



Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas
Instituto de Filosofia, Artes e Cultura
Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto
ISSN: 2596-0229

**BLACK MEN THROUGH BLACK WOMEN'S LENS:
peripheral resistance in the voices of Racionais MC's through black feminism**

ELES PENSADOS POR ELAS:
resistência periférica nas vozes do Racionais MC's a partir do feminismo negro

Maria Fernanda de Oliveira Ruas

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5019-8963>

 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i16.8327

**Black Men Through Black Women's Lens:
peripheral resistance in the voices of Racionais MC's through black feminism**

Abstract: This article proposes a reading of the work of the Racionais MC's based on the contributions of black feminist authors such as bell hooks (2019; 2022), Audre Lorde (2019), Patricia Hill Collins (2019) and Saidiya Hartman (2022), who offer theoretical and methodological tools for valuing knowledge produced in the margins. The analysis starts from the construction of black subjectivities crossed by racism, discusses rap as an instrument of political empowerment and addresses critical fabrication as a counter-historical practice. Anchored in the documentary "*Racionais: Das Ruas de São Paulo pro Mundo*" (Racionais MC's: From the Streets of São Paulo), the reflection highlights how the group articulates narratives that denounce structural violence and affirm possibilities for existence and political awareness among young blacks from the periphery.

Keywords: Hip Hop; black feminism; resistance; Racionais MC's; territoriality; peripheral culture.

**Eles pensados por elas:
resistência periférica nas vozes do Racionais MC's a partir do feminismo negro**

Resumo: Este artigo propõe uma leitura da obra dos Racionais MC's a partir das contribuições de autoras feministas negras, como bell hooks (2019; 2022), Audre Lorde (2019), Patricia Hill Collins (2019) e Saidiya Hartman (2022), que oferecem ferramentas teórico-metodológicas para a valorização de saberes produzidos nas margens. A análise parte da construção de subjetividades negras atravessadas pelo racismo, discute o *rap* como instrumento de empoderamento político e aborda a fabulação crítica como prática contra-histórica. Ancorada no documentário "*Racionais: Das Ruas de São Paulo pro Mundo*", a reflexão evidencia como o grupo articula narrativas que denunciam violências estruturais e afirmam possibilidades de existência e consciência política entre jovens negros periféricos.

Palavras-chave: *hip hop*; feminismo negro; resistência; Racionais Mc's; territorialidade; cultura periférica.



1 Introduction

The work of Racionais MC's, a group of great notoriety in the scenario of Brazilian rap, carries a narrative power that crosses and activates the social and cultural realities of the country's urban peripheries. Founded in 1988, the group has as members Pedro Paulo Soares Pereira (Mano Brown), Paulo Eduardo Salvador (Ice Blue), Edivaldo Pereira Alves (Edi Rock), and Kléber Geraldo Lelis Simões (KL Jay).

As Tiarajú Pablo D'Andrea (2023) indicates in his productions, they address many of the problems that make up the realities of peripheral neighborhoods. In his reading, the author tells us that such territories are the background for the overwhelming majority of the stories told. Still according to him, in proposing the visibility of low-income neighborhoods in the context of the 1990s, the group had multiple purposes, such as revealing the extermination of peripheral black youth, exposing the police violence present in these spaces, challenging the stigmas promoted by the elite and popular television programs and, thus, overcoming the invisibility that affected these territories, while aiming to show the potential of the subjects who live there.

The gesture carried out by Racionais MC's meets a series of other expressions that concern the historical social mobilization of black communities (Gonzalez, 2020). As Lélia Gonzalez (2020) explains, we have, in the second half of the 1970s, the consolidation of the Unified Black Movement (MNU), which appears guided by demands that focus on confrontation with racism and the inequalities that are established from it. According to her, black women played an important role in this articulation, while, faced with their triply marginalized political experiences (race, class, and gender) and the failure to encompass the entirety of their demands in classical feminist movements or in the MNU, these subjects decided to also organize internally, giving light to the Black Women's Movement in the Brazilian context.

Although speaking from a North American perspective, when reflecting on the potential of knowledge produced by black feminists, Patricia Hill Collins (2016) presents us with a relevant concept to think about the condition of these women in their participation in different groups of marginal intellectualities: *foreign from within*¹. By bringing up this group – as well as others who share a similar status of *outsider* –, Collins (2019) draws our attention to the possibility of readings that denounce aspects of reality that are often neglected by more conventional approaches (Collins, 2016). Based on this interpretation, this article seeks to reflect: how can black feminist authors contribute with a reading of the work of Racionais MC's, considering their speeches and also readings about the contexts in which they are inserted?

1 Guimarães-Silva (2023, p. 42) helps us understand this term by translating it to "foreign from within". The professor explains that we can understand outsiders as people who circulate well in a hegemonic group, but who are not necessarily part that constitutes it in its essence – remembering that the foreigner is the "outsider". Take domestic workers as an example. Although they sometimes provide services to the families that have hired them for many years, they are commonly associated with "almost family" people. They are subjects that are there, but they are not part of it. This place of Other offers these women a different perspective of the unfolding of the social relations of power established in this space.



To this end, considering that thinkers of black feminism have expended considerable energy in the struggle for the valorization of the production of knowledge from the margins, we understand that the authors summoned for the construction of this article provide us with a relevant arsenal of sensitive theoretical and methodological keys applicable to the work of Racionais MC's, since their productions also promote relevant strategic axes in the destabilization of the colonial order (Rodrigues; Nunes; Barros, 2021).

With this in mind, we have here a path that runs through the importance of experience for black feminism and the dialogue of these women's experiences with those of other social groups. Thus, we will think about how motherhood and male childhood are related subjects of interest to these researchers (hooks, 2022), and then we will investigate about the youth that masculinity, shaped by racism, tends to create. Thinking about the need for expression of these young people, we will discuss the Hip Hop movement (hooks, 2019) and the importance of poetry (Lorde, 2019), essential to rap music. Finally, we will address critical fabulation (Hartman, 2022) as a counter-historical methodological procedure of resistance of marginal narratives. Methodologically, we elaborated a procedure that considers the construction of the subjectivities of these subjects (hooks, 2022), the empowerment of their existences (Collins, 2019), and the fabulation (Hartman, 2022) of the readings of the scenarios in which they are inserted.

From this, we propose an analysis based on an excerpt from the documentary "*Racionais: Das Ruas de São Paulo pro Mundo*" (Racionais MC's: From the Streets of São Paulo), released by Netflix in November 2022 and directed by Juliana Vicente. At the end, we present our final remarks.

2 Facing racism with poetry: theoretical-analytical keys offered by black feminism intellectuals

Patricia Hill Collins (2019) explains that "the journey of black women goes through the understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class that intersect" (p. 25), that is, we speak of collective experiences when we consider racism as a marker at the center of our experience.

In this path, with our eyes focused on the ways of existing/resisting and the epistemologies proposed by black women, we resort to what Angela Figueiredo (2020) suggests when affirming that experience appears as a fundamental term to think about the "decolonial black feminist unsubmitive epistemology," which proposes the valorization of knowledge built in everyday life and thinking about the potentiality of knowledge produced by the margins. For the author, the maxim "the personal is political" shows the connection between personal, individual, and collective experience. Thus, lived experience stands out here as an important source of knowledge and archive.



In dialogue with this statement, Silvana Bispo (2011) tells us that authors such as Beatriz Nascimento, Sueli Carneiro, and Lélia Gonzalez have been incisively denouncing for decades the situations of vulnerability, marginalization, and violence that black communities face. For the researcher, black women dedicate their lives to various forms of political activism, in an attempt to promote collective benefits, occupying spaces such as “community leaderships, domestic workers’ associations, women’s and *quilombola* organizations, spiritual leaderships, teachers, labor unionists, singers, activists, actresses, researchers, writers, among others” (Bispo, 2011, p. 120).

In this sense, they recognize and face the challenges imposed by the annihilation of their bodies and of those around them (Bispo, 2011), “at home”: in their churches, neighborhoods, communities. The political potentiality of the occupation of these spaces is undeniable, mainly considering their formative and emancipatory function. From this, Bispo (2011) understands that empowerment, for them, is not restricted only to women, but has an impact and relevance throughout the community, since racism affects everyone, even if in different ways when added to other markers.

So, when we observe the periphery from the perspective of these subjects, we inevitably need to focus on other groups that necessarily intimately constitute their daily lives and relationships. When we think of black men and boys, there is no way to disarticulate their demands from those of these women, as they are their children, partners, family members, and often aggressors. Motherhood appears as one of the issues strongly considered when we think about black feminism (Carneiro, 2003) and, along with this, it seems important to think about the construction of the childhood of these children. According to Bispo (2011), it is not possible to fight for the autonomy of black women without addressing the issues that also marginalize men affected by racism. This theoretical nexus becomes even more intriguing when we consider confronting racial violence that reaches young black men as one of the main articulations of black feminism.

According to bell hooks (2022), black boys tend to be exposed to the idea that they live in a hostile world, which does not want their success and that is determined to ensure their failure. She also says that the media, above all, often mobilizes information of this type. However, even before being impacted by such influence, most of these boys already face emotional violence, at home and at school (hooks, 2022), since they are humiliated daily and, in our culture, there is only minimal concern for the well-being of these subjects when minors commit serious acts of violence. Also, hooks (2022) points out that violence committed by white boys tends to be seen as a psychological problem that can be treated, while black boys who act in the same way are often labeled as criminals and punished severely².

² We can understand this better when we look, for example, at the Marcus Vinícius case, in which a 14-year-old boy was murdered by the police while going to school in uniform. In addition to being associated with a drug dealer – which is particularly interesting to us here –, an account of his mother, Bruna da Silva, stands out in an interview with the influencer and communicator Gabi Oliveira. She says that after being shot, on the way to the hospital and in his last hours of life, the boy clung to his backpack, with great concern that the police would find it and put drugs there. This relates to a “protocol” of existence, a story that has been repeatedly told, that produces “modes” of behavior that



Therefore, black boys, more than any other group of children, are pressured to abandon their childhood, to give vent to the construction of a subjectivity embodied in the form of a patriarchal masculinity that is difficult to achieve (hooks, 2022), but that emerges mutated with genes of the conditions and possibilities of each context. When we consider children and adolescents who grew up abandoned by the government in low-income neighborhoods of São Paulo in the 1980s, violence, drugs, and premature labor are accessible and seductive.

In dialogue with this argument, regarding the finish line of the production of this youth, hooks (2019) explains that, in vulnerable spaces, the real bodies of black men are often the target of cruelty, either by white racist violence, intra-community violence, overwork, or the effects of addictions and/or diseases. She says that these individuals face considerable challenges when trying to articulate and recognize their own pain, since they lack public space and a social discourse that authorizes them to discuss their experiences, impressions, and knowledge in an appropriate way. The Hip Hop movement appears, then, as a resource capable of welcoming them and allowing exchanges between similar people.

While recognizing the importance of Hip Hop culture, hooks (2019) explains that, when young black men gain visibility by cultural expressions such as rap, they not necessarily get a means to explore their anguish. Although these cultural niches often address themes of resistance to racism, they also have the ability to perpetuate stereotypes of black masculinity, in a way centered on power and pleasure, sometimes to the detriment of issues more related to the ways in which they construct their identities (hooks, 2019). The author points out that the emergence of rap and breaking in marginalized communities are related to an attempt to gain recognition and public voice, but that these expressions are often used to reproduce sexism and misogyny³, reinforcing a patriarchal paradigm of hegemonic masculinity, which seeks to assert power while minimizing the critical narratives of black men and their experiences.

In the work of Racionais MC's, we can find traces of a sexism that appears eventually and that is shown in the presence and absence of discussions about the roles of black women in their lives. Both in the documentary and in their vast work, the group is very grateful and close to the

even on a deathbed are required from these boys. See: A LUTA DE UMA MÃE CONTRA AS FAKE NEWS. Gabi Oliveira – De Pretas. [S. l.: s. n.], 18 ago. 2020. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=128mlvxS-tc>. Accessed on: Oct. 8, 2025.

3 The song “*Mulheres Vulgares*” (Vulgar Women) from the album *Holocausto Urbano* [Urban Holocaust] (1990), by Racionais MC's, evidenced a vision of the group. The song is no longer part of the group's repertoire, but remains available on all platforms occupied by their discography. When asked about this topic, Mano Brown told journalist Anna Virginia Balloussier, in an interview for Folha de S. Paulo: “There's songs I don't sing anymore. The other day one was playing, and I was like, ‘stooop, we're gonna be lynched, check out the moment now in Brazil! Black women will kill me tomorrow, we can never say stuff like that again’”. He added: “You see, it's been 25 years, forgive me, I was just a boy, it was another Brazil, I didn't have a daughter. We had a really sexist view”. Thus, we can observe that there is indeed a self-criticism, which arises as an effect of the claim for respect demanded by the Brazilian Black Women's Movement. Balloussier, Ana Virgínia. ‘Tem música que não canto mais’, diz Mano Brown sobre letras machistas, *Folha de S. Paulo*, São Paulo, 13 dez. 2017. Available from: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/paywall/login.shtml?https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2017/12/1942874-tem-musica-que-nao-canto-mais-diz-mano-brown-sobre-letras-machistas.shtml>. Accessed on: Oct. 12, 2024.



women who took care of them: their mothers, their producer, their business manager. In their work as a whole, there are more mentions of mothers and, in the documentary, of other women. But can the value of black women be measured only by the care they take in their lives?

In the documentary, the romantic partners of the members of Racionais are never mentioned, even if Eliane Dias, in addition to being a business manager, has been Brown's wife for more than three decades, that is, since when they still had no visibility nor money. Moreover, all members of the group have children, and information and mentions of the women who were in charge of caring for these children, so that they could work, are rare.

Given the almost exclusive attention given to their mothers (in the case of Mano Brown and Ice Blue, solo) in the group's work, it is up to us to ask: is the daily life of these men not fundamentally crossed by the action of these women? Did sexism, aligned with racism, not pass before their eyes, in their concerts, in their neighborhoods, in contact with the "boys," at school? When looking at neighbors, friends, cousins? Have domestic workers vanished from the horizon of Racionais? We need to acknowledge a limitation and erasure reflected in the representation of these women in their lyrics.

However, even with the need for attention to these points, hooks (2019) states that rap is able to establish an arena where young black men can claim space and visibility and tell their own stories, even if it is within the confines of a social environment that often denies them recognition and dignity.

In this same way, Audre Lorde (2019), when defining poetry "as enlightenment, since it is through poetry that we give names to those ideas that – before the poem – have no name or form, that are about to be born, but are already felt" (p. 45), understands the fragment of experience as the source of true poetry, which creates thought, just as the dream generates the concept, sensation gives rise to the idea, and knowledge to understanding.

This point is especially interesting in our work, because we are inserted in a very intimate *corpus* of poetry, since we talked to artists of rap (which unites rhythm and poetry). According to Lorde (2019), as we learn to be more tolerant of the intimacy of research and accept the transformations it promotes, as well as learn to use the fruits of this research to strengthen ourselves, fears that dominate our existence and impact the construction of our silences begin to lose their influence on us. In this context, the author explains that poetry goes beyond language, presenting itself as the intense distillation of human experience:

It creates the kind of light upon which we base our hopes and dreams of survival and change, first as language, then as Idea, and then as more tangible action. It is poetry that we use to name what has yet no name, and which only then can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are paved by our poems, carved into the rocks that are our daily experiences (Lorde, 2019, p. 47).

The author points out that there is the possibility of learning to respect our feelings and



express them in words and, in this sense, where there is not yet the maturation of this language, it is poetry that contributes to shaping it. Poetry is not limited to the dream and imagination; it is the compass that directs us to a horizon that colors and often narrates the experience of our lives (Lorde, 2019). It lays the foundation for transformation, serving as a bridge over the fear of the unknown and the erased:

The white patriarchs told us: “I think, therefore I am”. The black mother inside each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: “I feel, therefore I am free”. Poetry creates a language to express and record this revolutionary demand, the implementation of freedom (Lorde, 2019, p. 48).

So, for the author, “on the front line of our passage to change there is only poetry to allude to the possibility made real. Our poems articulate the implications of ourselves [...], our fears, our hopes, our innermost terrors” (Lorde, 2019, p. 48). Thus, we understand speech, art, expression, presence, intimacy, security as indispensable factors to think about confronting the raciality device. With the sum of these elements, it is much more feasible to build empowered, critical, and mobilized subjects for the construction and elaboration of a more equitable and respectful world (at the micro and, who knows, macro level).

Thinking of experience as key and poetry as a place capable of enhancing expression, which produces record and also history, it is worth mentioning the concept of “critical fabulation,” proposed by Saidiya Hartman (2022). The author presents us with a method that aims to support those who strive to narrate the history of marginalized, subaltern, and enslaved people. For the historian, these subjects need to confront the power and authority of archives, as well as the limits they impose on what is possible to know, on who is considered relevant and who carries the weight and legitimacy of being a historical agent.

Hartman (2022) sought ways to ascertain how the lives of the women she is willing to talk about took place and, when resorting to the documents available for verification, she realized that these women were always portrayed as a problem. From this, she offers us a counter-narrative that exists far from the judgments and categories that condemned them to surveillance, punishment, and oppression. The author presents us with accounts of the beauty of the experiments of those who make living an art – designed by those who are often seen as promiscuous, wild, and rebellious. Therefore, she offers us a resource capable of recovering insurgent territory, rescuing the real rebellion (not) registered in the records.

She explains that the principle that guides her work is that “young black women were the radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways of living and never stopped considering how the world could be different” (Hartman, 2022, p. 13). If “outsiders” call the streets and alleys that make up the universe of these women “ghetto,” from black women’s lens, they are simply the place where they live (Hartman, 2022). The neighborhood is read as a dark tangle, while it also materializes an African city, the Black quarter, the native zone (Hartman, 2022).



Despite talking about a different historical and social context, Racionais MC's does a work that approaches that of Hartman (2022). Let us think about it. The historian talks about a context in which the construction of these peripheral black zones occurs in a way very marked by racial segregation and the establishment of areas openly intended for these people⁴. In Brazil, the construction of low-income neighborhoods takes place with more "racial subtlety," although strongly marked by the action of a biopower that establishes notions of Being and Other defined by coloniality and masked by the myth of racial democracy (Carneiro, 2023). This is even more evident given the fact that the ethnic-racial issue is sometimes neglected in Brazilian studies that are dedicated to discussing the dynamics of urban organization (Campos, 2012).

Thus, there is a process of fabulation that is proposed differently from that expressed by Hartman – with other references, mobilizations and constructions of individualities and collectivities –, but that, in a lot of ways, flirts with what the author proposes, when we consider subjects who position themselves as able to reimagine/retell the now, in their music, and, in the documentary, retell the story "already told," even by themselves. They fabulate from what they experience and what they imagine, they dream for themselves and for their communities. They worship the departed and ascribe new narratives to the past, with new ends, new possibilities of existence for their own – living and dead. Fabulation is a movement that brings together the fictional and the historical to imagine what cannot be verified, claim their lives in the present, and elaborate a collective biography of the subjects immersed in that reality.

3 Methodology

In this aspect, methodologically, based on the theoretical framework that precedes us, we propose the formulation of a table that brings together three central axes in our analysis. We understand that thinking about the ways in which the "subjectivities" of peripheral black men and boys are constructed is a key point. Living in a black, poor, and peripheral territory brings deprivation, resistance to violence, and the development of strategic skills to circumvent such reality. Therefore, we propose a reading about the "constructions of subjectivities". Then, we think about the capacity of the subjects from material and symbolic peripheries to rethink themselves and build paths that resist racial violence. We have seen that there is a resistance movement that appears in the "political empowerment" (Collins, 2019) of these people, another important reading key for us. Finally, we discuss language and art - poetry - as sensitive and revolutionary tools to think about

⁴ As an example of this, we can reflect on what Tricia Rose (2021) addresses when she states that Hip Hop arises in a post-segregationist context, marking the transformation of abandoned territories, technologies, and cultures into resources for the empowerment and satisfaction of these people. The authors tells us that "its first practitioners grew up at the end of the Great Society, in the decay of America's brief commitment to black civil rights, and during the early Reagan-Bush era. In Hip Hop, these abandoned parts, people, and institutions were agglutinated and then united not only as sources of survival, but as sources of pleasure. Hip Hop replicates and reimagines the experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates the urban space by samples, attitude, dance, style, and sound effects" (Rose, 2021, p. 40).



confronting such violence. In the midst of what we argue, we find our last key, “critical fabulation,” which arises as a possibility to propose new readings about their realities and histories. Racionais MC's lives now, whereas it has also lived “nows” that are no longer here. In moments of difficulty, to give a name, a story, to produce your own people as heroes is a fabulous impulse.

Thus, considering the scope of the documentary, its alignment with the theoretical framework in this work, and the space we have for the construction of this text, we chose to analyze the album “*Raio X do Brasil*” (X-Ray of Brazil) as we will see in the next section.

4 Analyses

The album “*Raio X do Brasil*” was released in 1993, with the songs: *Introdução* (Introduction), *Fim de Semana no Parque* (Weekend at the Park), *Parte II* (Part II), *Mano na Porta do Bar* (Bro at the Bar Door), *Homem na Estrada* (Man on the Road), *Júri Racional* (Rational Jury), *Fio da Navalha* (Razor's Edge), and *Agradecimentos* (Acknowledgments). There, they say that, despite the rise of their careers, the process of “reaching the heart” of the target audiences (black, poor, and *favela* people) was marked by racism and many difficulties in accessing spaces – something that extended to those who attended their concerts. The speeches about this work take place between the minute 00:27:57 and 00:50:07 of the documentary and are presented below in Table 1.



Table 1 – “Raio X do Brasil”(1993)

Construction of subjectivities	Political empowerment	Fabulation of their stories
<p>Mano Brown: We are armed and dangerous. Whoever wants to can come. Like, all gang thinking. And that's why it got that fame.</p>	<p>KL Jay: At the time, a lot of poor people... The poor and black people identified as shit with that.</p>	<p>Mano Brown: Back then, we liked to smoke a joint on the highway, listening to Jorge Ben Jor on tape. I said, “Man, I wanna be like this guy, you feel me? I wish I could sing like that”. I could visualize my hood listening to his songs, you know? It's not so easy to be able to add a more political idea with a more danceable rhythm, it was a knowledge that we didn't have yet, you know? The guy's vocabulary was badass and his vocabulary already came with rhythm. I connected myself to a vocal right from the inside, in the middle of the harmony, like this: [singing] Carol, Carolina...”. I was like “Wow! That's crazy, this is Arabic, this vocal is Arabian. He went to Africa!”. These are the songs that made my head during the making of the album “Raio X do Brasil”.</p>
<p>Ice Blue: when I started getting these fees of mine along with record money, I didn't know anything... I was like, “what am I going to do with this money?”. Milton put the money on the table, and I said, “Wow, Milton, what's that? Where do I go with that money? No, bro, I'm not carrying that money around, no. For God's sake, I'm not going to walk around with that much money, no!”. “This money is yours!” I was like “Wow! My money? Is all that money mine?” When I bought a brand new motorcycle, I arrived with it without a license plate, and the guys were saying: “Bro, you gonna show off? The guys wont' get it!” I said, “Man, just because we're black, political, we can't have a nice car? We can't have a cool bike? What the fuck? So I'm gonna get the fuck out of here, become a thug, and get my shit together. Is that it? So, can I ride my bike? I didn't buy it with anyone's money, I bought it with my own money. Cool?” Alright. Then, when the guys thought I was chill, I came with a green Silverado pickup truck! Wow! I said “Bitch, I needed to buy a car to take my bikes, bro”.</p>	<p>Mano Brown: That was the great revolution, that's when it got popular.</p>	<p>Mano Brown: It broke the first obstacle, which was to enter the hood. Until then, it didn't go in. Who was interested in those ideas? “Voz Ativa” (Active Voice), “Negro Limitado” (Limited Nigga)... Some students, some teachers, some experts... Some. Always a few. When we recorded “Homem na Estrada” (Man on the Road) it unlocked it.</p>



Construction of subjectivities	Political empowerment	Fabulation of their stories
Mano Brown: I was already living at Cohab. When I thought my life was going to get better, living at Cohab, I discovered that it could be worse. Cohab was tougher even though it had pavement. It was less romantic, you know? Strange things happened.	Ice Blue: We arrived at the police station, the police chief was, like, terrified "who is responsible for this? Who's the cop in charge? Look at the trouble you brought to my precinct. There's three lawyers, a senator, two congressmen, and the mayor calling me". That's when Racionais showed strength.	Mano Brown: Then I managed to reach the heart of Brazilians, you know? In the soul of Brazilians. How are you going to talk about black and white, poor and rich to Brazilians? They're not from the Bronx. They weren't born with the bathroom written "no black and no white," you know? It's another vision, it's another sensibility, okay?
Serafim (Zimbabwe record label): Everybody was happy, because the songs were playing, we were selling the LPs... And Brown "Hey, Serafim, here's the thing: I gotta talk to you. Well, Serafa, here's the deal, man: I'm upset, you know, man? Oh, shit, Serafa! Man, what the fuck? My music's playing on every radio station... it's playing on a boy's radio, it's playing... it's playing even on a priest's radio. I didn't make my music to play everywhere. Why are they playing it? I want you to call the guys there to get my music off the air". I said "I'm not even in charge to put it in! How am I going to call now to take it off the air?"	Ice Blue: We talked about everything they didn't want to hear. The way we behaved was exactly the way they didn't want us not to behave.	Edi Rock: After so much persecution, the first plane flight of the band and such... Damn... We're here, hey, we got there, right, man? Right? It's not possible, man... It was with Racionais, right? I had never flown before.
Mano Brown: It mobilized the entire precinct in the neighborhood where I was going to sing, you know? The guys talked like this "anyone can sing here, except these guys. These guys, in my precinct, they don't sing". It was a matter of honor for the police at the time. "Anyone can come, except these guys". Risk of getting shot on the way out, brother.		Edi Rock: And we recorded it and we did a concerts. We sang it, the audience repeated it, 50,000 people repeated it, 100,000 people repeated it. At a concert in Anhangabaú, for example, in which security was the police, the audience chanted "I don't trust the police, fuckass race". What happens? The fucking show was over. The police would end the fucking show, you know?
Ice Blue: And tha's why it got that fame. "Oh, the guys, Racionais... Oh!", because we arrived in the places, they were hostile places. We didn't go to play from the bridge there, we were gonna play deep down there, where the shit was going on. So, there's no point in us getting there [unprepared, unarmed]... No. We had to go big, all ready.		Mrs. Lourdes (Ice Blue's mother): I was in the kitchen, the phone rings "tell your son that we are going to kill him, he will learn not to talk about the police anymore. They're thinking they're so big". Then I said, "before you kill him, you come kill me first". My spiritual father is called Ogum-de-Lei. He's the one who takes care of us.

Source: Prepared by the author, 2025.

Regarding the ways in which these men experience the world and nurture the relationship with their subjectivity, first, we are struck by the need to be constantly on high alert, armed and



fearing danger. They told us several times about the need to be armed, ready for an imminent conflict with the police, which, in addition to themselves, could victimize their audience. We can observe a portrait of this reality in the song “*Um Homem na Estrada*”:

Criminal Justice is ruthless
They take away your freedom, family, and morals
Even far from the prison complex
They'll forever call you an ex-convict
I don't trust the police, fuckass race!!!
If they find me shot on the sidewalk
They kick my face and spit on me
(*Um Homem na Estrada*, Racionais MC's)

It is still interesting to reflect on how certain accesses became possible for these men, such as the first plane trip or the acquisition of a motorcycle — experiences that, for a long time, were completely disconnected from black and peripheral experiences. By transforming pain and suffering into art, the group was able to break through these barriers and reach these spaces-others, developing another relationship (and tensions that also emerged) with the possibilities of social and economic mobility. Obviously, we can observe fruition and achievement there, but there is also a conflict: how to deal with those who, in the hoods, do not have the same access?

In this path about political empowerment, in the images brought by the work, attention is drawn to the ways in which the audience is mobilized by the discourses triggered by the group. At one point, in a concert that took place in an open place, situated in some poor place, they mention the South Zone and are automatically acclaimed by those who prestige them. These people show pride, belonging and appropriate an identity, for a long time “criminalized”. In the excerpt in question, the artists performed the song “*Fim de Semana no Parque*”. In general terms, the song tells us about the discrepancies between a weekend in locations that have greater purchasing power at the expense of others immersed in conditions of greater vulnerability.

So far, on previous albums, we had seen a narrated perspective of history – which is also very valuable, as Collins (2019) and Lorde (2019) tell us. However, in “*Raio X do Brasil*,” we have a movement that closely approaches the subjects who live on the periphery of São Paulo and, more specifically, in the South Zone.

The group consists of two members from the South Zone of the city of São Paulo⁵ and who, not coincidentally, were raised without the presence of their fathers and had very difficult childhoods. Regarding the other two members, we have black and poor people who, even if with more access than Ice Blue and Mano Brown, still lived their issues. In addition to this theorized

⁵ Mano Brown and Ice Blue were born in the South Zone of São Paulo, while KL Jay and Edi Rock are from the North Zone. All came from contexts marked by poverty, although Brown and Blue lived experiences more directly crossed by precariousness and urban vulnerabilities.



place of peripheral life, it is interesting to perceive here the place lived, the place experienced in specific conditions.

In the same path, we can think about the structurality of racism and the ideology that maintains it, when Mano Brown says about the album: “then I managed to reach the heart of Brazilians [...]. How are you going to talk about black and white, poor and rich to Brazilians? They’re not from the Bronx. They weren’t born with the bathroom written “no black and no white,” you know?”. Brazilian-style racism is based on social structures and ideologies that perpetuate inequalities, moving away from the fallacy of racial democracy. For its maintenance, it depends on the support and silencing of the groups that are violated by it, as part of a trap, which deceives, distracts, and corrupts its prey in order to victimize it.

In fact, Capão Redondo⁶ is not the Bronx. It is common for the group to mention its international references by citing people from that territory⁷, but it is interesting and valuable for us to realize how this fabulation (Hartman, 2019) demands from these men critical resources that often extrapolate the place of memory and demand the search for an inventiveness that needs to be matured, built, before anything else. This process, as he explains, occurs with their audience, but at a certain point, it certainly also occurred with the group: Brazilian peripheral black people, in general, are not raised aware of the political dimensions of their bodies. There is terror, misery, the absence of access... There is a self-perception while there is also an external perception that characterizes them as subjects-others (“I am poor, but there is a rich one”; “I am not well received here, but someone else is”). This process of fabulation occurs in a specific way, in the face of the need for a dignifying reading about themselves and their own people – narrative often distanced from their bodies, by the action of the raciality device (Carneiro, 2023).

Still on this path, right when they started talking about this product, Mano Brown explains that, at that moment (early 1990s), he listened a lot to Jorge Ben Jor and, with that, took the singer as a reference to think about the sound of the album. We can see such an impact on the audience, when we see these people dancing and having fun, listening to this sound, even in the midst of precarious territories, that is, we have in these spaces the concretization of escape plans. There, these subjects could exist, dance, smile, and, who knows, even for minutes, forget about the violent reality, immersed in the precarious conditions of the periphery.

From these accounts, we can think about rap as an instrument of empowerment in the lives of peripheral young men, due to the transformation it promotes in the lives of these subjects. It was

6 Capão Redondo is a district in the South Zone of São Paulo, recognized as a *favela* and place of origin of members of Racionais MC's (Mano Brown and Ice Blue). The neighborhood has become one of the strongest symbolic references of the group, as it represents the experiences of inequality, resistance, and peripheral identity that cross their works.

7 Still in the documentary analyzed, Mano Brown reports: “when we started having ambition for the rap thing, automatically, Public Enemy and us, without them knowing that we existed, became one thing, you know? Where Public Enemy walks, I wanna walk too, even if from afar, in thought, you feel me? Then, these names started to show up, you know? Malcolm X and others”.



like that with Racionais MC's since the 1980s and with other people who have come, are coming, will come to this music scene.

5 Final remarks

In this article, we sought to trace a path that sheds light on the relevance of experience in black feminism and the dialogue of these women's experiences with those of other social groups. In this context, we reflected on how motherhood and male childhood are interconnected themes of interest to researchers, such as hooks (2022). Next, we looked at how racism shapes masculinity in youth. From the need for expression of these young men, we addressed Hip Hop and rap (hooks, 2019). Therefore, we explored the relevance of poetry (Lorde, 2019), essential for rap, and, finally, of fabulation (Hartman, 2022), seen as a counter-historical method and a form of resistance of marginalized narratives.

From this theoretical framework and the proposed methodological movement, with the formulation of a table that brings together three central axes in our analysis – construction of subjectivities (hooks, 2022), political empowerment (Collins, 2019), and fabulation of their stories (Hartman, 2022) –, we identified that the presentation of the album “*Raio X do Brasil*” in the documentary “*Racionais: Das Ruas de São Paulo pro Mundo*,” shows how, from the reading of the work of Racionais MC's, guided by black feminist authors, it is possible to understand how racism acts in the construction of the subjectivities presented there, especially when analyzing the childhood and youth of its members, marked by absences, exclusions, and violence. At the same time, the group places itself as a transformation agent by using rap as an instrument of empowerment, producing discourses that destabilize colonial logics and call for collective action. Finally, by mobilizing elements of black Brazilian musicality and proposing areas of escape and reinvention, within the territories of precariousness, Racionais MC's build a fabulation, which tensions reality and opens cracks to imagine other possibilities of existence. This triad – subjectivity, empowerment, and imagination – thus becomes a powerful key to read the group's work and understand its impact on peripheral black youth in Brazil.



References

- BISPO, Silvana Santos. *Feminismos em debate: reflexões sobre a organização do movimento de mulheres negras em Salvador (1978-1997)*. 2011. Dissertação (Mestrado em Estudos Interdisciplinares sobre Mulheres, Gênero e Feminismo) – Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, Bahia, 2011.
- CAMPOS, Andreilino de Oliveira. Questões étnico-raciais no contexto da segregação socioespacial na produção do espaço urbano brasileiro: algumas considerações teórico-metodológicas. In: SANTOS, Renato Emerson dos (org.). *Questões urbanas e racismo*. Petrópolis: DP et Alii; Brasília: ABPN, 2012, p. 68-103.
- CARNEIRO, Sueli. *Dispositivo de racialidade: a construção do outro como não ser como fundamento do ser*. São Paulo: Editora Schwarcz-Companhia das Letras, 2023.
- CARNEIRO, Sueli. Mulheres em movimento. *Estudos avançados*, São Paulo, v. 17, p. 117-133, 2003. Available from: <https://revistas.usp.br/eav/article/view/9948> . Accessed on: Oct. 8, 2025.
- COLLINS, Patricia Hill. Aprendendo com o outsider within: a significação sociológica do pensamento feminista negro. *Revista Sociedade e Estado*, Florianópolis, v. 31, n. 1, jan./abr., 2016.
- COLLINS, Patricia Hill. Por uma política de empoderamento. In: COLLINS, Patricia Hill. *Pensamento Feminista Negro*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019, p. 490-518.
- D'ANDREA, Tiaraju P. Trabalho e periferia na obra dos Racionais. In: VIEIRA, Daniela; SANTOS, Jaqueline L. (org.). *Racionais MC's entre o gatilho e a tempestade*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2023, p. 232-255.
- FIGUEIREDO, Angela. Epistemologia insubmissa feminista negra decolonial. *Tempo e Argumento*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 29, e0102, jan./abr. 2020.
- GUIMARÃES-SILVA, Pâmela. *De Lélia Gonzalez a Marielle Franco: mulheres negras e seus processos comunicacionais interseccionais de resistência*. 2021. Tese (Doutorado em Comunicação Social) – Programa de Pós-graduação em Comunicação Social da Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Minas Gerais, 2021.
- GONZALEZ, Lélia. *Por um feminismo Afro-latino-americano: ensaios, intervenções e diálogos*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2020.
- HARTMAN, Saidiya. *Vidas rebeldes, belos experimentos: histórias íntimas de meninas negras desordeiras, mulheres encrenqueiras e queers radicais*. São Paulo: Fósforo, 2022.
- hooks, bell. *A gente é da hora: homens negros e masculinidades*. Tradução de Vinícius da Silva. São Paulo: Elefante, 2022.
- hooks, bell. Comendo o outro: desejo e resistência In: hooks, bell. *Olhares negros: raça e representação*. São Paulo: Elefante, 2019, p. 56-82.
- LORDE, Audre. *Irmã outsider: ensaios e conferências*. São Paulo: Autêntica Editora, 2019.
- ROSE, Tricia. *Barulho de Preto: Rap e Cultura Negra nos Estados Unidos Contemporâneos*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva S/A, 2021.
- RACIONAIS: Das ruas de São Paulo pro Mundo. Direção: Juliana Vicente. Brasil: Netflix, 2022.



RODRIGUES, Jéssica Silva; NUNES, Larissa Ferreira; BARROS, João Paulo Pereira. Feminismo negro decolonial como metodologia inter(in)ventiva de pesquisa em Psicologia. *Anais do XI Simpósio Brasileiro de Psicologia Política*. Belo Horizonte, 2021. Available from: [www.even3.com.br/anais/sbpp/381815-FEMINISMO-NEGRO-DECOLONIAL-COMO-METODOLOGIA-INTER\(IN\)VENTIVA-DE-PESQUISA-EM-PSICOLOGIA](http://www.even3.com.br/anais/sbpp/381815-FEMINISMO-NEGRO-DECOLONIAL-COMO-METODOLOGIA-INTER(IN)VENTIVA-DE-PESQUISA-EM-PSICOLOGIA) . Accessed on: Jun. 16, 2024.



Academic Biography

Maria Fernanda de Oliveira Ruas - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)
PhD student in the Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.
E-mail: amaferuas@gmail.com

Funding

At the time of writing the thesis, fellow of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (Capes); currently, fellow of the Minas Gerais Research Foundation (Fapemig).

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

The article originates from the dissertation: RUAS, Maria Fernanda de Oliveira. Somos o que somos, cores e valores: a apropriação do território periférico como contra-dispositivo de racialidade, na obra do Racionais MC's. 2025. Dissertação (Mestrado em Comunicação Social) - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, 2025. Available from: <https://repositorio.ufmg.br/items/78487787-58dc-4c57-804e-44d86777d283>. Accessed on: Oct. 6, 2025.

Copyright

Maria Fernanda de Oliveira Ruas

Copyright of the translation

Sabrina Leitzke and Leonardo Maciel

Contribution of authorship (CRediT)

Not applicable

License

This is a paper distributed in Open Access under the terms of the License Creative Commons Attribution 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.pt-br>

**Evaluation Method**

Double Blind Review

Editors

Altemar Di Monteiro
Anderson Feliciano

Peer Review History

Submission date: 15 July 2025

Approval date: 23 September 2025