1. Introduction: Framing Decolonial Visuality in Visual Culture Studies

In Sembene Ousmane's "La Noire de…." (1966), it is possible to find a starting point for discussing the following question, which still is of key importance for the research of decolonial visuality – what is the situation when those people, who were seen as objects of colonial representation, started to speak and represent themselves via visual means? Sembène's movie is not just another way of making new images of colonial subjects. It puts the spectator in the situation, which is defined by the uneven power relations and different ways of remembering and perceiving, and thus it raises the following issue – the issue of the production of the visual meaning. The image can never be considered independently from its conditions of production and interpretation. What is shown in it, whose perspective is recognized, and what an image means is determined by the history of the image itself.

The current study locates itself precisely where studies of visual culture, decolonial theory and phenomenology meet. It is concerned with the particular material manifestations through which visual experience is constructed rather than with the category of the visual as such. The basic claim here is that visual meaning is not something inherent to any given image. It is produced in the relation between a material object, a perceiving body, and a historical community. There is no such thing as a pure visual experience. Such encounters are always characterized by power asymmetries, competing interpretations, and categories of perception as well as collective memories that play their part both in shaping what can be seen and how this is perceived. Decolonial visuality, in this respect, can be understood as a relational and educational practice through which the act of seeing becomes praxis. That is, a practice of questioning inherited modes of perception and its structures.

The argument is organized along three dimensions. The first-dimension deals with perception. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one takes perception to be not a passive reception of information by the mind that observes but an activity undertaken by an embodied subject that is already situated in the world. This is where Merleau-Ponty's concept of the lived body plays an essential role, because his understanding of perception implies that visual experience is inseparable from the position, motion and involvement of the perceiver. The second dimension is related to knowledge. Images are regarded as spaces where meanings and claims to knowledge are negotiated and not merely transferred. Mignolo's theory of coloniality of knowledge enables one to comprehend how visual regimes help to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge, and at the same time it becomes possible to question how such hierarchies can be undone through visual practices. The third dimension

pertains to the conditions of meaning making which are communal. Co-creation is meant to denote here processes of creating and modifying meanings collectively. Such processes are neither automaticaly equal nor automatically emancipatory. They are still characterized by the uneven distribution of power, but they can change relations within which communities visualize and interpret themselves.

The focus on material and historical specificity differentiates the current study from approaches in which the notion of visuality is treated primarily in terms of abstract problems of subjectivity and representation. Critical Phenomenology has provided productive links between phenomenological analysis and issues of race and post-colonialism. The research of Lisa Guenther, Gail Weiss, and Alia Al-Saji and others has demonstrated the possibility to consider the issues of embodiment and situatedness along with the issues of power. The current study continues this discussion through examining what happens when these considerations are made in relation to specific examples of visual culture from the Global South. Sara Ahmed's conception of racialised orientation in Queer Phenomenology (2006) is another point of reference, especially in relation to the ways how the bodily orientations become habitual and how these orientations might reproduce existing configurations of visibility and invisibility. However, the arguments suggested in the paper do not treat European phenomenology and visual theory as a homogeneous body of thought. The problem lies in specific historical configurations of representation and knowledge through which colonial hierarchies have been reproduced.

The article moves on with analysis of three case studies, which differ not only in their medium but also in the historical period and in the way they were produced. The theoretical framework is developed in section two and pedagogical implications of the framework are discussed in section three. Three case studies to be analyzed are Sembene's "La Noire de…" (section four), Tlacolulokos murals from Oaxaca (section five) and "The Sword of Tipu Sultan" – an Indian TV series (section six). Section seven unifies three case studies using the idea of relational ontology of visuality.

1.1 The Coloniality of Seeing

The study of visual culture has recently approached the issue of vision as one defined by power relations rather than the aesthetic experience of transparent media. For instance, the notion of counter-visuality introduced by Nicholas Mirzoeff makes the link between the power struggle of representation and the right to look. The notion highlights the unequal

conditions of visibility and authorization to see subjects (Mirzoeff, 2011). Another approach that comes into consideration is Claire Bishop's analysis of participatory art. The author pays attention to the power relations that may exist even in democratic projects and are based on the institutionalization of the participation in such a way that turns it into the curatorial practice (Bishop, 2012, pp. 3–39). Finally, Paulo Freire can be considered a third significant reference point in this context. Although the language of conscientisation has been used in analyzing the issues of visuality, the importance of the theory for this specific argument resides not only in the notion of becoming critically conscious of something but in the social conditions of representation (Freire, 1970).

The phrase 'coloniality of seeing' is employed here to refer to the perpetuation of colonial relations within the organization of visual experiences. Colonial domination was not restricted solely to political governance and economic exploitation. It also involved making distinctions between those who could become subjects of knowledge and those who could be rendered objects of observation, which representations would be authoritative and what kinds of seeing would be considered valid. This aspect of coloniality is particularly pertinent to Mignolo's idea of 'the colonial matrix of power', in that it articulates the connection between geopolitical domination and knowledge, being and authority (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 1–30). The aim of this essay is to explore this issue through embodied visual practice and its possible transformation.

1.2 Research Gap

Decolonial visual theory has made significant contributions to research on the ideological role of images and the politics of representation. However, there has been relatively little focus on the process whereby decolonial resistance emerges within collective visual practices; namely, how certain forms of image production and reception might change perception rather than just reveal its colonial construction. Counter-visuality in Mirzoeff's account captures a political battle over the right to see and be seen, whereas research on participatory art has explored the institutional and inter-personal context within which collaboration is possible. Less explored, however, is the relationship between these issues; namely, how collective participation in visual practices may become a terrain for the making and unmaking of meanings. A second problem related to this question is that of visual literacy, which is usually treated as an individual skill, the ability to decode visual information.

The present paper attempts to address the above problems via the theoretical construction of decolonial visuality as an interlocking practice of perception and action. The paper does not strive to reconcile the contradictions of resistance and appropriation, individual agency and collectivity, or aesthetic experience and epistemological change. On the contrary, the contradictions mentioned above are understood as constituting the context within which decolonial visual practices take place. The goal thus is not to construct a universal theory of decolonial seeing but to analyze how certain visual practices enable different kinds of perception, participation and knowledge.

1.3 Methodological Orientation

The study combines philosophical analysis with interpretive visual case studies. Its method brings together phenomenologically informed accounts of embodied spectatorship, decolonial critique, formal visual analysis, and insights from participatory design. These approaches are not applied identically to all three cases. Each case is read through the methodological perspective most suited to its medium and mode of production, while remaining open to concepts developed in the analysis of the other cases.

Case Study	Dominant Methodological Lens	Rationale
Sembène's *La Noire de…* (1966)	Phenomenologically informed reading of embodied spectatorship (Merleau-Ponty; Sobchack)	As a cinematic work, the film organises perception through framing, point-of-view, movement, duration, and sound. Sobchack's phenomenological film theory provides a vocabulary for examining how spectatorship is embodied and how cinematic form can place the viewer within relations of identification, distance, and resistance.
Oaxacan Murals: Tlacolulokos	Decolonial critique with participatory design insights (Mignolo, Wynter; Kambunga et al., 2023)	The murals emerged through a collective mode of production in which questions of representation and participation cannot be separated. Decolonial critique addresses the distribution of epistemic authority, while participatory design helps examine the power asymmetries and conditions of collaboration through which collective visual practices are formed.
The Sword of Tipu Sultan (1990)	Formal visual analysis with decolonial critique	As a state-sponsored television series, this case calls for attention to its visual and symbolic organisation, including camera angles, costume, colour, and narrative pacing, alongside an examination of how popular media participates in the negotiation of collective memory and historical power.

This variation enables one to study the relational theory of visuality in different settings without equating the decolonial visuality with a specific medium, a particular colonial history, or a particular cultural production process. Three cases have been chosen since they allow for the application of the theoretical framework in relation to different media, different colonial histories, and different cultural production processes: France's colonial Senegal, the combined colonial and postcolonial history of Mexico and the US, and Britain's South Asia; individual authorship, community cultural practices, and state-controlled broadcast media.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Decolonial Visuality

In the current paper, Fanon presents the closest connection between phenomenology and

the experience of the colony. In his book “Black Skin, White Masks,” Fanon reveals that the subject described as a Black person in the colonial discourse is not simply presented as an inferior subject. The subject discovers himself in a racial schema which is already socially and historically determined before the act of self-description appears. In such a way, the Fanonian description of the being overdetermined from without goes far beyond the scope of representation. It speaks about the process of racial meaning attachment to the body and its becoming part of the subject’s experience (Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 89-97). This is the core of what is called by Fanon the sociogenic dimension of colonial oppression: the meanings of the body are socially produced, but experienced immediately in terms of embodied existence.

2.1 Frantz Fanon: Internalisation of the Colonial Gaze

The idea becomes even more explicit when comparing the reading of Fanon with the reading of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body schema within the Phenomenology of Perception. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is not an object that needs to be observed first and then controlled by consciousness. The body orientation is normally a pre-reflective phenomenon; the body is already oriented toward its environment and ready for movements long before any perceptual experience is thought of (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, pp. 100–106). This is where Fanon shows how the relationship with the world is disturbed by the racialization process. Fanon talks about the black body not only as one’s own body, but also about the body defined in terms of racialization of another person (Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 91–92).

However, Sara Ahmed’s theory of orientation allows taking this idea further from the actual process of encountering the body racialised. In Queer Phenomenology, the term ‘orientation’ describes the manner in which bodies learn to move within spaces as a result of their interactions with various objects, people, and familiar pathways (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 111-115). These orientations are not completely voluntary or imposed in one instant of time – rather, they become a habit due to repeated interaction with the social environment. With regards to Fanon, such approach enables discussing the ways in which history of being racialised becomes sedimented in the everyday experience and organization of space.

The work of Lewis Gordon on Fanon is crucial in order to avoid reducing such a comparison to an easy synthesis between Fanon and Merleau-Ponty. In his book, Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism (1995) and Fanon and the Crisis of European Man (1995), Gordon

understands Fanon as making evident the limits of the philosophical tradition of Europe regarding its description of the human experience insofar as it does not consider the historical reality of the situation of racialised people. The problem is not one of whether phenomenology has anything to say on the matter of embodiment or whether Merleau-Ponty's understanding of it can be rejected outright. On the contrary, Fanon shows how any attempt at describing the phenomenon of embodiment in universal terms cannot overlook the fact that there is a particular historical situation in which bodies come into being.
This distinction becomes important to the discussion in this essay. Fanon is thus not viewed as an additional point of view that would supplement an already complete phenomenology. Through his work, he puts into question those universalising tendencies that can emerge when an account of the lived experience of perception gets abstracted from the historical context of the encounter between subjects. Decolonial visuality emerges in response to this challenge. The task cannot be reduced to a simple substitution of one set of images with another, for the issue at stake is how images gain their power.

2.2 Walter Mignolo and Sylvia Wynter: Coloniality of Knowledge and the Overrepresentation of Man

Instead of looking at the constitution of embodied experiences, the analysis by Mignolo moves towards the organization of knowledge. The colonial matrix of power proposed by Mignolo refers to a system where political dominance, economic structures, knowledge, and authority continue to be inter-related even after the official end of colonial domination (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 1-30). Within this system, European knowledge becomes universalized while the rest of the traditions have to settle down for the place of being 'local', 'particular' or 'culturally specific'. Epistemic disobedience as a concept by Mignolo challenges this system. It is not about adding the marginal perspective to an unchanged epistemic system (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 117–122).
It is important when thinking about visual culture, as images form part of how knowledge is organized. A visual regime does more than define what is visible; it shapes which histories are legible, which subjects can count as speaking authority, and which experiences will be rendered illegible and peripheral. A decolonial visual project must necessarily engage not only with the new objects introduced to the representational system but also challenge the assumptions underlying the organization of visibility.
Wynter takes this line of thought one step further by challenging the category through

which the knowing and seeing subject is framed. Her critique of overrepresentation of Man is a challenge to the historical ascension of one version of the human being to the status of universality (Wynter, 2003, pp. 257-264). Thus, not only colonial modernity excluded certain individuals from the category of humans in order to include others in it, it did so based on a particular model of being human.

Wynter's differentiation of "Man1," who represents the Renaissance humanist subject, from "Man2," who represents the subsequent liberal economic subject of the human being, further sharpens this point of view (Wynter, 2003, p. 263-270). Man1 and Man2 are historically constituted genres of the human being rather than clear representations of the pre-existing universal concept of the human being. The implications of this statement in terms of visuality are great. If the concept of the human being has historically been organized, then simply changing those people who appear in the visual field is not enough. The decolonial practice may need to question the very assumptions of personhood and agency on which visibility depends.

This is why the decolonial impulse cannot be reduced either to inclusion or a mere reversal of the colonial perspective. What is far more difficult is to disrupt the categories within which the seer and the seen have been separated. This is why Wynter's project of "after Man" is pertinent insofar as it allows us to imagine the world beyond one historically prevailing genre of the human. The case studies to follow approach this challenge differently and with varying degrees of success. Their significance does not lie in proving an alternative visual paradigm, but rather in revealing what happens when we subject our assumptions about the seer, the seen, and the interpreter to scrutiny.

2.3 Ngũgī wa Thiong'o: Decolonising the Sensorium

The contributions of Ngũgī wa Thiong'o add yet another perspective on this issue, focusing on the significance of language, imagination, narrative, and cultural memory. In his book Decolonizing the Mind, he states that colonization invades not only the experiences of people but also the way these experiences are described and imagined by people. Language plays a crucial role here inasmuch as language is not just an indifferent tool for communicating an already formed experience (Ngũgī, 1986, pp. 14–17).

Such a proposition bears implications for the practice of vision. Visuals do not exist independently of language, narratives, memories, and other cultural discourses through which one learns to make sense of the visuals. Thus, in decolonizing the sensorium, it is

important not only to reclaim the images and aesthetic forms suppressed by colonial powers, but also to recover the cultural environment within which such forms are made to make sense. Ngũgĩ's contribution helps us examine the role of vision within a broader organization of experiences where seeing, remembering, narrating, and imagining are all interlinked.

2.4 Toward a Relational Concept of Decolonial Visuality

These three perspectives do not constitute stages in a single process but rather different facets of the same problem. Fanon demonstrates how colonial power infuses itself into the lived experience of the body. Mignolo and Wynter reveal how relationships of knowledge and definitions of the human being structure the parameters through which experience is comprehended. Ngũgĩ calls attention to the cultural modes of perception and imagination. The interrelationship between these three facets is, thus, reciprocal in nature rather than linear. Any transformation in the way of seeing may transform the way in which bodies interact with the world around them but will still be limited by existing knowledge and social structures.

The notion of the distribution of the sensible that is formulated by Rancière offers an appropriate language to describe this relationship. According to Rancière, the distribution of the sensible represents the order of what can be perceived and shared, along with the distinctions that determine where different bodies have their places and abilities within the common world (Rancière, 2009, pp. 7–19). This notion is relevant in the given context due to the shift of focus from isolated images to the more comprehensive structure within which some aspects are perceivable and other aspects cannot be easily perceived or recognised. Colonial power can function through the given kind of structure by establishing differences between subjects and objects, as well as between different forms of knowledge and history.

Decolonial visual practice could interfere in this setup by changing the way people and histories are seen and interpreted. Such an interference is not necessarily bound to be successful insofar as a practice claims to be resistant or participatory. Embodied resistance could be romanticized, as participation could hide a hierarchy of power. The institutional context, the division of decision-making power, the process of production, and the process of reception are all significant factors. Decolonial visual practices could attack one hierarchy while preserving another. For this reason, the three examples discussed below are analyzed neither as models of decolonization nor as examples of an established theory.

They are simply contexts in which it would be possible to investigate the potentials and constraints of decolonial visuality.

3. Visual Literacy as Decolonial Pedagogy

In its application in this paper, the idea of visual literacy is far from the traditional notion of literacy, which sees it as a set of personal competencies for reading images. This definition is similar to Paulo Freire's idea of conscientização – which means becoming aware of the socio-economic context within which knowledge comes into existence, circulates, and gets challenged, and is achieved through long-term reflection on the practices and representations of one's community (Freire, 1970, pp. 35-42). Visual literacy, therefore, is a collective and embodied practice embedded in history. It cannot be separated from the conditions under which it gets shaped and disseminated. Instead, it develops through participation in practices of looking, interpreting, talking, and creating images, which get shaped by the community while shaping the community's understanding of its own reality.
With this concept of visual literacy, there is a shift in the understanding of visual pedagogy. Visual pedagogy is no longer an attempt at conveying the pre-determined codes of interpretation from an expert to a student but a collaborative process of investigating the production and interpretation of images. The participants are not mere receivers of knowledge but contributors to the very process of questioning visual meaning. Participation does not necessarily guarantee an egalitarian or decolonial practice either, according to Kambunga et al. (2023) who discuss the case of decolonial practices in design. Collaboration is characterized by hierarchical differences in power, experience, and agency that affect the process of knowledge production and require addressing it in order to create a safe space for dialogue.
Furthermore, Kambunga et al. stress that productive collaboration cannot be defined by agreement or reaching an agreement prematurely. Indeed, disagreement is also part of reflection and negotiation of meanings during which participants question their assumptions about what they create. This idea is especially relevant to the current framework as co-creation should not be equated with harmony. In visual collaboration, for example, many participants do not mean anything if there is power in the hands of only a few; similarly, disagreement does not necessarily signal disharmony but may point to re-examining some previously accepted assumptions. Thus, the educational significance of participation is defined not just by the number of participants, but by the distribution of authority,

interpretation, and decision making.
The three case studies outlined below represent different contexts in which the above questions could be studied. The differences between them lie in terms of the medium and production method, but each one allows for an exploration of the ways in which visual practices could be a context in which perceptual and interpretive knowledge is negotiated collectively and its boundaries explored.

4. Case Study I: Ousmane Sembène's *La Noire de…*

La Noire de… (1966) by Ousmane Sembène becomes the first tangible space in which the decolonial theory of visuality put forward in this paper can be analyzed. This film in particular becomes highly important because Sembène was not just creating his film in accordance with certain cinematic language, but he was doing so in opposition to visual conventions that had come from the colonial era. It is not just about telling a story of Africa or oppression by colonial forces. The key point here is about how cinematic form can change the relation between the subject and the spectator.

4.1 Cinema as Decolonial Medium

Cinema cannot be considered an inherently emancipatory or inherently colonial form of culture. It cannot have its own political meaning because of its inherent potential, nor can it work outside historical context. Certain rules of the game in cinematography – such as composition, editing, identification of spectators with characters, and so on – were created and elaborated in certain social and historical conditions, and the relations of colonialism affected the representation of non-European peoples in this way. Thus, the issue is not in the essential colonization of cinematography as a cultural medium. It is in the repetition of certain historical relations between the observer and the object of observation.
This is the backdrop against which Sembene's work must be understood. Sembene's movies tried to reach African audiences, instead of assuming that the lives of Africans could only be represented through the eyes of a European spectator. The consistent emphasis on making movies for an African audience, according to Pfaff (1984, p. 47) based on interviews with Sembene, shows a difference in conception of cinematic address. The importance of such an approach is not just in the identity of the viewers. It also has to do with the assumptions inherent in the act of representation: what kinds of experience need explanation, whose

point of view gives meaning to events, what kinds of recognition are expected from the audience.

The Eurocentric tradition of visual representation that Sembène is challenging is thus clearly not to be seen as a single or unified European filmic practice. Here the phrase "Eurocentric visual tradition" is used in its common meaning as referring to those modes of representation in which the colonial subjects have come to be depicted either as objects of observation, ethnographic subjects, or objects of curiosity and/or benevolence. In all cases the right to observe and interpret belongs to the one who is assumed to be capable of describing what he/she sees. What makes the contribution of Sembène significant is that he reverses the viewpoint from which the colonial relationship is being shown.

This is clearly related to Fanon's analysis of colonial gaze. If the colonial racialisation of the subject is about the imposition of the meaning on the colonised from the outside, then the refusal to depict him/her as the mere object of observation is an important step that can help to change the conditions of experience of these meanings.

4.2 Analysis of *La Noire de…*

La Noire de… centres on the life of a young Senegalese woman named Diouana, who travels to France to work as a servant and, gradually, becomes imprisoned in the physical and social space of the apartment of her employers. The anti-colonial message of the film does not reside only in its narrative. Rather, it is conveyed through the spatial composition, silence, movement, and the way in which the viewer gets access to the experience of Diouana.

The framing in Sembène's film constantly highlights the narrow spaces in which Diouana spends her life and works. With the help of close-ups and static shots, Sembène draws attention to walls, rooms and the movements that take place inside them. The apartment ceases to be just a background for the story told and becomes an important part of Diouana's experience as such through its spatial organisation. The stillness of the camera plays an important role in this process, since it does not transform the experience of the main heroine into a spectacle or heroic deed.

This feature of the movie can be viewed through Fanon's analysis of racialization. Colonial domination is not only manifested through the direct expressions of racial difference. They become associated with bodies in virtue of the social meanings associated with them, influencing the ways in which these bodies can be present in and move through the world

(Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 89-97). This means that Diouana's imprisonment has both concrete and symbolic aspects. The constraints imposed on her physical freedom are connected with her position in society in which her body is understood by others.

The use of voice-over is another contradiction between inner experience and outer visibility of Diouana. She is almost silent in the domestic space where she works, but the viewer knows her thoughts. This difference is significant since she is at once visible and socially invisible. The movie thereby distinguishes between what other characters see and what the spectator sees of the person who is seen. Instead of making Diouana a silent object in the domestic space, the voice-over makes her a subject with inner experience that cannot be reduced to her physical appearance.

The African mask gives the most intense visual representation of this issue. While in Dakar, the mask exists in a particular social and cultural environment. In the Antibes apartment, however, the mask is isolated from this environment and placed in front of a white wall, making it an ornament for aesthetic appreciation. Isolation of the mask changes its meaning. Now the mask is not found within the social environment where it belongs but becomes an object to be gazed at by Europeans.

Diouana's experience with the mask turns the table. With Diouana's face juxtaposed with the mask in the extended scene, the film refuses to confine the object to the strictly aesthetic plane of representation that has been reserved for it by the apartment. Instead, the mask is integrated into Diouana's confrontation with the world she finds herself in. Following Wynter's criticism of the excessive representation of Man, the scene can be seen as challenging the clear separation between the subject looking at something and the object looked at (Wynter, 2003, pp. 257–264). The mask does not just bring back the African artifact from its aesthetic captivity. It serves as a disruption within the very visual system of representation that has reduced it to an aesthetic object. When the mask appears again, this time on the head of the child addressing Diouana's corpse, it ceases to be an aesthetic object and turns into a symbol of accusation.

4.3 Embodied Spectatorship

The meaning that can be derived phenomenologically from such formal decisions is made more evident when we refer to Merleau-Ponty and Vivian Sobchack. According to Merleau-Ponty, the theory of perception starts from the bodily connection between the perceiver and the surrounding world. The discussion of painting in the work "Eye and Mind" concerns not

only the content of an image but also the fact that perception itself is connected with the visible world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1993, p. 121-124). Sobchack applies a similar approach to the phenomenon of cinema suggesting that watching a movie is not limited by processing the information visually (Sobchack, 1992, pp. 3–13).

The relation in the film La Noire de… is defined by the power of repetition and restriction. Through the process of repetition of domestic procedures, the restriction of Diouana's freedom of movement, and the opposition of the closed apartment space to the recollection of the other space, a conflict between movement and restriction is generated. It is not only implied to the viewer that Diouana's movement is restricted. Through the process of viewing the film, the viewer is presented with an experience of that restriction as well. In such way, the didactic function of the film does not consist in providing a thesis concerning colonialism. It is realized in revealing the conditions of colonial dominance through the process of experiencing cinematic form.

This is, of course, still an asymmetrical situation. Sembène's film is an example of auteur cinema: it creates its own formal language and appeals to a collective audience, but it does not engage the spectators in producing their own meaning in the way that was explained in connection with the Oaxacan murals. And so the decolonial nature of this work is in part contingent on how this film is interpreted by the viewers located in contexts other than the ones that Sembène inhabited historically and culturally. One viewer will understand the film as offering a critique of colonial domination, but another one will perceive the suffering of Diouana mainly as a beautiful object, as a tragic tale of an individual or as something exotic. And while this fact certainly does not undermine the decolonial intent of the film, it suggests that the political and epistemological impact of a visual work cannot be guaranteed at the time of its creation.

4.4 Epistemic Implications

Importance of the film for epistemology is related to the fact that the movie allows reflecting upon the way colonial perception is organized. Framing, restricted movement, silence, and transformation of the mask do not only provide some information concerning colonial subjugation, but organize an experience in which a viewer is forced to re-think the relationship between visible and invisible in regard to the other who is primarily an object of observation. The knowledge produced in the process of this experience is also experiential and is produced in the process of relation of the viewer and the organization of the film.

The film, however, functions in a different way on each of the three dimensions described in this paper. The film's most successful intervention is perceptual; it uses spatial enclosure, silence, and the mask to unsettle the viewer's role as external spectator and renders colonial relations perceptible as spatial and bodily relations. At the epistemic level, the film subverts the assumption that seeing someone is synonymous with knowing them. The film creates a space within which the very act of being visible and interpreting oneself becomes the object of reflection. As for the communal dimension, this is less successfully engaged since Sembène's approach is auteurist. While the film appeals to a community of spectators and is capable of creating common discourse about it, it doesn't engage this community in the creation of the work itself. Thus, the decolonial potential of the film relies, in some measure, on the interpretive positions from which different spectators encounter it. This reliance is not something negatively inherent to the film; it is one of the conditions of its decolonial potential.

5. Case Study II: Oaxacan Murals and Collective Epistemic Agency

5.1 Murals as Territorial Memory

Mural practices linked with the Tlacolulokos collective are distinctively different from what could be called the artist-centered perspective on art. The mural should be understood here as territorial memory, where collective memory is represented through public spaces, with the act of creation and viewing related to the issues of land, identity, immigration, and community. The material nature of the wall plays an important role in such practices. Being big, solid, and visible in everyday space, the work gets placed within the context of society rather than getting detached from common communal practices. Opposing the representational approach to territory, as an abstract object for depiction and management, murals create a relationship between the territory and the memory where the territory becomes part of the process of meaning creation.

The Tlacolulokos installation *Visualising Language* (2017), presented at the Los Angeles Central Library, is particularly significant in this respect. It occupies an architectural setting already marked by Dean Cornwell's 1933 murals depicting California history within a predominantly Eurocentric historical register. The Tlacolulokos panels respond to that setting through a markedly different visual language. Their burgundy and gold palette contrasts with Cornwell's pastel tones; the eight large-scale panels bring Zapotec, English, and Spanish into the same visual field; and Indigenous figures appear in both traditional and

contemporary forms of dress. The composition is discontinuous and polyphonic rather than organised around a single authoritative historical viewpoint.
The addition of drawings that have been created by children during community workshops brings yet another layer to this visual project. In this case, the role of authorship is not limited to the professional artist as understood in traditional terms, but involves the participation of an intergenerational process where the community gets involved in the creation of the visual memory of the work. As such, the mural does not simply symbolize the community of Oaxaca, but becomes an example of the institution as a place of negotiation of diverse histories of California, migration, Indigenous presence, and cultural memory.

5.2 Collective Production and Epistemic Agency

The importance of the Tlacolulokos art form does not lie only in what the paintings depict but in how the imagery is made as well. Traditional ideas regarding the concept of artistic creation have usually placed the creative act at the hands of the artist, the community being mostly considered a passive recipient. The Tlacolulokos art form challenges such thinking as it includes different aspects of community and intergenerational involvement within the creation of visual memory. The artists and members of the community are not confronted with an existing image of their history but are involved in the creation of that image.
The impact on the epistemic nature of the mural is that the power distribution associated with the production of knowledge is shifted. It does not matter whether or not the produced mural is more just or more desirable politically speaking. A normative decision will be a question of what should be represented and how the social relations should be organized. An epistemic one will be a question of who will be acknowledged as a knower, whose experience is going to be part of the production of knowledge, and who has the power to decide what kind of history the community will have access to. The knowledge systems of colonial times have always kept those two aspects apart by distinguishing between the authoritative producers of knowledge and the people whose experiences will be used as data for interpretation.
The knowledge thus generated is, therefore, not merely embedded in the final image. It is also generated through the process of negotiating visibility and representation among the participants. Living memory, embodied experience, and inherited knowledge of the place find themselves involved in a material activity wherein meanings get negotiated, contested and revised. Thus, the epistemic truth claim of the mural is intrinsically connected to the

social conditions under which it was produced.

This process must not, however, be interpreted as an equitable dialogue wherein all participants are equally empowered. Disparities in terms of age, experience, institutional power, artistic skills and decision-making ability can exist even in projects consciously designed to promote participation. Consequently, collective production cannot be regarded as an automatic outcome of epistemic justice. Its significance lies in how differences are negotiated in this process. Kambunga et al. (2023), while discussing the relevance of decolonial design rather than the specific case of Tlacolulokos project, emphasize the need for creating an environment where multiple voices engage in dialogue without collapsing into a single consensual voice (Kambunga et al., 2023, pp. 4–8).

The fact of institutional co-optation adds another factor of limitation. In the case where a mural is commissioned and presented through an institutional framework, such as a library, municipality, or art group, the community may not dictate all the factors involved in the creation, presentation, and interpretation of the art. There is the potential for institutional power to set the terms of engagement and subsume acts of visual defiance within an official cultural discourse. This means that the decolonial possibilities inherent in collective production need to be considered as being contingent rather than certain.

5.3 Visuality as Pedagogy

The importance of the pedagogical value of the murals lies in their ability to transform the public space into the medium of extended visual and bodily experience. It differs greatly from the pedagogical model where the transmission of knowledge happens from an expert to a learner. Both participants learn in the process of creation, discussion, revision, and interaction with images, while the meanings of these images emerge in the process as well. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of painting in Eye and Mind provides some terms for the description of such a process. While his interest does not lie in the final picture, but in the bodily relation that involves visible world in the act of expression through the eye, the hand, the gesture, and the material (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1993, pp. 127-132).

When applied to the practice of Tlacolulokos, such approach leads to the shift of focus from learning about the decolonial history to learning in the process of material production of historical memory. Murals are not simply educational media, that carry the ready-made message about the past. The production of the image becomes the occasion for negotiation of the aspects of past that have to be presented and how.

The intergenerational aspect renders the pedagogy especially important. The involvement of children through the workshops allows the younger generation of the community to become participants in the creation of visual memory and not be limited merely to being receivers of the visual tradition generated by their predecessors. Cultural literacy then does not become an act of transmission of static visual codes, but a living process in which the community recreates its history.

5.4 Cultural Literacy in Practice

This literacy is thus not merely the skill of decoding existing visual images. This includes the ability to understand the historical and political context in which certain representations become authoritative, to challenge those who have the authority to represent the community and take part in creating alternative visual representations. The mural becomes a public text; however, the meaning of such a text is inseparable from the social relations and practices in which it was created.

Simultaneously, the institutional framework means that there cannot be an easy equation between collective visual representation and decolonial liberation. Libraries, municipalities, art institutions offer access to various resources and opportunities to gain visibility; at the same time, they define crucial conditions of production and reception. The very institutionality that allows the mural to exist as a public text constrains how effectively it challenges the representation. Co-optation is not just an external risk; it is an intrinsic part of the structure within which participatory visual activity takes place.

As such, the Tlacolulokos case provides an especially intimate conjunction of the three levels of the framework. On the perceptual level, the murals operate on the institutionalized space of the school through size, material, colour, and contrast between visual and linguistic registers. On the epistemic level, the collaborative mode of production challenges the neat opposition between producers and consumers of knowledge. On the communal level, intergenerational collaboration links the production of visual memory to the process of forming collective identity. Nevertheless, the convergence of these levels is not without remainder. Collaborative participation is structured in terms of difference in power; the institutionalized space is capable of neutralizing dissent; and the meaning of the artwork always escapes the community which produced it. What is important about the practice of the Tlacolulokos, therefore, is not that it gives an uncontested model for decolonial visuality, but rather in demonstrating how collaborative production of the visual reconfigures

perceptual and epistemic agency while being subjected to institutional and social conditions of such reconfiguration.

6. Case Study III: *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*

6.1 Popular Media as Epistemic Field

The Sword of Tipu Sultan, however, poses a case study separate from those considered above because the film was made in circumstances that differ significantly from both Sembène's auteurist cinema and the mural-making of the Tlacolulokos. Rather than being an artist's film for a limited audience or a collective project undertaken by multiple artists, this work is a state-sponsored televisual serial made for popular consumption via the national broadcasting networks of the time.

The Sword of Tipu Sultan was broadcast on Doordarshan television in 1990 – a time when Indian television itself played a particularly prominent role in the public imagination and everyday culture of India. Prior to the changes that were to come through further developments in satellite broadcasting, Doordarshan held a peculiarly important place in Indian society. Watching television went beyond the individual family and involved communal viewing by family, friends, and members of the neighbourhood community. The point here is not that television continues to play as prominent a role in contemporary society as it once did, but rather that this particular form of reception constitutes one historical moment in which visual renderings of the past might have a wide communal audience.

This difference helps illuminate the idea of popular media used in this essay. Television does not only disseminate the historical facts to more people than before. Mass media broadcasting demands some kind of narrative construction: figures need to be recognizable, conflicts – clear and the episodes – to sustain emotions through time. These needs might be problematic for keeping historical complexity. Moreover, these needs might help construct a representation that challenges one historical narrative to create another just as selective one. Thus, popular media constitutes an epistemic field where historical visibility is extended while the condition of intelligibility is narrowed at the same time.

The Sword of Tipu Sultan, based on Bhagwan Gidwani's novel, tells the story of eighteenth-century Mysore ruler and his resistance to the British colonization of India. Thus, this TV series comes into the historiographical context already defined by colonial representations of Indian political resistance. The decolonial significance of this series consists not only in

the restoration of Tipu as the center of resistance to the colonialism. But this restoration raises the next question – how can the rehabilitation of the silenced figure be done using the narration where this figure needs to be a hero?

6.2 Visual Analysis of *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*

In the series, Tipu's heroic figure is constructed through the use of a particular set of visuals. The low camera angles bestow physical authority to Tipu and the warm lighting and purposeful movements of the camera further distinguish his presence from the visual representation of his British adversaries. While there may be exceptions in some scenes, it can be said that the overall effect of such use of visuals creates a connection between Tipu and sovereignty.

Costuming is also used in the construction of the same. The ornamental angarkha and jewel-studded turban along with the constant tiger motif connect Tipu to the culture of sovereignty. While the costuming does contribute to establishing the atmosphere of the period, it locates political sovereignty within a particular culture, distinct from the colonial one of which Tipu is the protagonist.

The motif of the tiger is especially significant in that it is a sign that links ideas about personal bravery, sovereignty, and resistance together. The significance of the tiger symbol is not in the isolated use of the symbol but in its repetition in the series, in relation to the public persona of Tipu. The way in which the story is told further underwrites the construction of this symbol. Military and political confrontation are structured in such a way that Tipu's inevitable defeat does not negate the significance of his fight. Defeat here could be read as sacrifice, enabling the historical personage to continue as a symbol of resistance.

In Fanonian terms, the series can be said to engage the sociogenic dimension of collective identity. Images from history do not merely represent a pre-existing social consciousness but become active in the constitution of the very categories by which communities think about their own past and themselves (Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 89-97). The Islamic and South Asian symbolic frameworks, including the crescent moon, the tiger, and the language of Persianate court culture, are all used to present Tipu as someone whose political resistance connects him to cultural continuity.

6.3 Negotiating History and Myth

The same strategies that make the series an effective historical drama also create the fundamental epistemic problem within the series. The depiction of Tipu as the perfect anti-colonial hero implies that the historical landscape should be shaped according to the moral narrative of heroism. Various versions of history relating to his reign, especially ones concerning his attitude towards non-Muslim subjects and the controversial issues of his religious policies and coercion in politics, get less attention than the narrative of resistance. The problem does not lie in the fact that the series cannot convey all the details of the historical period in question. Every historical drama fails to achieve that goal. A more important point is what kind of historical knowledge becomes invisible in this case.

That is the reason why the notion of "myth" must be used with caution. Here, the term myth does not imply that the events portrayed in the film are fiction or that they are not historically true. It implies the act of creating coherence and meaning out of a historical figure that surpasses the complex nature of the historical reality. Tipu is not just the historical leader who fought back against the spread of the British empire. He becomes a symbol through which one can tell stories about resistance, sovereignty, sacrifice, and cultural identity. The construction of such a myth has both a political and cultural strength. On the other hand, it may make the internal differences more difficult to discern.

Tension, in other words, exists not because of any questions about the accuracy of the depiction of Indian resistance against colonialism, but rather because of the structure of historical drama. This means that popular historical drama must select, condense and organize historical events in such a way that they would become interesting enough for sustained narration. In this way, the historical drama could challenge the hierarchy of visibility and replace it with another one. Decolonial power of The Sword of Tipu Sultan resides in the fact that it tries to reclaim the history of Indian resistance against colonial domination; however, this history is reclaimed within the narrative paradigm of singular heroism.

This is the key distinction that should be made for the development of the argument presented in this paper. According to Mignolo, the epistemic transformation does not only involve the change of authorized figures in historical narration. It involves change in the conditions of authorization of knowledge itself (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 117-122). The narrative that authorizes the decolonial hero as opposed to colonial one does not transform the grammatical structure of history at all. The Sword of Tipu Sultan stands on the verge of such transformation.

6.4 Participatory Reception and Epistemic Agency

One cannot fully comprehend the historical significance of the series through its formal construction alone. This is because the meaning of the broadcast does not depend only on the intention behind it. As television viewing in India was, for a time when Doordarshan was operating throughout the country, a social activity involving family and neighbors among others, the research conducted by Mankekar on television and everyday life in India is especially relevant here (Mankekar, 1999).

In light of this social context, one may wonder about the agency of the viewers of the series. Merleau-Ponty's theory of phenomenology may come in handy at the perceptual level of analysis: viewing is not merely passive receipt of information but embodied process in which the images are given their meaning through the relationship of the perceiver with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, pp. 178-184). It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the phenomenological proposition is also the empirical one concerning what specific Indian audiences thought of the series.

It follows that the idea that viewers might have brought into their experience of the series oral traditions, family memories, regional histories, or alternative interpretations should be formulated as a hypothesis rather than an accepted fact. Audience studies would be needed to discover how various communities interpreted Tipu's portrayal in the series and whether their interpretation either contradicted, repeated, or amended the series' intended narrative. What matters for the purpose of this discussion is the fact that the dissemination of the state's visual narrative does not necessarily mean that the meaning remains within its control.

The question of audience participation is nevertheless entirely different from the question of co-production explored in the Tlacolulokos case. The audience members of The Sword of Tipu Sultan had no role whatsoever in the writing, filming, and designing of the series. Their role was one of reception and not of production. The difference is crucial since it keeps the idea of participation from becoming too broad. Social viewing and interpreting do create spaces where meanings can be negotiated, but this does not necessarily redistribute authorship or institutional control.

This means that the three dimensions of the framework have been unequally distributed in this instance. In terms of perception, the series interferes with the visual language in which the anti-colonial struggles of South Asia are portrayed, employing the means of costume, lighting, camera placement, and symbols in order to give Tipu a culturally-based presence

as a sovereign. In terms of epistemology, the series increases the historic visibility by centering Indian resistance in the popular narrative even as it reduces historic multiplicity by creating a coherent hero. Finally, in terms of community, the historic context of the Doordarshan viewing created opportunities for collective watching and discussion, but these did not translate into collective authorship. It thus illustrates the key tension in the paper's argument that the decolonizing potential is not necessarily correlated to institutional reach – a visual practice can attain an unusual breadth of ability to alter the public vision even as it remains limited in its ability to determine the public perspective on that vision.

7. From Representation to Participation: A Relational Ontology of Visuality

7.1 Beyond the Dominant Model of Representation

Three case studies undermine a representational theory whereby images are viewed simply as vehicles of meanings preconceived by the author and accepted by the viewer or consumer. The problem with this theory is neither that representation itself is a passive process nor that all visual theories operate according to it. Representation has occurred through various forms and at various times. The specific point that has been raised here is that a certain form of representation, particularly prevalent in modern European regimes of knowledge, has been able to separate the creation of meaning from its reception and make the image something stable and meaningful enough for those authorised to produce meanings out of it. In the colonial museum, in the practice of ethnography, and in history itself as an authorised discourse, this separation could serve as a mechanism of epistemic hierarchies where the other was visible without having any control over their own meanings.

This point is important in the sense that the history of representation is not a straightforward dichotomy between the ancient passivity model of vision and the modern active approach to vision. In philosophical discourse on vision, activity in vision has always existed. Plato, for instance, constructs his philosophy on vision, one which cannot be regarded simply as passive reception. Descartes on the other hand conceptualizes perception in terms of judgement acts that transcend immediate reception. Moreover, the early artistic traditions in Europe did not view image making in terms of passive reflection of reality. What is at stake here is the identification of the historically specific forms of institution of images as authoritative representations of reality and the positioning of viewers as recipients of such representations. This point makes the Foucauldian analysis of

the historical organization of knowledge relevant since the emphasis here is not on locating an origin of representation but on the conditions of the authorization of certain regimes of visibility.

These case studies directly attack the separation of image, producer, and spectator that defines representation. Rather than offering up an alternative image of colonialism, Sembène produces a cinematic context in which the viewer must consider the processes that allow Diouana to come into sight and sound. The Tlacolulokos mural projects move beyond that, by destabilising the boundaries between producer and spectator through collective production and cross-generational interaction. In The Sword of Tipu Sultan, production of the image is controlled institutionally, but reception occurs in social contexts where viewers might interpret the history through memories and types of knowledge that cannot be contained within the broadcast.

The point that arises out of these case studies is not that representation disappears but that it is shifted into a wider field of signification. Images are important, but their meaning is not exhausted through them alone. Meaning occurs through interactions among images, perceivers, historical memory, and social context. What constitutes participation in this case should not be thought of as participation in the production of art per se. What it really amounts to is the fact that visual meaning occurs through interactions that go beyond the individual image.

7.2 Visual Activism and the Reorganisation of Visibility

The concept of “visual activism” that is developed throughout the current argument can be defined as the employment of the practice of visualization not just as the means of communication of the political message but also as the means of intervention into the conditions of emergence of the community into visibility both for the community itself and other people. Therefore, the case studies cannot be considered only as the examples of alternative representations. Instead, they should be regarded for the ways in which they restructure the relationship between visibility, historical memory and interpretive authority.

In Sembène’s *La Noire de…*, the intervention is mostly made by means of the organization of spectatorship. The confinement of Diouana, her silence and the way she relates to the space she finds herself in reveal the conditions of colonial domination as the perceptual conditions. It is not just about the message communicated to the spectator, but the very visual experience structured in such a way that makes it impossible to miss the oppression

that the character suffers from.

Tlacolulokos murals redistribute visual authority much more directly. Being the products of collective creation, these artworks challenge the distinction between artist and community, while their installation in a public institution enables Indigenous and migrant stories to inhabit a space which used to be structured according to a different historical narrative. Mural becomes thus an image as well as a social practice. The decolonial power of the image is inherently related to the relations in which it has been created, which includes children and other members of the community. However, the institution of its placement means that collective authorship doesn't make asymmetrical relations disappear. The artwork remains open to the danger of being appropriated by the institution which would assimilate the very differences which constitute its critical power.

The third example of decolonization of images provided by The Sword of Tipu Sultan presents another configuration of visual authority. Visual authority still rests with the state-sponsored production here, but the images themselves circulate within a social field of reception which the institution cannot completely control. While the series gives the visibility to anti-colonial struggle and represents Tipu Sultan as a historically rooted hero, it does so via the reductionist narrative.

Similarly, one can observe the parallel in the use of arpilleras as a visual strategy during the period of dictatorship in Chile, where women resorted to textile making in order to give concrete shape to their experience of violence and disappearance, experiences which were intended to be hidden by the official institutions. When these images are removed from their immediate social context, however, they could be presented as aesthetic products in international art galleries or within the discourse of human rights. This is important not because it adds another case study, but rather because it serves as an illustration of the continued vulnerability of visual activism to the shifting of context and its impact on the meanings that are made of these images.

This tension forms the crux of the argument in question. Redistributing visibility does not necessarily translate into redistributing interpretive power. Visibility might increase without any change in the way a community is being interpreted according to pre-established categories.

7.3 From Visibility to Epistemic Transformation

The conceptual opposition between visibility and epistemic transformation enables the

argument to transcend the politics of representation. An image can bring a marginalised subject into the realm of the visible without changing anything in the ways knowledge of this subject is being generated. The decolonial visual practice becomes epistemologically relevant if it starts transforming the knowledge-generating structure itself: if communities are not just represented differently but take part in defining what matters as relevant information, whose interpretation is authoritative, and how the historical experience should be articulated.

The three examples present various levels of such transformation. In the case of Sembène, the main point of intervention is related to the conditions of perception. The audience sees the process of colonial domination in the way space, silence, movement and visual addressing are structured in this film. In the practice of Tlacolulokos the transformation is much closer to the production of knowledge because the very process of its production includes a variety of forms of embodied and communal memory. As for the Sword of Tipu Sultan, the distribution of historical visibility changes considerably, but the structure of the production of the narrative is still centralised and focused on one heroic person.

It is especially necessary to refer to Fanon at this stage, as his analysis of sociogeny precludes understanding epistemic transformation as merely a cognitive process. Colonial categories cannot be viewed as something that a person takes up voluntarily. It is the result of the social relationships, affects, habits of perception, and interactions with other bodies. Thus, any change in visuality may imply shifts in recognition of something as possible or identification. Pain, shame, anger, pride, and solidarity are not the external factors that influence a rational process of knowing, but part of the process of disrupting inherited structures of perception and history (Fanon, 1952/2008, pp. 89–97).

However, this does not mean that affect always results in decolonial knowledge. A person may feel a lot of emotions and at the same time view an image in accordance with the inherited colonial framework. The epistemic issue, then, lies not in production of affect but in whether this encounter offers an opportunity for rethinking existing relationships between perception, interpretation, and authority. That is why the communal aspect is vital. When visual practice provides such opportunities, perception becomes linked to the processes of revision of communal way of knowing.

7.4 Relational Ontology of Visuality

This line of reasoning leads us to the notion of the relational ontology of visuality. What it

means is not just the involvement of a viewer in the meaning-making process or community participation in the interpretation of an image. It makes a philosophical statement that is much more radical: visuality cannot be described as a characteristic of an image or viewing subject taken by themselves. It emerges in relations between bodies, material entities, histories, and social worlds.

One of the crucial philosophical approaches to the development of the idea is provided by Merleau-Ponty. In particular, The Visible and the Invisible offers some insights on the chiasm that questions the standard dichotomy between the subject that sees and the world that exists apart from it. The body that sees is already situated within the visible world. It can be touched and it is touchable; it can see things but it is exposed to seeing. Consequently, perception is not a passive receiving of external stimuli or an active projecting of one's self upon the world. It is a mutual participation in the world of existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 130–155).

This is key to the present argument, although it cannot easily be transferred unmodified from phenomenology to decolonial theory. Merleau-Ponty offers a philosophical account of the interdependency of body and world; Fanon illustrates how that body is socially and historically distinct in its racialisation within the world. The seeing body is thus never merely the body in phenomenological philosophy. It is the body shaped within a history of power, recognition, exclusion, and identity. The possibilities for what one sees, for what one is allowed to see, and for how one sees are always mediated through social relations that lie outside of phenomenological description.

Further development of this historicity is offered by Wynter as she interrogates the figure of the human subject upon which modern epistemic orders have been structured. Since the category of universal humanity has itself been created through a historical racialisation of the genre of Man, then the supposedly universal seeing subject cannot be taken at face value. The decolonial project here is not to offer yet another privileged position, but to interrogate the historical basis of certain universalisations of humanity, perception, and knowledge.

Together, these perspectives present a relational theory of visuality that is both phenomenological and decolonial. Merleau-Ponty defines the inseparability of body and world in perception; Fanon makes visible the historical rupture and ordering of embodiment via racialization; Mignolo describes the epistemological hierarchies that give some modes of understanding universal status; and Wynter describes the narrow definition of the human that grounds such epistemic privilege. The importance Ngũgī places on language,

imagination, and sensory experience reinforces the idea that such hierarchical arrangements do not just operate through explicit theories, but also through the means through which people come to see and narrate their worlds.

Decolonial visual activism, therefore, is more than simply using images strategically for political ends. It involves practices in which seeing, knowing, remembering, and being are reordered in certain ways. Such practices cannot be assumed to be decolonial by virtue of the identity of its makers, the topic of the image, or the intentions of the audience. They have to be judged according to the production and reception context, the distribution of interpretive power, and the disruption of established relationships between vision and knowledge.

The relational ontology described above can thus neither be a theory of endless interpretive possibility nor an assertion that all participatory visual practices are decolonial. The potential for transformation is always matched by the potential for cooptation, reduction, exclusion, and institutionalization. What is crucial is the generation of a new relationship between the visible, the knower, and the community. Decolonial visuality is achieved in that space in which the relationship allows those who have been historically constructed as objects of vision to shape the way in which they are seen and their histories interpreted and the forms of knowledge produced by their visual practices.

8. Conclusion: Toward a Decolonial Epistemology of Seeing

8.1 Restating the Argument

In this paper, the point has been made that decolonial visuality is better seen as a relationship among images rather than an aesthetic category of images. Meaning does not lie entirely in the object itself nor is it simply derived from the intentions of the producer of the image. It emerges through specific encounters wherein existing structures of perception and interpretation are possibly repeated, questioned, and reworked. This is no neutral process, for it has always occurred in a context where history has already decided who sees and who has to be seen.

These three cases offer different examples of what is possible in the field of relations. La Noire de… by Sembène uses the language of cinema to make the viewer relate to the colonial conditions of sight in an uncomfortable way. By making perception and embodiment itself part of the problem, it creates a critical experience for the viewer. Tlacolulokos offers a direct example of reassigning visual and epistemic agency through collaborative

intergenerational practice. While The Sword of Tipu Sultan provides perhaps the most ambivalent example of decolonial visuality: using a state-sponsored popular medium, it can bring out a history of resistance and offer it to the public while at the same time turning a complex history into a coherent heroic story. It is clear that these examples offer no single formula for decolonial visuality. Their difference lies in the relations of production, reception and institutions of power.

8.2 Theoretical Contribution

The first important contribution of the paper is conceptualising a relation between the phenomenological and decolonial theorisations of visuality that preserves the critical potentialities of both approaches. Merleau-Ponty offers a way to think about perception as an engagement of the body with the visual world as opposed to the passive reception of an object of perception. Fanon reveals the limitations inherent in any approach that treats embodied perception as a process independent of the history of racialisation: the body that perceives and is perceived is historically conditioned in its formation in social relations where it receives pre-judgemental meaning.

The approach of Mignolo and Wynter builds on this analysis to encompass the problem of the constitution of knowledge and its universalisation. On the one hand, Mignolo criticises the notion of the coloniality of knowledge that speaks to the presence of epistemological hierarchies even after the formal end of colonialism. Wynter questions the idea of the overrepresentation of man as the source of these hierarchies. Finally, the focus of Ngũgī on language, imagination and the sensorium offers yet another dimension of the reproduction of these structures through cultural means that influence perception and memory.

Collectively, the above theories provide a framework for the definition of the decolonial epistemology of visuality to be discussed in this paper. It is not merely an appeal for more representative pictures but also not the assumption that the embodied perception is necessarily resistant to colonial power. Instead, the theory makes a more concrete and demanding argument by saying that visuality becomes decolonial when the existing relationships between perception, interpretation, memory, and epistemic authority are subjected to questioning and sometimes even reorganization.

Moreover, it allows defining how this research contributes to the visual culture studies field. The critical phenomenological approach has already proved the significance of engaging embodied perception into conversation with racial and postcolonial theories. This study

continues that dialogue but in a new way by examining what occurs when the philosophical issues are discussed in relation to particular visual artworks and practices in the Global South region. The focus on the material and historical specificity is important because the theory of decolonial visuality cannot be verified only in terms of abstraction.

The rethinking of visual literacy then is based on this reasoning. Visual literacy can no longer be seen as an individual skill to interpret signs, considering the socially and historically organized process of sign making and sign interpretation. Rather, it should be viewed as the ability of the situated subject to discern power relations within visual discourses, to challenge existing ways of understanding and, if possible, take part in the construction of new meanings.

8.3 Practical Implications

The implications of the analysis also reach visual pedagogy and community cultural practices. The case of the Tlacolulokos shows that the pedagogical meaning may be embedded not only in the finished product but in the production process itself. Involvement of different generations, room for debate, and consideration of differential types of authority may turn visual production into a process of collective investigation instead of just artistic activity. This approach does not have to become some sort of universal template. Its importance is in proving that the process of education can be transformed from the transfer of ready-made interpretative codes into the process of investigation of conditions of their creation.

The three examples are further confirmation of the need for institutional contexts within decolonial visual pedagogy because a commissioned mural, an internationally distributed film, and a TV show that has been sponsored by a state cannot have the same potential for collective action. Therefore, curators, educators, broadcasters, and other cultural institutions need to think about not just what an image stands for, but who makes the decisions around how it is made and how its meaning is set forth and what kind of collective actions become possible after the image has been produced. It is not the question of whether the involvement of an institution renders any visual practice invalid.

8.4 Limits and Future Directions

The argument presented here has been consciously limited both in scope and in nature of

evidence. The three case studies used here cannot be claimed to capture the range of visual practices around the Global South; neither do they make any conclusive connections between specific visual forms and change in perception or collective understanding. Case studies have been chosen for what different configurations of authorship, reception, power structures, and memory they present, not for the completeness of the field.

Furthermore, the paper presents itself as an interpretative one. While it discusses visual forms, theoretical concepts and context, it does not include any systematic studies of audiences and ethnography of reception of the works mentioned above. It is especially important in regard to The Sword of Tipu Sultan, when assumptions of what kind of interpretations viewers had should be considered tentative without the evidence provided by audience studies. The same concern should be stated regarding the assumptions made about the impacts of collective creation of murals on participants' perceptions and epistemology. Such issues should be investigated through methods that could study negotiation of disagreements, authorities, memory and representations.

For example, future studies may be able to put the current model into conversation with participatory action research, community-based research, and collaborative ethnography. The digital visual culture is another dimension where the current argument can be extended. Social media sites have created new dynamics in terms of production, distribution, and consumption, which may create new ways of participating in visual activities, which involve redistribution of visibility, along with new dimensions of algorithmic curation, commercial mediation, and institutional control. Contemporary Indigenous visual activities, vernacular imagery, and other kinds of community-based media would be some other ways of testing whether the current relational model works outside the institutional contexts.

In addition, the framework must be aware of the risk of idealizing participation. Collective creation does not automatically amount to decoloniality. A community might reproduce its own hierarchies; an institution might instrumentalize its participation; a popular medium might increase access to an oppressed history but reduce the number of historiographic perspectives from which that history can be understood. The issue is not, then, whether the practice is collectivist, popular, or oppositional in nature. Rather, it is whether the relationship between the practice and its producers and receivers holds any epistemic potential.

8.5 Final Reflection

Decolonial epistemology of seeing starts with a seemingly straightforward, yet demanding idea: the politics of an image cannot be separated from the social and political conditions of learning how to see, interpret, and recognize other people. Coloniality does not function merely through the representations of the colonized. It functions through certain systems of visibility that determine who is going to appear as intelligible, legitimate, and fully human. In order to challenge the former one must engage in something more than the act of producing alternative images.

The three examples considered in this paper show various ways of doing it. The former is achieved through the organization of cinematic perception, the latter – through the production of collective memory inscribed in material form. In the case of The Sword of Tipu Sultan, there are some elements of both approaches, however, this work shows that the struggle for decolonial visibility takes place within institutional constraints of the chosen medium.

Wynter's critical challenge to the overrepresentation of Man, at this juncture, is crucial insofar as it shifts the focus of the debate from questions about inclusion within an existing order towards those pertaining to a rethinking of the terms through which that order constructs the human (Wynter, 2003, pp. 318–328). As far as visuality is concerned, this is tantamount to asking not only whether marginalized individuals have become represented within the representational space, but also who controls that representational space and how that control is exercised, as well as how one might be able to take part in defining the very terms of one's representation.

In this sense, what becomes significant about decolonial visuality is not so much its claim to produce a purified form of representation as it is its potential to bring about circumstances wherein established patterns of seeing and knowing become contestable. Differently seeing, as such, is not enough to change the world. Yet when seeing is indissolubly linked with knowing, remembering and recognizing others, different visual practices become a part of a more comprehensive struggle for a different social and epistemic order.

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