactions, categories of power, and hierarchies between epistemes.

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¹⁰ The author, named Gloria Watkins, has adopted the pseudonym bell hooks in tribute to her ancestors and requests that it is written in lowercase, to place focus on her ideas rather than her name.

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