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Black noise, police brutality, and city landscapes: Noir aesthetics in Kendrick Lamar's "Alright"

CRISTIANE GUEDES (BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY AND UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA)

Abstract

The paper attempts to analyze whether the music video of the song "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar reveals new conceptions of the urban occupation and power relations within Oakland. To conduct this reflection, the author uses a Fanonian analysis of selected scenes from the music video with police officers and an analysis of the aesthetics of Noir cinema present in the music video. The article's argument is that the image of the police helps construct a dichotomous imagery of dangerous places in a city: on one hand, for certain groups, the police can represent the fight against crime; on the other hand, for other groups it represents the danger personified. According to the author, the video not only criticizes police violence but also reclaims urban periphery as an alive space of Black culture.

Keywords: police officer, representation, Noir, Kendrick Lamar, Alright, Oakland, cityscapes.

Introduction

This paper attempts to analyze how the representation of the tension between police and Black society in the video clip of the song "Alright" (Kendrick Lamar, 2015), the latter part of the album To Pimp a Butterfly (TPAB), reveals a new conception of spatial power relations in Oakland according to a Fanonian analysis. The purpose of this work is also to investigate whether the music video in fact proposes a new representation of the city regarding the tension between police and peripheral Black people. [1] To pursue this endeavor, it is important to conduct a close analysis of the video clip especially of scenes including with police officers. Theoretically, I will draw upon the notion of the split in the colonial world (Fanon 28) and follow the argument that film noir styles are being appropriated in the video in order to present a new and urbanized perspective of Black images on the screen (Diawara 526). The theories of Fanon will be the base for a methodologically complex discourse analysis that considers not only the images of the music video but also the lyrics of the song, the music sampling used, and the positioning of the song "Alright" within the music album. The paper at hand conducts a deeper analysis of the relations between police violence, ideology, and urban space represented in the video.

According to Livien Ameel, cities are usually understood in terms of centrality and density, respecting an implicit opposition between a (suburban, rural, colonial) hinterland or periphery and a city center. However, "as urban sprawl and the implosion of post-industrial cities have shown, a sense of peripheral urbanity may, however, be as essential to contemporary urban centres" (1). In this sense, this paper will focus on the representation of Oakland considering the dichotomy between center and periphery and following the hypothesis that Lamar's music video presents a new perspective on the occupation of the city regarding Black lives.

My argument is that the image of the police helps construct a dichotomous imagery of dangerous places in a city: on one hand, for certain groups, the police can represent the fight against crime; for other groups, it represents the danger itself. This appears true since "in the colonies the legal and institutional interlocutor of the colonized, the spokesman of the settler and the regime of oppression is the gendarme or the

soldier" (Fanon 28). Furthermore, according to Douglas Muzzio, scholars on urban studies have shown that cities' representation in audiovisual art such as cinema not only shapes the public's imagination of cities but also the way people understand and experience them (189). In that sense, I suggest that Lamar's music video not only criticizes the police violence in the cities but also reclaims periphery as an alive urban space.

Historical contextualization

Lamar's choice of recording and shooting the video in Oakland is not arbitrary, but rather symbolic: the video appears as a creative and critical response to Oakland's part in protest culture. In the music video, which comes close to a short film, the connection between the cityscape and cultural expressions is represented, exploring the city's composition and revealing Oakland's socio-racial tensions. To observe how these dynamics are perceived in terms of spatial organization, it is important to understand the context of the city, since "the suburban 'white noose' surrounding the urban black community stood metaphorically for metropolitan inequality and segregation" (Self 256); in other words, even in the organization of cities, it is possible to observe socio-racial distinctions.

Oakland is historically recognized for its duality of resistance and oppression through police brutality. The city has been plagued by police violence and repression towards social movements but has also been known for its protest culture (Epstein 66). There is a strong connection between the city and the hip-hop scene, highlighting the large number of rappers who supported the city's American soccer team, the Raiders, in the late 90s and early 2000s (Bracelin). Since the 1960s, with the influence of the Civil Rights and Black power movement, Oakland also has had a great importance for the development of social ideas in the United States, being the birthplace of the Black Panther Party (BPP) (Self 218). The latter group was responsible for a "form of black nationalism commonly known as revolutionary nationalism" (Jessica Harris 409). As Donna Jean Murch points out,

> In July 1972, the Black Panther started publishing a multipart series entitled "Oakland - The Base of Operation." The title had a double meaning that referred both to the Party's decision to focus all of its resources on the city of its birth and to Oakland's status as a major disembarkation port for the Vietnam War. The Black Panther explained, 'Sitting on the northern coast of America's most militarized, industrialized, most technologically developed state, California, Oakland operates as a base for much of America's dirty work, with relatively little attention.'" (203)

The strong political agitations of the Black community in Oakland since the 1960s' highlight the great protest culture in the city. Moreover, a few years before the release of Lamar's video in 2015, the Occupy Oakland movement took place and, later, the United States (US) saw the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, in 2013. Occupy Oakland initially was a protest against corporate greed and economic inequality, which used the strategy of occupying spaces in the city, beginning with the famous encampment at Frank H. Ogawa Plaza on October 10, 2011 (King 20). Just a few years later, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged criticizing the systematic violence on the rise against Black people. However, to better understand the specificity of both protests in the Bay Area is important to expose the region's political economy based on gentrification and the speculative real estate boom it suffered, which has contributed to the notion of "how security is produced in the region" (Maharawal 340). Maharawal explains his approach with the following words:

> I analyze Black Lives Matter protests in the Bay Area as protests against a racialized security regime designed to protect capitalist urban redevelopment, tech-led property speculation, gentrification and the regional restructuring of the Bay Area's economy. I understand racialized police violence as a means of creating 'safe' spaces for capital investment and gentrification in the region (since at least the mid-1990s). Or as activists from the Anti-

> Police Terror Project bluntly say: 'police are the shock troops of gentrification'. (340)

According to the critic, the racialized aspect of police violence is connected to the construction of the space dichotomy in cities, regarding 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces for investment. Further, police forces would actively work in favor of gentrification in the cities. The author points out that BLM protests, far beyond being a mere expression of a national movement against racist police violence, also had local and regional idiosyncrasies closely connected to the political challenges of specific places.

Considering that the hip-hop culture was born within the tension between the growth of modernization and the increase in the number of slumlords, the urban space became inadequate for those who suffered the rise in the redlined loans from the banks, further marginalizing Black people and their artistic and cultural expressions (Berry 232). This historical context contributes to a better understanding of the intertexts and political commentary present in Lamar's music video "Alright". Recorded in Oakland in 2015, shortly after the two events mentioned above, the video criticizes police violence and structural racism.

Short summary of the video's narrative

Directed by Colin Tilley, Kendrick Lamar's music video, "Alright", was released in 2015, as part of the critically acclaimed album "To Pimp a Butterfly" (TPAB). The video begins with a black and white shot of the Oakland Bay Bridge. In the audio, parts of "Loving me is complicated" are intertwined with the scream from the song "U", both from TPAB. The screams are played while the spectator watches a black ceiling in which white lights stand out. From then on, the first minute and a half of the music video shows a city in apocalyptic fashion; either desert-like or with people breaking up public spaces. Meanwhile, the poem "I remembered you was conflicted" is recited (00:00:00 - 00:01:30). In a later interview, Lamar also pointed out that the poem is directed to 2pac (MTV).

The poem is built up progressively throughout the album as it is divided into several parts and recited in different songs. This gives the album a specific conceptual structure that helps the viewer to understand not only the order of the songs but also the connections and the common thread between them. It is important to note, though, that the complete poem is only present in the music video version of "Alright" and it reads like this:

> I remembered you was conflicted
> Misusing your influence
> Sometimes I did the same
> Abusing my power full of resentment
> Resentment that turned into a deep depression
> Found myself screaming in the hotel room
> Lucifer was all around
> So I kept running
> Until I found my safe haven
> I was trying to convince myself the stripes I got
> Making myself realize what my foundation was
> But while my loved ones were fighting the continuous war back in the city, I was entering a new one
> A war that was based on apartheid and discrimination
> (00:00:30 - 00:01:42)

From the penultimate line of the poem onward, the video shows a policeman violently trying to handcuff a Black man who escapes. At this point, the policeman draws his gun and shoots the fugitive. This shot takes the viewer to the formal beginning of the song, in which a presentation of the video appears, as if it were a movie, mentioning its author Kendrick Lamar, its title "Alright", and the direction by Colin Tilley, above a black and white image of a lamppost with the cityscape of Oakland behind it (00:01:30 - 00:01:53).

The music video begins with four Black men in a car listening to songs and singing rap. By zooming out, the viewer realizes that the car is actually being carried by four white police officers. The screen goes completely dark and all you hear is the sound of car tires dragging

on the ground. The image returns with Lamar driving while accompanied by a child that throws money into the air (00:01:55 - 00:02:45). Throughout the video there are images of Black people on the outskirts, dancing and expressing Black culture. Everyone seems happy, partying, and Lamar appears on screen floating, literally flying through the city as they celebrate. It seems fair to conclude that these scenes take place on the outskirts of the city, because in some scenes the skyscrapers of Oakland appear far away in the background. For most part of the music video there are no further scenes with police officers. On the contrary, the police car appears "occupied" by Black children who dance on it.

After the representation of intriguing cityscape images of Oakland and the resistance of the historically marginalized Black culture, the music video ends with the reappearance of the police figure, as Kendrick Lamar stands above the lamppost we already saw at the beginning of the video (00:05:35). Since downtown Oakland can be seen in the background the viewer understands that the action takes place on the periphery of the city. The police officer gets out of his car. He is armed. Looking at Lamar, the officer forms the shape of a pistol with one of his hands and simulates a shot with his fingers. The plot twist of the entire music video is that, although the shot is fictional and metaphysical, Kendrick Lamar appears shot in the chest and falls from the lamppost to the ground. During the fall, the poem from the beginning of the song is recited again. As Lamar hits the ground, he smiles at the camera (00:05:50 - 00:06:40).

"Alright" also serves as a sample for another song, "Blood", by the same composer on a future album entitled Damn. It is about a blind woman who seems to have lost something and the lyrical self, interpreted here as Lamar himself, tries to help her; out of the blue she shoots him. "Blood" ends with an allusion to the US news followed by the sample from "Alright": "Lamar stated his views on police brutality with that line in the song, quote: 'And we hate the popo, wanna kill us in the street fo' sho'." (Blood, 00:01:42 - 00:01:56). According to Mair, in the song "a female voice replies with disgust, 'Oh please, ugh, I don't like it'" (1). This reinforces not only the police violence already addressed in "Alright" but also highlights the participation of the elites in perpetuating the genocide of young Black people due to racism.

Despite the various possibilities of interpretation arising from "Alright" and its music video, the work's reception is generally linked to a strong message of hope and determination to overcome adversities which is also "evidenced by the song's adoption in protests", according to Noriko Manabe (2019 par. 1.3). Moreover, it was nominated for four categories at the 58th Grammy Awards, winning Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song. As Manabe sums up various critical responses,

> Much of the praise stems from the song's political import. In its summary of the song for the Best Hip-Hop Songs list, Billboard notes its presence in Black Lives Matter and the Million Man March, adding, "it would be criminal to overlook the social struggle that K. Dot [Lamar] captured from the frontlines with 'Alright'" (Platon and Rhys 2015). As Matthew Schnipper (2015) notes in Pitchfork, "It has soundtracked a movement." Generally interpreted as a message of hope during a dark time, the song has been called the "unofficial anthem if the Black Lives Matter movement" (O'Connor 2017), the "New Black National Anthem" to replace "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (Harris 2015) and its generation's "We Shall Overcome", making it "the most important rap record of the decade so far" (Garrett 2015). (par. 1.1)

The choice to shoot the video in the city of Oakland is highly symbolic due to the history of the place, which is closely linked to Black resistance against social and institutional violence. The song and music video represent powerful critical works of art against police brutality and the socio-racial distinction of cityscapes in the United States.

Noir by noirs [2]

The aesthetics of "Alright" has an important role for the message created in the video clip. Tilley, the music video director, and Lamar use film Noir aesthetics in order to frame the

narrative. In the first 30 seconds, the music video depicts urban spaces as a desertic space. However, the music video demonstrates all the vivacity of Black life and a strong presence of Black culture that permeates these spaces, previously imagined as apocalyptic. In this regard, the white and black colors used in Noir reinforces the issue of the city's duality.

The music video begins with a shot of the Oakland Port, which can be interpreted as a reference to the "dialectical interplay between protest and repression" observed during the Occupy Oakland's movement, since the "police miscalculations in the course of trying to maintain control of public space led them to temporarily lose control of the city and the Port, building mass support for the movement in the process" (King 20). During the protests of Occupy Oakland, in 2011, a general strike shut down the Port. Its noir-style representation in the music video reinforces the conflict over control of public space and economic inequality in Oakland. Also, the appropriation of film Noir by Black people orient the style toward a representation of a Black way of life and resistance. According to Diawara, the "content criticism of noir by noirs is more appropriate to analyze ... the specificity of Black culture in the text ... making Black people and their cultures visible. In a broader sense, Black film noir shines light (as in daylight) on Black people" (Diawara 526-7).

Defining Noir is certainly an arduous task. It is said that the style emerged in the United States from a synthesis of German Expressionism and hard-boiled fiction, experiencing its prime time between 1941 and 1958. Still, it is possible to recognize "certain visual and narrative traits" that define the genre (Naremore 12). According to Naremore, "nothing links together all the things discussed as noir – not the theme of crime, not a cinematographic technique, not even a resistance to Aristotelian narratives or happy endings" (13). Borde and Chaumeton maintain that "film noir is a film of death, in all senses of the word" (5). Hence, according to their point of view, the one constant in film Noir is the presence of crime:

It's the presence of crime that gives film noir its most distinctive stamp. "The dynamism of violent death," as Nino Frank put it, and the expression is excellent. Blackmail, Informing, theft, or drug trafficking weave the plot of an adventure whose final stake is death. (Borde and Chaumeton 5)

Regarding death Lamar suffers a symbolic one in the music video, by a shot that comes from the policeman's hands – not his gun. The scenes are gradually darkened, allowing Lamar and the police officer to alternate on the screen. Since the former's death does not derive from the actions of the physical world, that is, it does not come from a bullet, it can be said that Kendrick suffers a symbolically motivated death. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a physical violence that occurs in a veiled and often unconscious way so that it is usually invisible or forgotten (Bourdieu 22). More than that, "Bourdieu's emphasis on class fractions acquires more importance in the context of global cities, wherein capitals and signs of distinction tend to shift quickly" since not only material capital but also cultural capital, shape class (Ghannam 268). One of the main points of the music video is to defend and praise Black culture, usually rendered invisible or marginalized by elites that suffocate other forms of cultural expression. Working in favor of those elites the police force reinforces this marginalization of groups of people including their entire cultural expression.

As I argue, the music video ends with a very strong message about crime. First, it shifts the common imagery that the police force represses illegality by presenting them as major perpetrators of rights' violations against Black people. Second, it shows a violence the execution of which does not require weapons; rather, it is a crime of an ideological nature. Ideologies are responsible for displacing, marginalizing, stigmatizing, and killing people. Third, Lamar's fall, as he spends the entire music video in motion, is also a "fall into" the cruel reality that Black people live in. However, Lamar's death in the video does not mean the death of hope. This can also be related to 2Pac, to whom the poem recited throughout the album is dedicated. In this respect it is interesting to note that originally TPAB was to be named To Pimp a Caterpillar, so that the initials would spell out "TuPaC" (MTV, 2015).

After the shot, Kendrick falls from the lamppost and hits the ground. As the screen

fades to black and returns to the video, the poem from the beginning is recited again. The murder scene appears as a "revolutionary" form of crime representation in the Noir narrative precisely because it is committed by those who are in power and supposed to protect society. As soon as Lamar hits the ground, he smiles at the camera, giving a second air of irony to the scene. After all, since Lamar's symbolic death does not represent the death of everything, it signals that the hope that everything will be alright still remains. The use of Noir aesthetics serves well to represent the rage of Black people and their resistance to live in urban spaces that are violent towards them. As Diawara puts it when analyzing the movie *A Rage in Harlem*, the Noir style functions "as a way of describing Black rage at being trapped in these conditions" (528). Something similar occurs in Lamar's music video since it reflects not only police brutality towards Black people but also a Black way of life in Oakland within a juxtaposition of various cityscapes and their respective power relations.

In recent years, new conceptions of centrality and marginality have been created in urban studies due to "changes in the spatial, cultural and political form of the city" (Kennedy 3). The distinction between black and white in the Noir aesthetic reinforces the duality structure of Oakland. This is also expressed by the figure of the police officer who is presented in the music video as perpetuating violence against the Black community in the city. The argument here is that the police officer works as a divider of worlds manifesting a drastically different behavior in white middle-class areas as compared to urban areas populated by Black people. He thus helps to shape cityscapes in a political way.

The spokesman of the regime of oppression is the gendarme

Space is an important approach for studying the construction of social relations, especially since "the organization of space was central to the structure and functioning of capitalism as a coherent whole" (Warf & Arias 3). In colonized societies, the biggest representation of the regime of oppression is the gendarme that speaks in a language of violence. According to Fanon,

> In the colonial regions, on the other hand, the gendarme and the soldier, by their immediate presence, by their direct and frequent interventions, maintain contact with the colonized and advise them, with guns or napalm explosions, not to move. It is clear that the power broker uses a language of pure violence. The intermediary does not make the oppression lighter, he does not conceal the domination. He shows it, he manifests it with the good conscience of the forces of order. The intermediary brings violence into the home and brain of the colonized. (28)

Applying Fanon's theory to the music video, I argue that the police officer prevents Lamar from continuing to fly over the city by metaphysically shooting him. It not only denounces the attack on the freedom of Black lives, but also highlights the colonialist mindset in controlling Black bodies and spaces wherein they live and move. This can be traced back historically, according to Sandra Bass, since an informal but still organized type of police force was born during slavery in the US, working as a slave patrol in order to control insurrections and the possibility of slaves escaping from captivity (156). Nowadays, there is still a relationship between race and policing, also considering space. For that purpose, it matters to observe not only the way that the police force acts but also where. Bass explains that the "construction of urban ghettos and public housing were deliberate efforts to promote social control and isolation through racial containment" (156). Therefore, the location of a more ostentatious police action is not chosen naively. To that end, whereas the police violence is directed towards racial minorities, "'race' is also entangled with common perceptions of 'the city'", guiding police action aimed at gentrifying spaces and marginalizing Black lives in favor of economic elites (Kennedy 1). As Bass points out with a nod to Steve Herbert,

> Urban spaces are socially and politically constructed to meet certain goals, ends, visions, and dreams. Ethnic/racial

> separation has historically been a central feature, and in some instances, goal in the development of American cities, ... The social construction of space has had a significant impact on the development of policing in America. As Steve Herbert (1997) notes, the police are the domestic institution responsible for preserving domestic spatial sovereignty. Thus, how the police conceptualize territory is critical to understanding police work. (Bass 157-8)

That being so, it is possible to argue that policing, race, and space are inextricably intertwined since the police force not only works pro-gentrification but also in order to preserve spatial sovereignty. This entanglement can be observed in Lamar's music video in the correlation between the figure of the police officer and the spatial organization of Oakland. In cultural studies, representation is considered responsible for the "production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language" (Hall 17). According to Stuart Hall, representation is able to connect meaning and language to culture, since what is used to represent the world is the language. By using a constructionist approach, the analysis of meaning is oriented by the idea that it is constructed "in and through language" (Hall 15). It is important to note that language here is understood in a broader sense, not just communication with words, but refers to the aspects that provide an entire "system of representation" in which the complex relationships between organized concepts can be analyzed (Hall 17). To this end, this paper pursues a complex discourse analysis including the visual narratives of the music video, the lyrics, as well as musical aspects – such as sampling. As the police force has historically oppressed racial minorities in the US, segregating spaces between "safe" and "unsafe", the representation of the police officer in the video clip "Alright" sets an understanding regarding the organization of Oakland city.

Nevertheless, the perception of the police is not homogeneous in US society, as the police force behaves differently and also arbitrarily towards different groups. Although exposing bias in police decisions can be very difficult, "an analysis of the policies and practices associated with drug war, quality of life, and zero tolerance policing reveals a system of de facto racial discrimination driven by specific policy choices and low-level police discretionary decisions" (Bass 171). Therefore, the social perception regarding the image of the police force can change depending on the group one investigates. Usually "the role white civilians play in perpetuating police dynamics has been largely overlooked by sociologists" (Magliozzi 4). Using violence against racial minorities, the police force tends to work in the protection of social elites and supports social segregation.

On one hand, Bass explains that there is a "contentious relationship between the police and racial minorities based on social control rather than public service imperatives" (159). On the other hand, it is important to note that the police forces are, in fact, a state force working for social security. The question that remains is: whose safety does the police work for? As Magliozzi continues, elites play an important role in shaping racial prejudice in police action, even though they sometimes ideally defend progressive discourses on racial justice and inclusion. "Elites shape policing from the perch of policymaking and then leave police to run amok as racial bias seeps into their discretionary enforcement of the law," (3) he concludes and explains further:

> Elites are not by-standers to racially unequal policing; they actively produce inequality by mobilizing police to act on their biases. "Over-policing" is not limited to the urban core. In suburbs, too, police zealously enforce petty criminal codes and carry out discretionary stops and searches of people of color. But whereas in marginalized neighborhoods over-policing takes place over the objections of residents, in elite suburbs it takes place at their request. (4)

In that matter, the police officer in the video clip "Alright" stands for the representation of the forces that stigmatize Black culture including social violence, whiteness, and class. Inherently associated with the disposition of the spaces of a city, the police violence towards Black

people has a stronger and more spontaneous occurrence in urban spaces, not neglecting the occurrence of it in suburbs where police forces work more properly as the spokesperson of the elite's will. In both cases, police forces act as an intermediary for institutional desires of preserving spatial sovereignty. In the "Alright" music video, the verse "resentment that turned into a deep depression" echoes with the first appearance of a police officer (00:00:49). The lines appear for the first time in the song "Institutionalized" (ft. Bilal, Anna Wise, and Snoop Dogg) which appears just before "Alright" in TPAB. This song talks about institutional racism which also traps Black people's minds and self-perceptions.

In "Institutionalized", Lamar not only refers to society as a whole when talking about institutionalized racism, but also elaborates a critical reflection on an individual level. In the song, the narrator, who is Lamar himself, is feeling trapped by his own thoughts, and success has not alleviated him from them. The track then tells us that "the largest challenge that institutional racism has is the mindset it often yields in neighborhoods like Compton to break the cycle of feeling trapped, wanting us to conquer the mind that has fallen victim to systemic racism" (Spotify *Dis/sect*). This reference is key to comprehend the first appearance of the police officer in the video clip "Alright" because the police forces are not only the image of institutionalized racism. The violence that comes from them also contributes to socio-spatial perceptions based on race on a larger scale.

In the second appearance of a police officer, a Black man is being handcuffed and tries to escape, when is shot by the police officer (00:01:36). At the same time, the narrator of the video, Lamar, continues to recite the poem: "but while my loved ones was fighting the continuous war back in the city / I was entering a new one / a war that was based on apartheid and discrimination" (00:01:30-00:01:45). The path of the bullet leads to the beginning of the song, with the presentation of the title of the video clip, as if it were a Noir movie. The video clip starts with four Black men in a car listening to music. This scene is usually a target for police action, in a cliched perception of Black men as intrinsically violent. This image makes a reference to racial profiling, which means, according to Rafael Garcia, that police suspicion presents a "criteria that are specifically directed at a certain group of people" (149). However, the zoom out reveals that the car is actually being carried by four white police officers, which can be read as a mark of servitude. This practice was very common in some Amerindian traditions, such as Calusa or Kalinago, as a symbol of homage to the carried ones (Santos-Granero 119), when the slaves or servants carried rich and important personalities. The reversal of roles proposed in this scene shows a response to, and even more so, a subversion of the historically constructed system of oppression against Black people.

Sampling and a larger Black Consciousness

Lamar draws on sampling techniques to unfold a larger Black consciousness. As Phillips puts it, the progressive modifications during the construction of the songs in the album show that "Kendrick is treating TPAB not as a finished product but a continued work in progress" (Phillips 2015). Sampling consists in reusing a portion of a sound recording in another one. This practice is widely performed in the hip hop scene, aiding in the cultural exchange of this musical genre on a global scale. According to Stephan Kreher, "appropriating, reorganizing and restructuring existing musical material has played an important role in the creation of the Hip Hop sound" (3). Those influences can be observed in all possible directions and transnational exchanges, from the most obvious to the most unusual.

One of many noteworthy samples in Lamar's song are the drums that introduce the chorus (00:02:58). It is a sample from "Flowers of the Night" by Paul Kantner, Grace Slick and David Freiberg, which can be understood as "a celebration of monarchial overthrows throughout history" (AllMusic). The use of the sample in "Alright" signals that the monarchy to be overthrown refers to the power structures that marginalize and oppress Black people, allowing the urban spaces to be resignified as safe places to live in. During the video clip the police car is used as a dance stage for Black children while Kendrick Lamar is driving a 1969 Chevy Camaro,

where the child in the passenger seat throws money in the air. This can be understood as a seizure of power, especially due to the absence of the police figure in the scene. It can also be interpreted as a reference to Occupy Oakland's strategy of protest by occupying institutional and historical places as a resistance. Just after that, Lamar appears fluctuating in the streets as a symbol of liberty.

While Kendrick is positioned on a lamppost in the final moments of the music video, and is still above the policeman, it is possible to see the city of Oakland in the background of the scene. This reinforces the urban duality that permeates the entire music video between the periphery and the center of the city, and the spaces destined for the expression of Black culture. The poem at the beginning of the video restarts as Lamar falls from the lamppost. When he hits the ground the effect of floating through the streets ends. However, he smiles at the screen in the last few seconds of the video, suggesting that even though he is on the ground, it is important to believe that everything will be alright at some point. There is a hint of irony in the scene that while leaving space for further interpretation it certainly also suggests the struggle will have to continue.

Conclusions

The image of the police has a significant impact not only in the imagery regarding the feeling of safety or insecurity but, further, has a significant impact on how we organize and conceive urban spaces. This is mainly due to the fact that police force's attitudes change depending on the place within the city: in some spaces, the police are seen as protectors; in others, such as those featured in the video clip, they are seen as perpetrators of violence. According to Fanon, there is a division of worlds, a colonial division, and the state's armed agents uphold this dichotomy. Thus, applying Fanonian theory to urban spaces which are commonly differentiated according to the implicit opposition between center and "density" part — here called periphery — the police force holds the responsibility to guard this dichotomy, which is not only spatial, but also considers aspects of class and race, as Lieven Ameel puts it (3).

In Lamar's music video, the noir aesthetic reinforces the construction of the dichotomous narrative present throughout the music video. The aesthetic also appears in a subversive way, especially when it comes to the construction of crime, which, in the analyzed video, is committed by the police officer who is normally responsible for keeping the peace, thus underlining systematic violence against Black people and the distinction of police action in different spheres of the city. This contributes to the perception that the cityscape is also constructed by its citizens and the relationship between them.

With the growth of the periphery in cities, there is also the cultural marginalization of people who live in those places. This may also explain why Lamar's "Alright" has become a Black anthem of pride and resistance; much more than just denouncing police violence, it pays homage to the entire periphery's Black culture, marginalized by the dichotomous construction of urban spaces. Recording and shooting in the Bay Area, one of the most economically developed places in the US, and focusing on lives on the periphery can be considered a revolutionary act in itself. Throughout the video the focus is not only on the violence suffered by the marginalized Black population, but also – and above all – on their resistance to it all. The video's message signals that it is important to keep fighting and resisting, because living is the best way of resisting and the only way to see that "everything is going to be alright" some day.

Endnotes

[1] In this paper, Black will be capitalized, and not white, when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms. "For many people, Black reflects a shared sense of identity and community. White carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists." (Laws).

[2] Reference to Manthia Diawara's paper "Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema."

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Author's Biography

Cristiane Guedes Peixoto is Double degree master student in Inter-American Studies at the University of Bielefeld and in Literaturas Interamericanas at the University of Guadalajara. She completed and MA in Law at the University of Brasília. Her main research interests are related to cultural studies, representations of race and class, feminism, institutional violence against minorities, and the entanglement of power and language.