Transidiomaticity and transperformances in Brazilian queer rap: toward an abject aesthetics*, **

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Abstract

Queer rap has been shining in the homophobic world of hip-hop lately, especially in the contemporary New York music scene. Considered by many as the new kids on the block, queer rappers have been breaking down mainstream ways of composing, delivering and enacting rap tunes by working on more outwardly feminine performances characterized by ambivalence, hybridity and defiance. In this paper, we focus on how Rico Dalasam, a contemporary Brazilian rap performer, radicalizes this type of rupture, engaging in what we have termed 'abject aesthetics'. The latter constitutes a spectacular semiotic landscape, in which mixed sexualities, genders, races, ethnicities, clothing styles, hair styles, rhythms, languages and registers interact. In fact, transperformances and transidiomaticity dominate his work, which we approach through a scalar sensitive lens (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016) and metapragmatic indexicality (SILVERSTEIN, 1993) as we analyze the artist's lyrics, performances and their reception by different audiences. In doing so, we shed light on the smuggling of semiotic resources which subverts the usual circulation of linguistic and non-linguistic goods across borders. In particular, we discuss how Dalasam's deterritorializing-multisemiotic enactments confront modernist epistemological and linguistic regimes by subverting logocentrism. The analysis focuses on the transit between the so-called margin and center and on the enigmatic meanings generated by the mixture of languages and performances. As a whole, these aspects leave interactants in a state of uncertainty since the assembled resources are not directly intelligible in a conventional sense, most often preventing straightforward object-designation associations. However, this sense of indetermination does not necessarily prevent communication from taking place. We therefore argue that Rico Dalasam, by forging faltering ways with signs, orients to constant movement as a way of inhabiting the border and formulating alternative rules for re-existence.

Keywords*: transidiomaticity; transperformances; scales; metapragmatic reflexivity.*

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1. Introduction

Western imagination of language and communication has over and over invoked essential qualities of purity that claim a "sovereign vision" (IRVINE, 2006) of human expression. According to it, language is pictured as a stable instrument for describing the world, while communication is seen as the sheer transportation of intentional meanings produced in the minds of autonomous individuals. In both processes, ideals of precision and transparency would guarantee the transmission of messages and ideas between people. These actions rely on words as the central unit of meaning whose function is to capture the essence (or *logos*) of signifying objects. In a *logocentric* tradition (DERRIDA, 1976), words connect naming and the things being named. The noun "chair", for instance, would provide clear evidence of the object's presence in the world. The assumption is that such a world and all things in it exist prior to, and independent of, our meaning-making practices.

The conception of a transcendent presence is the core of metaphysical thinking. Things exist and are located in specific positions. They are what they are meant to be. Complex social phenomena are thus divided into neatly-demarcated groups. Two major logical consequences derive from this mode of reasoning. On the one hand, it creates oppositional pairs (us vs. them, for example) that materialize fixed borders and hierarchical relations, in which one term is privileged over the other. On the other, this dualistic logic disregards the crucial role of indeterminacy and difference. As a corollary, diversity and mixture are relegated to a subaltern position.

Although such purist understanding has founded the disciplinary area of Linguistics, it has never reigned supreme. On the contrary, it has been called into question over time by a lineage of philosophers, from Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Austin to Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze. More recently, different thinkers have consistently questioned various aspects of the modern-colonial episteme. Binary thinking, simplistic categories and clear-cut certainties have been a constant target of critical approaches to social phenomena at large (APPADURAI, 1996; GRUZINSKI, 1999). According to Walter Mignolo (2000), one possible way of enhancing a critical perspective is by locating ourselves on

the borderland, blurring the boundaries between "center/ periphery" or "norm/transgression". He suggests that seeking a non-essentializing perspective and defying fundamentalist dichotomies engage us with what he terms "border-thinking". The concept of border-thinking dislodges territorial limits of all sorts—of nations, languages and identities—and as such, abandons "the rigidity of epistemic and territorial frontiers" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 12) in favor of hybrid and "indisciplinary" forms of knowledge production (MOITA-LOPES, 2006/2016).

The borderland is thus the place for crossing and experimenting with meaning-making potential. It is the site for making "another thinking" and "another logic" possible (MIGNOLO, 2000, p. 69-70), through "smuggling" languages, semiotic resources, discourses and ideas[1]. It is ultimately a context for "border gnosis" characterized by extreme mobility, in which processes of mixture and translocality are constantly in operation. In the contemporary globalized world, referred to as *superdiverse* (VERTOVEC, 2007), a much wider range of individuals, from all realms of social life, find themselves crossing hitherto "well-established" perimeters, whether geographical, social or linguistic. In times when contact between nations, cultures and discourses reaches unprecedented potential, ordinary people are confronted with the projected bounds of metaphysics on a daily basis. With the advancement of technology, migratory and digital transits across the globe have become routine procedures. And, as people move around, they come across traces of identity barriers involving class, race, gender, sexuality, culture and language.

What happens in these encounters? How do people handle communication? How do they negotiate different symbolic frontiers? Artists in the music scene, for example, allow us to catch a glimpse of meaning-making activity occurring on the fringes of a still-prescriptive society. Brazilian queer rapper Rico Dalasam is a case in point. In one of his lyrics he blurts it straight out:

> This is the story of someone / Who took two bus and a train
>
> To get to university, I work because money is alright Mix Brazil, Sri Lanka and Bahrein / He who comes from the gutter

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[1] See Moita-Lopes 2017 for a discussion of transidiomatic rap on the borderland.

Isn't afraid of rain /Got that I am hitchhiking right?
See how good my English is
(Rico Dalasam - Accept Yourself).

Minha saga é de quem / Pegou dois busão e trem / pra faculdade, trampo porque a grana convêm / Mistura o Brasil, Sri lanka e Barém/ Quem vem da lama aqui não tem medo de rain / Viu que eu tô em punga né?! / Fino no inglês (Aceite-c)

By placing himself on the margins ("someone who took two bus and a train"), the author displays his lack of commitment with grammar regulation, his affinity with mixture ("Brazil, Sri Lanka and Bahrein") and his disposition to catch a free ride ("*tô em punga*") with other languages—English in the case at hand. This kind of stance that addresses deep-seated prejudices concerning linguistic and social identities is the general concern of our paper. We aim to explore knowledge-making that communicates without becoming hostage to logocentric and territorializing ideologies, by investigating how Rico Dalasam transgresses traditional 'socialscapes' and radicalizes different types of rupture, engaging in what we have termed 'abject aesthetics'. To operationalize our discussion, we establish a dialogue between academic epistemology and Dalasam's own theorizing to investigate how he materializes the borderland metaphor. In this conversation we recruit notions of scale, metapragmatic indexicality, and performativity.

2. Rap, queer rap and the borderland

From its beginnings in the Black-Latino neighborhood of New York City in the 1970's, rap has virtually spread everywhere around the globe: from the periphery of big cities to indigenous groups (MITCHELL, 2001; PENNYCOOK, 2007). Expressing the marginalized voices and their local/translocal lives through a unique aesthetics experience, rap generally relies on hybridity as a creative force. The hybrid performances mix "non-standard" language, multimedia sampling, "peculiar" body movements and social-political themes. This kind of mixture, which flows transculturally, usually operates within a counter-hegemonic logic. However, most often rappers enact lyrics that reinforce colonial

dualisms concerning gender and sexuality. They invoke sexism, homophobia and subalternity in performances that systematically praise traditional masculinity. As Dalasam (2016) himself observes, "Rap is a snap picture of our culture. It is chauvinist, homophobic, bigoted." (authors' translation)

Amidst the trend of a conservative backlash in traditional rap, so-called queer rap has been shining in the homophobic world of hip-hop lately, especially in the New York music scene (LANG, 2013). Considered by many as the new kids on the block, queer rappers have been breaking down mainstream ways of composing, delivering and enacting rap beats by working on more outwardly male-female performances. In spite of being characterized by ambivalence and defiance, queer rap is a mainstream, convenient, and generalizing marketing label for gay rappers (LANG, 2013). The categorization is frequently brought under suspicion since it projects the dichotomy queer rap / straight rap, besides running the risk of fetishizing rappers based on their sexualities. It may also obfuscate performers' own personal narratives, musical and poetic qualities. In practice, however, queer rappers are critical of homophobia and racism, engaging themselves in hybrid performances that radicalize experiences of living in between borders and in ambiguity. In Dalasam's view (2016), they want to "disseminate ideas about a new 'sense of normativity'."

All in all, queer rappers dismantle rap practices by destabilizing essentialist binary performances of gender and sexuality, which project ironic and ambiguous performativities (for example, MC Foucault—an indigenous-Mexican male rapper from Michigan, fat and white-bearded, performing a girl in pink[2]). Gender and sexuality are therefore fathomed as "a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (JAGOSE, 1996, p. 3), which are performatively enacted. In doing so, queer rappers have brought visibility to allegedly marginalized meanings and identities. In queer rap performances, it is not possible to predetermine the kinds of performativities people's bodies will call into being here and now. This is in fact a performative view of meaning and of who we can be or become (BUTLER, 1990; 2004; FOUCAULT, 1982). Meanings are not given. They come about performatively (PENNYCOOk, 2007).

In Brazil, queer rap has come on the back of social movements that question the borders constructed by racism,

[2] Available at < https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLN3myTb-JRoLb7GJHPSMB9xxsp3fJpPZ9>

classism and homophobia. Government policies implemented by two successive left-wing presidents, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, supported this kind of concern from 2003–2013. Long-marginalized groups (poor, black, indigenous, favela-dwellers, LGBTI populations among others) gained economic and social mobility during that period, as a consequence of a fast-moving process of social inclusion (SOUZA, 2016). In an unprecedented shift in the history of the country, the gap between the rich and the poor decreased. Underprivileged fractions of society broke free from the contempt they had long suffered. They started to share unexpected realms of leisure, consumption and education as a result of access to cultural and symbolic capitals formerly reserved for the middle- and upper-class. Nevertheless, along with social mobility, fear and hatred thrived.

Black rappers like Liniker, Linn da Quebrada and Rico Dalasam emerged in Brazil at that time. In spite of the radicalization of social tensions, they understood the political potency of the sociohistorical conjuncture they were entangled in. Their artistry was their strategy of resistance. Borrowing these artists' own words, their music capitalizes on themes "against the interest of society"[3] and "queerizes"[4] social regulation. In their view, queer rap has become one more "weapon" that marginalized rappers make use of to confront processes of exclusion. Race, class, gender and sexuality are intersectionally performed on stage, illuminating the claim Bernard (2004) makes in his book "Queer Race" in favor of decentering dualisms. He embodies varied personae. He can perform stereotypical masculinity or play an haute couture model on a cat-walk. He can also enact mixed sociocultural repertoires such as Afro, Sri Lankan, Indian or platinum blonde American women. However, whether enacted on or off stage, this kind of blending is fraught with inequalities and violence. When one trespasses the borderline of purism, risks skyrocket. Dalasam (2016) is very much acquainted with this danger:

> I have always had problems in joining all the minorities that come together in my story. "He likes rap, but he's gay". "He's a black youth, but enjoys going to places where there's art" (and blacks are not there). I get this strange look for existing in those places. When I was younger, my friends never wanted to leave the neighborhood. It made no sense to me.

[3] Song "Não recomendado", by Caio Prado,performed by Liniker, Johnny Hooker and Almério. Available at < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oB6elb7M5M>

[4] In "Enviadecer", music and lyrics by Linn da Quebrada. Available at < https://www.letras.mus.br/mc-linn-da-quebrada/enviadescer/>

> Later, when I started moving around town on my own, I could understand what was going on. I went from Taboão to the Rock Gallery and realized that people were looking. They grabbed their purses because my presence meant danger. Being gay does not rescue me from such situations. Being all that—young, black and gay—makes you feel so dead … (authors' translation)

By describing his physical moves between Taboão da Serra—a small town on the outskirts of São Paulo city—and *Galeria do Rock*—a trendy shopping venue in the centre of São Paulo, Dalasam reflexively acknowledges the "complex hierarchies of power" (BRAH; COOMBES, 2000) involved in the mixing of people, cultures and life styles.

Next, we deepen our observation of Dalasam's experiences on the borderland of queer rap. In particular, we want to focus on the meaning-effects brought into being by his highly stylized performativity, or "high performance" in the sense developed by Coupland, 2007, p. 146). It involves intense planning, programming and awareness of possible meaning-effects, which differs from less coordinated performances.

3. 'Abject' aesthetics

Jefferson Ricardo da Silva was born in the periphery of São Paulo—a mega-metropolis in the south-eastern region of Brazil. While still a child, he was re-territorialized in an upscale German school in the city center[5], where he was the only black student. This trajectory has probably influenced his ability to hybridize traditional peripheral and central social life traits, which moves his rap performativity into something else. Identifying himself with "queer rap", he explores mixed signs, "languages", materials and sociocultural references in pursuit of the types of political aesthetics that purists often render abject or deviant. The latter is clearly delineated in his own words as in "I would like it to cause discomfort [or abjection] in some people, so that it could break some paradigms" (DALASAM, 2016).

not naïve, though. It indexes intense and continuous reflexive activity. It is present, for example, in the choice of an artistic name, Dalasam. This is an acronym for "Disponho Armas Libertárias a Sonhos antes Mutilados" (I access libertarian weapons to fight for formerly mutilated dreams). Besides being a politicized stance, it indicates the artist's total

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5 His mother worked as cook for well-off families. In spite of her humble financial circumstances she gained a scholarship for Dalasam to attend the German School—an upscale, private, bilingual school.

awareness of the risks involved in transgressing boundaries. Statements made in different interviews such as "Good guys require stuntmen, we the villains are what we have to be"[6] and "My body image says that I don't fit in. I've tried very hard but I always feel lesser." (DALASAM, 2015) explicitly put forward an underlying idea in his work "Everybody takes risks; I do the politics of existence." (DALASAM, 2016b).

If rap is traditionally characterized by hybridity, Dalasam's performances are even more so. Mixing is in fact the way his body resists normalized patterns and comes to *re-exist* (SILVA SOUZA, 2001, p. 36), by (re)combining crystallized discourses and multiple signs. His enactments constitute a spectacular semiotic landscape, in which various elements blend together to produce daring meaning effects— genders and sexualities, races and ethnicities, clothing and hairstyles, rhythms and sonic arrangements, languages and vocal registers. Transidiomaticity (JACQUEMET, 2005) and transperformances dominate his work as a whole, decentering sedimented references. In the following section, we approach this mobility through a scalar-sensitive lens (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016) and metapragmatic indexicality (SILVERSTEIN, 1993).

4. Scaling language and other semiotic resources

Carr and Lempert (2016, p. 18) have proposed that "social existence is radically scalable." According to their approach, social actors make sense of experience through scalar lenses. They perspectivize the world around them. In the contextualization and organization of social action in space and time, social actors use different strategies. Not only do they compare and qualify meaning-events, but also classify, hierarchize, and totalize them. Scaling exercises are semiotic accomplishments that demand the use of signs (linguistic and non-linguistic). Employed in conjunction with metaphors and analogies, they craft perception and guide social performance (MOITA-LOPES; FABRICIO, 2018). Signs in use may render phenomena universal or local, relevant or irrelevant, normal or abnormal, scientifically accurate or inaccurate. These operations are inherently relational in that they involve not only comparison but also evaluation—an endeavor that projects points of view and privileged points of observation. They

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[6] In "Paz, Coroas e tronos", music and lyrics by Dalasam.

function as parameters for measurement and as "adjudication" criteria, so to speak. This sort of template applies to the way "natural languages" and communication phenomena have been projected as stable and universal processes.

So-called natural languages can be taken as scalar projects. They make sense of communication according to specific orientations or linguistic ideologies, which allow us to understand a language as "a discursive project, rather than an established fact" (WOOLARD, 1998, p. 20). Firstly, these scalar exercises construct territorial boundaries of all sorts: where languages are spoken and by whom; who owns language; what counts as correct language; what counts as transgression; which language counts as a lingua-franca; which ones count as foreign languages. Forging borders and relations are thus central scaling techniques.

Secondly, languages are made normative and valorized as autonomous and neutral abstract systems, existing as such in grammar books and dictionaries. This maneuver automatically downgrades out-of-norm usage. Ranking and valuing, as recurrent scalar habits, sort out objects, people and phenomena according to positive and negative attributes. Right/wrong, good/bad, formal/colloquial and native/foreign are frequent binaries projected by scalar work in relation to languages.

Finally, the creation of a disciplinary field, i.e., Linguistics, institutionalized the projected scales, investing them with an authority that wields epistemological and educational performative effects. Take, for instance, the truth values attributed to borders and classifications. These operations are ideological, since they position social objects differently, favoring some over others. They are also performative in that they influence social practices. For instance, they sustain traditional concepts such as "native speaker" and "foreigner", or "vernacular" and "street" languages, which end up having concrete effects on our everyday social lives.

Dalasam is attentive to the consequences of classificatory scalar projects indexed in dualist categories. For instance, when talking about the dynamics between center/periphery or elite/popular, he displays his understanding of how different sense-making practices interlace with class and neighborhood divisions. This awareness becomes clear when he justifies his attraction to rap (DALASAM, 2016c):

> It has to do with not having to change the way you speak to communicate with people. […] Music that ignores the colloquial and expresses itself in a vernacular way is meant for the elites […] at home we didn't use to play elite music, and it was neither my fault nor my mom's.

In the remainder of this paper we discuss how Rico Dalasam resists the prevailing linguistic ideology delineated above. We do so by exploring his song "Procure" ("Look up"), in which he scales language and his identity as an artist. We focus on the lyrics and the music video production, paying close attention to the performative meaning-effects of Dalasam's scalar activity. Otherwise put: we concentrate on how he does abject aesthetics by smuggling semiotic resources into his music video.

5. Smuggling linguistic resources – metapragmatic reflexivity in Dalasam's lyrics

Rico Dalasam's lyrics display intense metapragamatic reflexivity (SILVERSTEIN, ʓ3) about language use through the indexicality phenomenon. Not only does he place signs in the world—the pragmatic dimension of meaning. He indicates what he thinks he is doing with the signs he mobilizes. This is how he understands the metapragmatics of his sign activity explicitly (DALASAM, 2015):

> I don't want to do pop music just to make it a dancing hit. It needs to inject a vision that you can transform things through partying and happiness. The idea is that it's no use waiting for people to accept you.

In "Procure (Look it up)" the author's purpose is actually indexed from the very beginning, with the refrain "Look up what it means to smile like that in the dictionary". Dalasam seems to be implying dictionaries cannot capture all the language games "to smile like that" can possibly index. As such, he criticizes linguistic ideologies that view language as an autonomous package containing all possible meanings. The linguistic ideology he draws upon, as further illustrated below, is that of language as a repertoire of semiotic resources (other than linguistic ones) whose meanings are perfomatively accessed here and now.

One of the resources he heavily relies on here and in other rap songs is transidiomaticity (JACQUEMET, 2005). Rather than operating with the use of what could be called a single unitary language, he crisscrosses his lyrics with pieces of different languages that do not fit in with a monolingual epistemology. In fact, he creates a language of his own, which could be called Portenglispanaquibic (Portuguese-English-Spanish-Yaqui-Arabic). For example, the following elements from the lyrics: "Dala boy, Dalasam boy black, container" in English; "wakabake" in Yaqui (Mexican indian native language); "barrio" in Spanish; "Ali Bhaba" in Arabic; "quê, Mediocre, Aluriê, comprei, copiê, Barbiê, cabelerê" in French transliteration for an aesthetic rhyming purpose. This is a transidiom, which can only be operational if a border epistemology is taken into account, since the border is the place for language contact, mixture and hybridity. Such an epistemology allows him to smuggle diverse linguistic resources into his lyrics.

Another feature in the lyrics is a poetic device called "one-word-pulls-along-another" (GARCIA, 1997). This device is based on the rhyming of words without any necessary concern with denotational meaning, as done here (see: *wakabake, atabaque, barcas/ atarraca, ataca, catraca/barrio, rir/ mato, macro/ quê, Mediocrê, Aluriê, compriê, copiê, barbiê, cabelerê/ Alibaba, Aluriê/ Navalha, falha, malha/otário, horário/ Balanga, raba, tanga-raga/ alaga/alarga*). This non-referential rhyming game, riffing on French and other languages, does seem to index the borderland's inclination for language play. Sometimes, there is a word like "wakabake" whose reference can be hinted at. It is a Yaqui word for a type of Mexican soup that mixes all sorts of native vegetables. No wonder Dalasam sings: "You got to understand my wakabake". At other times, Dalasam uses expressions that may have no specific meaning, like *Alibaba Aluriê*, a made-up riff on a Yoruba word integrating the verse *"Alibaba Aluriê / Fools don't understand, they only copy."*

In an interview (DALASAM, 2017), he explains

> I create a code to explain something that is indescribable…
> It's like magic […] I need to generate an 'alibaba aluriê' in
> the listener's head (…) —sometimes the person does not
> even know what I'm talking about there… And that's magic.

This fragment summarizes a pragmatic point of view that confronts the deep-seated ideal of language as a tool for informing and describing the world with precision. According to Dalasam's perception, signification, contrariwise, is precarious and limited since it may produce various meaning effects, different reactions or no meaning at all depending on the circumstances. "Language is a labyrinth of paths" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953/2009, §203). This characteristic would not necessarily be a problem in communication but something meaning-makers have to account for on a daily basis, when language is at work. His understanding of language can be rephrased on more philosophical terms, following Wittgenstein (1953/2009 §98-109, p. 49-52): Dalasam's creatively employs a precise way ("a code") to imprecisely characterize an experience (i.e. sense making) that is in itself always vague and imprecise.

Moreover, the individuals who inhabit it are not treated with equality because race gets in the way. "*The black man takes over the mooring boat / In the container drugs go through the access turnstile*". Two juxtaposed signs "black" and "boat" invoke the time-space scale of slavery. They suggest the daily hardships specific bodies have to overcome when moving around. To talk about how people bypass discrimination Dalasam summons *Alibaba* and *Aluriê* as symbols of creativity. The former escapes from thieves. The latter performs magic tricks. Despite their different maneuvers, both avoid common sense by going beyond mimicking: "*Alibaba Aluriê / Fools don't buy, they only copy / Ali Baba in the Barber´s shop / A razor that fails runs the hairdresser down.*"

It is useless to do what everybody does. Copying as a mode of existence in the borderland is a risky position. Copies can fail and run people down. Within these circumstances, a referential logic is suspended, and Dalasam's wakabake gains confrontational undertones. "*I am here to confront your cowardice for a good job / The schmuck's free ticket isn't valid for long*". One does normativity out of fear and thus lives mediocrely. Dalasam's bold bid is producing music creatively. He explains (DALASAM, 2017):

> To enslave another is to show cowardice, holding a people without them being able to defend themselves. You were a coward with me, but I'm here. All this bullshit that was supposed to have knocked me down, supposed to have left me overwhelmed, to have made me paralysed in

> life—congratulations, it served no purpose. I have come to pay your cowardice, and look what I am returning here with: music! Art is the payment. Congratulations for your cowardice. Look what it generated in me: good music, an aesthetic, representation, smiles from the people who see themselves in me.

On the border, what counts as language and performance is the aggregation effect of resources that interlocutors strategically employ or, as in the case at hand, the resources Dalasam smuggles into his own territory. They create reversal effects *à la* Foucault (1982) *or à la* Butler (2005), as the rapper states "Music is a mantra, and black people have always lived in survival mode. The world wants to shame us, but we have to resist this." (DALASAM, 2017).

In sum, the linguistic material Dalasam relies on projects a scalar exercise that perspectivizes language as a translocal practice. He produces a transidiom devised for life on the border, where those who lack "a borough" to smile are destroyed (*If you lack a borough where you can smile … destruction everywhere*). If, on the one hand, this scalar exercise disrupts the idea of a natural language, on the other, it plays with a referential logic, leaning on a rhyming game that evokes children's babbling when they first start speaking (DOWKER, 1989/2009). Engaging in a technique typical of some poetry (GARCIA, 1997), he also seems to savor the pleasure of letting words roll out of the mouth without any concern with literal meanings.

The metapragmatic reflexivity in which Dalasam is involved may be pointing to the fact that language games are not representational, i.e., they cannot be prefigured before they are performed (PENNYCOOK, 2007; PINTO, 2018). In this way, meaning construction is an operation that comes about performatively here and there through how discourses are indexed in language use by participants. That is why we cannot "look up what it means to smile like that in the dictionary", since signs do not exist in a state of inertia, confined in books. The linguistic ideology informing Dalasam's work exists more and more in our extremely mobile globalized societies. Texts, languages and people flow intensely (BLOMMAERT, 2010), motivating an infinite number of language games. No wonder this momentum infuses the queer borderland Dalasam constructs in his music videos.

A moving semiotic space, where no reference is necessarily intended, operates with a different logic. Dalasam makes it operational through border-thinking and through a view of language perspectivized as a repertoire of resources. Being so, the artist questions the modernist imagination of language and communication as both logocentric and representational processes—features that many theoreticians have attributed to coloniality (BAUMAN; BRIGGS (2003); VENN, 2000).

6. Smuggling semiotic resources – metapragmatic reflexivity through Dalasam's bodily performance

Metapragmatic reflexivity is also indexed in Dalasam's high performance (COUPLAND, 2007, p. 146) by a carefully-crafted design that goes beyond the lyrics he sings. It includes a vast array of semiotic resources or indexicals, such as bodily motion, clothing, hairstyle and beard (visual indexicalizations). When read in conjunction with linguistic signs, these other elements project a sense of abjection indexed by a bearded black man waggling his bottom to the video camera, wearing a girl's outfit and a female hair style. How could one explain the perplexity caused by these enigmatic enactments of race, gender and sexuality, if not through a queer border logic? We propose that such high performance can be fathomed by what we call *transperfomance*, in the sense that the meaning effects his body evokes places it in a constant flow that questions who he is continually becoming.

Such a view is enhanced by the very song (ragatanga) that his body is dancing to. In the lyrics he calls it "tanga-raga" instead. This could perhaps be a strategy employed either for rhyming reasons, as said above (*Balanga a raba nesse tanga-raga*) or for metapragmatically drawing attention to the inversion (male into female) his body is indexing. This idea may be justified if one considers that the song was created in Spain and made popular there by Las Ketchup Girls, and in Brazil and Portugal by the girl group called Rouge[7]. Here, once again, the hybrid and enigmatic nature of the queer borderland comes in full. For the purposes of this paper, we have taken three screenshots of the video, which exemplify the metapragamatic reflexivity indexed through Dalasam's body.

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[7] The Ketchup Song <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ketchup_Song> Accessed on 21 March, 2018.

Fig. 1: Screenshot of Rico Dalasam's videoclip "Procure"
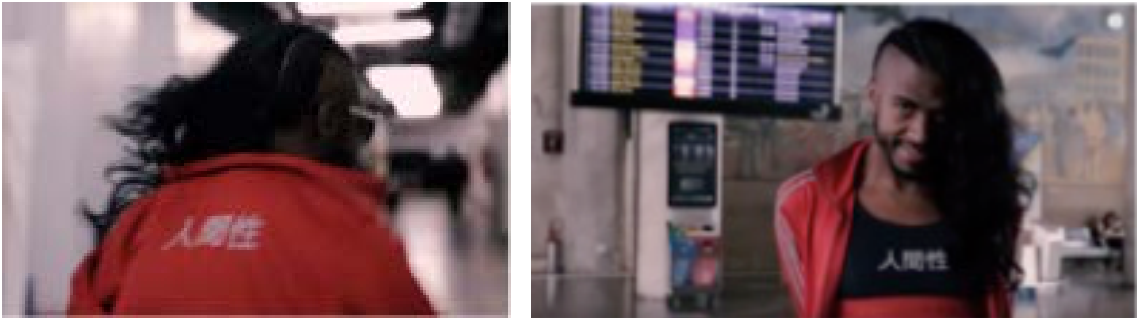
The first image (Fig. 1) appears right at the beginning of the music video, when Dalasam shows up wearing a jogging suit on which the phrase 'The Human Condition' is written in Chinese characters, both on the tank top and on the back of his jacket. The introduction of a non-phonetic form of writing problematizes the idea of communication naturally associated with oral expression. Moreover, the expression brings different signs into the video, helping to increase transidiomaticity, since now the semiotic resources are visualized. The phrase indexes discourses related to native languages, gender, race and sexuality—some of the most crucial human condition parameters that classify us. Functioning as a framing device, the expression projects the human condition matrix into a scalar perspective from the very beginning of the video through visual indexicalization cues that call into question traditional approaches: why is this black guy mixing male and female styles? The image starts questioning the kinds of semiotic effects Dalasam's body brings into being as it anticipates the transperformances he involves himself with. This kind of scalar exercise capitalizes on the polysemic aspects of meaning-making.

In Fig. 2, Dalasam's body seems to evoke discourses of a more male hegemonic type. He jumps about to the rhythm of his tanga-raga, indexing more typical traditional male rappers' movements. Metapragamatically, his body motion projects a scalar perspective that classifies him along the lines of more traditional male performativity effects. Nevertheless, the miniskirt he wears disturbs the body aligned with hegemonic masculinity. Once again, the artist breaks down expectations

of what male bodies can do, which seems to fit in with a queer borderland logic.

Fig. 2: Screenshot of Rico Dalasam's videoclip "Procure"

Fig. 3 shows Dalasam dressed in a skimpy leotard. His transparent pants, through which one can see his legs and bum, create a curving silhouette that indexes a mixture of common-sense gender meanings.

Fig. 3: Screenshot of Rico Dalasam's videoclip "Procure"

In this particular camera take, Dalasam turns his bottom to the camera and twerks it in the way hip-hop girls do, indexing discourses about women's dancing steps in the popular music scene in Brazil. When performed by a black

male, such a move projects meaning effects that concomitantly trouble traditional views about rap, homosexuality and black male bodies (see SULLIVAN, 2003).

> Rap already exists, the gay world already exists, but we [queer rappers] decided to crisscross ideas and made it happen. Fearlessly. We want to change things. I don't want to change only my own life. I want to change the places I go to, the history of the people who experience the hard demands I myself experience (DALASAM, 2016b).

If one attends to the argument that "homosexuality is a product of so-called white culture" (MELO; MOITA-LOPES, 2014, p. 657), Dalasam's indexing of homoerotic discourses in his music questions several taken-for-granted ideas with one single blow.

7. Doing the politics of existence

Following Dalasam's artistic performance in the music video "Procure", it was possible to observe how the artist unsettles epistemological regimes that have dominated our ways of thinking. In particular, we have discussed how Dalasam's enactments interrogate monolingualism and identity borders. His transidiom indicates his alertness to how ideologies of language intertwine with ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, and class. In a Derridian vein, we can say that the queer rapper composes a strategic architecture to run away from a traditional conceptual economy (DERRIDA, 1976) that does not afford his existence. He makes explicit during an interview his discernment of lives taken to matter versus lives taken to shatter. Identifying with the latter, he says he has to guarantee his existence and to sidestep the system that silences him (DALASAM, 2016d). This positioning is consistent in many of his interviews. When asked about the present political scenario in Brazil, after the recent *coup d'état* that ousted the president Dilma Rousseff, he pondered (DALASAM, 2016b):

> (…) we were beginning to have more visibility (…) there were public policies. But now we are going to slip back 30 steps. Resisting is what we must do. Resisting and resisting and resisting. And finding ways to go on producing our content, our art, our possibilities. And now, doing it even more and more independently. And we have to be aware that we run the risk of strong repression just by being who we are. In

> connection with the present situation, we are bound to return to full invisibility and to once again be considered the scum of society and people worth despising.

For the sake of analyzing Dalasam's mode of resistance we have separated linguistic semiotic resources from his semiotic body, but both are experienced simultaneously during Dalasam's performances. They are to be heard, seen and felt. Perhaps the metaphor implicit in the acronym Dalasam summarizes life on the queer borderland. In doing one's politics of (re)existence (SILVA E SOUZA, 2011), one struggles to make "mutilated dreams" come true. Such dreams have to do with the possibility of imagining an alternative logic for social life, a transidiomatic and fluid one, not captive to any essentialized systems. The transidiom he devises in the queer borderland illuminates the invented nature of language, equated with a national territory and its people. Transidiomaticity draws our attention to a linguistic ideology that requires a "linguistics of contact" (PRATT, 1987) or a linguistics of the margins.

On the borderline, in tandem with transidiomaticity, transperformances are put to operationalize a non-essentialist and non-representational view of who we are and of the resources we use when we do being ourselves. Transperformances transgress the "heterosexual matrix" (BUTLER, 1990) through which we are scaled in the world. Moreover, it throws light on the relevance of race and class as crucial components of such a matrix. This is done through an extremely well-crafted 'abject' aesthetics, whose metapragmatics can be recovered from the indexicality of his lyrics and political semiotic body. Dalasam interpellates the referential essentialist parameters that have brought us so far. Instead of trying to capture a preconfigured reality, he imagines it outright. In this enterprise, signs do not function literally. They exist in a chain of traces (DERRIDA, 1977) that get entangled in his transit through diverse repertoires. Therefore, it is no use seeking the origin of meanings in the dictionary. Meaning belongs in performative traces left by an abundance of signs.

When smuggling all sorts of semiotic resources, Dalasam makes them work outside the denotational function. As interlocutors, we are left with only uncertainties. The conundrums we experience disturb dualisms. Center or

periphery? Male or female? Portuguese or what? This state subverts the usual circulation of linguistic and non-linguistic goods across borders. His 'recombinations' of languages and performances promote rupture with the idea of iconicity (i.e. language as a reflex of reality). They stick and unstick labels (BAYNHAM, 2015). They produce "filthy", or impure, verbal and bodily performances (BORBA; LOPES, 2018). They put forward new arrangements that are not intelligible in a conventional sense. They thus project ambiguity as part and parcel of meaning-making. However, this sense of indetermination does not necessarily prevent communication from taking place. It would be his signature design element—something that becomes clear when he states metapragmatically, "My lyrics say which side I am on" (DALASAM, 2015). On his transit between different symbolic territories he constructs his allegiance to an anti-dualist form of belonging. Always on the move, here and there.

We therefore argue that Rico Dalasam, by forging faltering ways with signs, orients to constant movement as a way of inhabiting the border. He constructs an authorial style that is immediately recognizable. He does it because it is possible. As Wittgenstein says (1953/2009, §23, p. 14-15), the activities language performs are infinite. "Giving orders", "Reporting an event", "Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams", "Singing rounds", "Making up a story" or "Solving a problem in applied arithmetic" are part of the diverse language games we play. Creating queer rap is another. Dalasam is playing his own game, an abject one that fulfills his political interests. Using the artist's own words, "I can write things that have no specific meaning because then each person can hear and re-signify what I say within his/her own narrative" (DALASAM, 2016d).

In times of sharp intolerance in Brazil, and worldwide, Dalasam is producing his own form of life, imagining alternative rules for resistance and re-existence of otherwise invisible bodies. He is doing micropolitics by employing transidiomaticity and transperformances. The local facet of these practices does not directly enhance broader political actions. However, their singularity may serve as inspiration to other processes of renovation.

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Resumo

Transisiomaticidade e transperformances no rap queer brasileiro: por uma estética abjeta

O rap queer tem tido grande repercussão no mundo homofóbico do hip-hop nos últimos tempos, especialmente no cenário contemporâneo musical de Nova York. Considerado por muitos como a nova sensação, os rappers queer têm desconstruído os modos considerados tradicionais de compor, falar e apresentar o rap ao fazerem uso mais abertamente de performances femininas, caracterizadas por ambivalência, hibridismo e resistência. Neste artigo, focalizamos como Rico Dalasam, um performer brasileiro contemporâneo, radicaliza esse tipo de ruptura, ao se engajar no que chamamos de "estética abjeta" Ela compõe uma paisagem semiótica espetacular, na qual sexualidades, gêneros, raças, etnias, estilos de roupa, cortes de cabelos, ritmos, línguas e registros se entrecruzam. Na verdade, transperformances e transidiomaticidade dominam seu trabalho, o qual abordamos por meio das noções de escala (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016) e indexicalidade metapragmática (SILVERSTEIN,1993) ao analisarmos as letras do rap, suas performances e sua recepção por audiências diferentes. O movimento analítico gera visibilidade para o atravessamento de recursos semióticos que subvertem a circulação de artefatos linguísticos e nãolinguísticos pelas fronteiras. Em particular, discutimos como o desempenho multissemiótico-desterritorializador de Dalasam confronta regimes epistemológicos e linguísticos modernistas, subvertendo o logocentrismo. O foco do estudo está no trânsito entre os chamados centro e periferia e nos significados enigmáticos gerados pela mistura de línguas e performances. Em sua totalidade, esses aspectos deixam os interactantes em um estado de incerteza, uma vez que os recursos reunidos não são diretamente inteligíveis em um sentido convencional, já que, muito frequentemente, evitam associações referenciais diretas a objetos. Contudo, esse sentido de indeterminação não necessariamente prejudica a comunicação. Argumentamos que Rico Dalasam, ao forjar modos vacilantes de usar signos, se coloca em movimentação constante como um modo de habitar a fronteira e de formular regras alternativas de reexistência.

Palavras-chave: *transidiomaticidade; transperformances; escalas; reflexividade metapragmática.*