

**Speculative Vexillology: Exploring National Identity and Imagining Afro-Brazilian Futures
through Flags**

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ABSTRACT

Speculative Vexillology: Exploring National Identity and Imagining Afro-Brazilian Futures Through Flags

Tarcisio Cataldi Tegani

Flags are an essential visual artifact built to, among many other things, help facilitate a collective national identity. In theory, it creates a homogeneous sense of identity and belonging; in practice, this overpowering idea and performance of nationalism can mask a history of oppression of a people and/or minority groups.

Under the lens of the decolonial Brazilian research methodology Quilombismo and speculative and ontological design, this research-creating project sought to develop two fictional flags and a collection of twelve postcards to draw on the idea of an imaginary Brazilian future rooted in Black futurism and social change. Through a detailed explanation of the creation process guided by the research question of how flags can act like a visual platform for the imagination of new futures for Afro-Brazilians, this project assesses the relationship between national identity, representation, and collective memory.

Finally, the driving goal of this research-creation project is to expand the field of vexillology within graphic design while creating new visual artifacts driven by Quilombismo as a cultural-creative methodology. By creating new flags and postcards that chronologically narrate key pieces of Afro-Brazilian history, one major goal was to challenge the traditional practice of vexillology and instead use it as a means of cultural resistance, daring to speculate about a future with a truly representative national imaginary.

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DEDICATION

To those who dreamt this dream before me;
To my parents and my brother, for your dreams;
To the love of my life, Julia, for our dreams.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning as forms of rudimentary signaling, flags have evolved through use in ancient military banners, to maritime semaphores, to symbols that represent entire nations and peoples. National flags, in the modern world, are used as visual symbols to stand for the whole of a country, embodying various interpretations. Flags are visual artifacts that express many signs, with the goal of ultimately uniting a people under one image, carrying, also, not only many semiotic implications, but a shared cultural and historical national identity.

This research-creation project is deeply rooted in my personal interests, as I have always found flags to be so meaningful and full of history. Its visual language is like no other, where each flag's shapes, colours, and even text can hold such power of inclusion and exclusion, centralization and marginalization, representation and misrepresentations.

As further analysed in future chapters, we will dive into concepts such as national identities and understand that they are artificial in many ways; despite playing a big part in one's identity. It is all connected: The language, the shared environments, the country's history as their citizens learn it; but mostly, the visual artifacts they see and share, and how formative of their individual experience and worldview they are.

This is what Wunenburger (2016) call the imaginary¹, “a set of productions, either mentally or physically manifested, based on visual images (painting, drawing, photograph) and linguistic

¹ *Imaginaire* in French, which is the original language of the publication. To the author, it is a difficult term to translate as it “remains a source of ambiguity and misunderstanding”. (2016, p. 39)

expressions (metaphor, symbol, story), influencing the symbolic process of giving meanings to things and ideas” (p. 11).

The imaginary, however, is not limited to a mere collection of images but a dynamic system that roots our sense of belonging, shaping our beliefs, acts, and values. It can also be a powerful tool of action, according to Wunenburger, who argues that political and social transformations are very often ignited by powerful images that enhance the collective desire.

Building on the concept of national identity, this project revisits many of Brazil’s attempts to synthesize what it means to be Brazilian, and how many of these “tries and errors” came short due to colonialism and (racist) racial constructs (Fernandes, 1972; Camillo, 2020). Drawing on Nascimento’s *Quilombismo* (2020), this project engages with his speculative methodology to imagine Afro-Brazilian futures, grounded in the reclaiming of black memory and ancestry.

Through the creation of three design artifacts – a physical flag, a digital flag, and a collection of twelve original postcards - speculative vexillology is a personal narrative that proposes a critical dialogue on Brazilian history and an imagination of a Black-centered future.

Besides my own interests as a graphic designer, this research-creation project stemmed from my personal identity and sense of self as an Afro-Brazilian man. With the recent rise of far-right political forces worldwide, particularly in Brazil, it is impossible not to notice how strongly ideologies and political groups use symbols and colours as means of identification. The strongest of these symbols is flags, as there can be so many of them. In times of political tension and inflamed imageries, it is important as a designer and visual artist to investigate the relationships embedded in the flag, its meanings, what they say – but also what they fail at.

Through a comprehensive analysis of vexillology as a design branch, flags as the primary visual symbol of a nation, and using *Quilombismo* as a creative methodology for speculation, this research-creation seeks to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: How can flags be a visual platform of speculation and imagination for black individuals and communities in Brazil?

RQ2: Considering *Quilombismo* as a creative design methodology for Afro-Brazilians, how can one visually imagine new models of plural national identities?

This research project aims to answer these questions, looking at the flag as a design artifact that reflects a sociological phenomenon of identification, belonging, and socio-cultural organization that is the nation. By exploring the modern concept of nation, which differs from state, it will be possible to understand that the flag holds immense symbolic power that translates into real power over a society, and designers as agents of imaginary materialization can and need to be aware of their responsibility towards these dynamics.

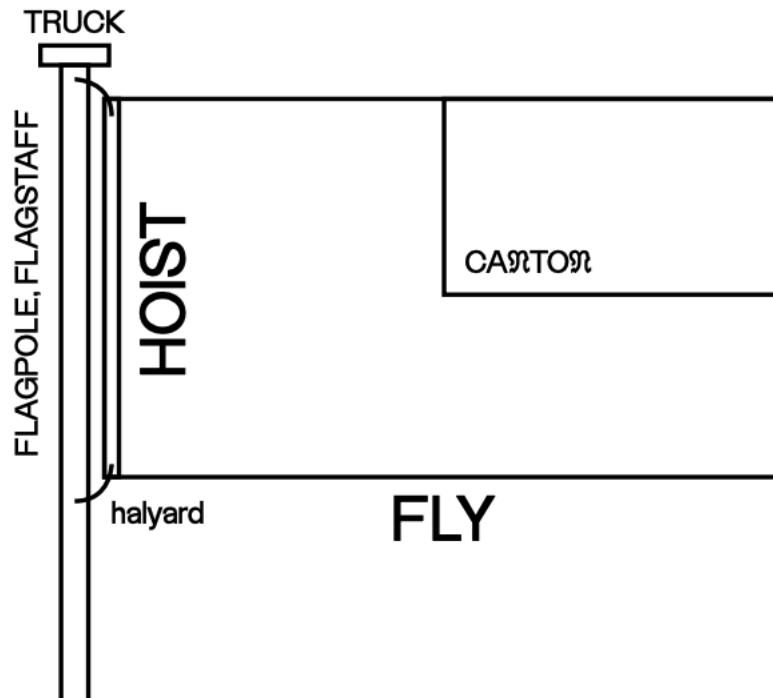
The objectives of this research are to expand the field of vexillology in Graphic Design, to assess the relationship between nationalism, identity, representation, and symbolism; and to create new artifacts that are driven by my own identity as an Afro-Brazilian, speculating on visual symbols, their materiality, and their cultural meanings.

In the following chapters, I examine the relationship between the nation as ideology, its imaginative nature, and the symbols through which it is represented, especially how flags embody national identity. Chapter 2 investigates the concepts of nation, nationhood, nationalism, and national identity, and how the idea of *brasildade* was constructed in Brazil after its independence.

Additionally, Afro-Brazilian theories, led by Abdias do Nascimento's work, are introduced as a critique of this national identity discourse, proposing a new cultural and political framework using both theory and visual artifacts. In chapter 3, flags are analysed as design artifacts, exploring their meanings, the symbolic power they hold, and the role they play in shaping the collective imaginary. Using mixed methodologies, chapter 4 outlines how I approached the project and uses *Quilombismo* as a new, hyper-located framework within the design field. Chapter 5 presents the creative outputs of this research, applying speculative vexillology in the Afro-Brazilian context. Then, in chapter 6, I reflect on the results of this work, its limitations, next steps and ideas for future work.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated by Slater and Znamierowski (2007), a flag is a piece of cloth, bunting, or similar material displaying the insignia of a sovereign state, a community, an organization, an armed force, an office, or an individual. A flag is usually composed of many parts: the fly, the hoist, the canton, the pole, and others. The main and sole objective of flags is to visually represent nations, organizations, or an individual (Turner, 1967).



(Figure 1: Flag diagram. Free creation by the author.)

The World Encyclopedia of Flags & Heraldry (2007) dates the flag history to prehistoric periods, where humans clustered in hunting groups and appointed a leader in battles and territorial disputes. In that context, humans wore ceremonial headpieces and held a rod or spear adorned with wood, feathers, or animal skins. Later in China, with the invention of silk, larger and lighter banners that

were easier to see from long distances were created. The use of fabric expanded to Mongolia, India, and Persia, and once it reached Rome, it spread across the whole Empire. Vexilloids and early flags were originally long and triangular, or short and square.



(Figure 2: Flag for Theater, 17th-18th Centuries. China [Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911]. Silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk satin. 70 x 91 in. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.)

In medieval Europe, from the 12th to the 14th century, flags became a significant means of identification and identity in battles through the heraldic system. Heraldry is the system of identification using armorial bearings based on hereditary lineages, meaning European houses and kingdoms. As helmets hid warriors' faces, heraldry became the prominent means of identification. Later in the 16th century, with the decline of armorial banners, many modern flags became

prominent. Created after revolutions, the “design of these newly created flags reflected the idea that, with the abolition of monarchy, the heraldic system of identification was also rejected” (Slater & Znamierowski, 2007).



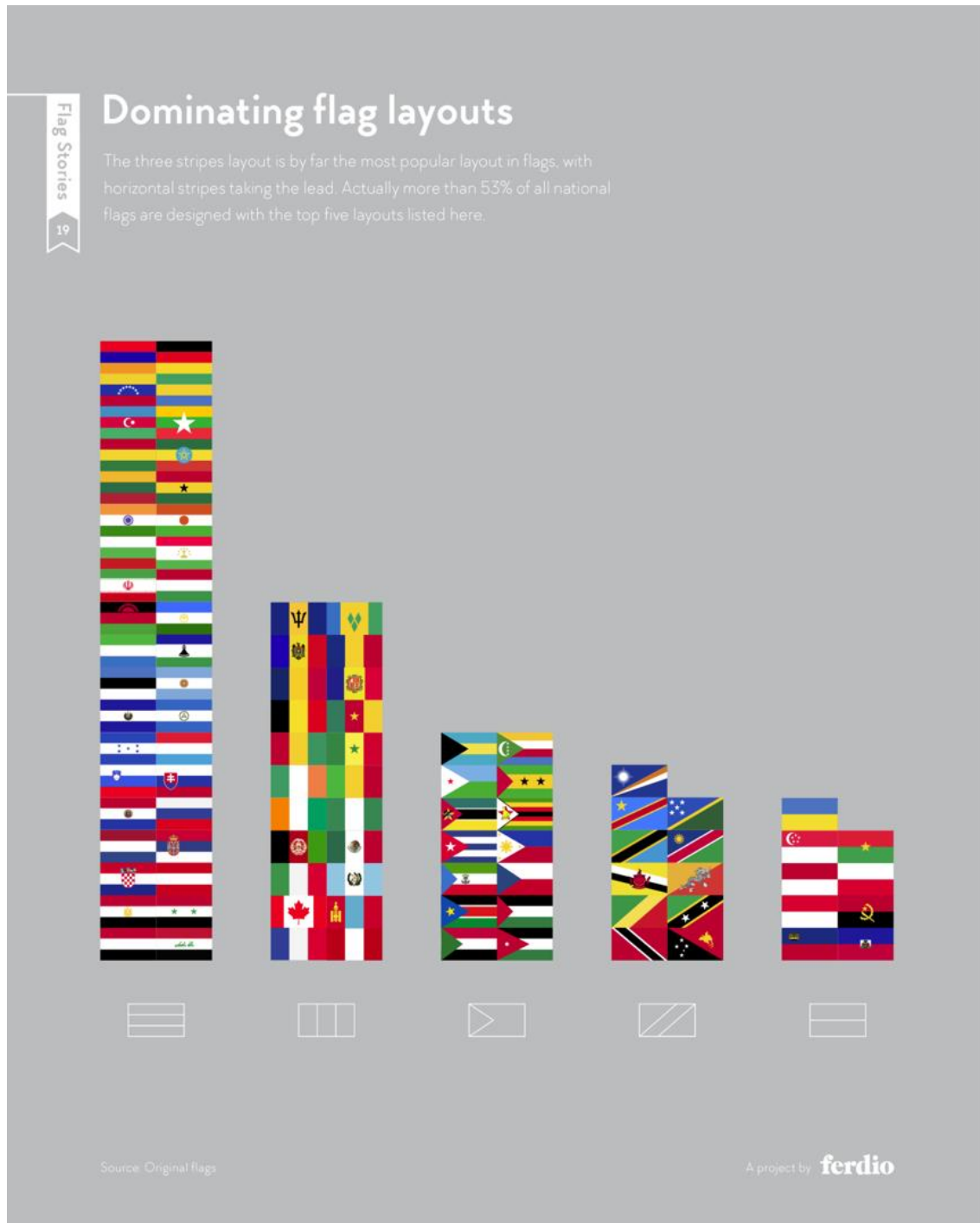
© 2013 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

(Figure 3: Royal Arms of the United Kingdom, as used in England²)

Today, flags are used as the primary visual symbol of nations and many of them follow a system that came from the early modern flags: simple shapes, few colours, and standard formats. Although there are no universal rules for creating a flag, Ted Kaye (2001) in a booklet called “Good Flag, Bad Flag” attempted to create a design guide for flags, using principles found in flags around the globe. The five basic principles of flag design are: 1) Keep it simple, 2) Use meaningful

² Encyclopædia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/heraldry/Seals#/media/1/262552/1871>. Accessed: September 14, 2025.

symbolism, 3) Use 2-3 basic colours, 4) No lettering or seals, and finally 5) Be distinctive or be related.



(Figure 4: Flag Stories. A project by Ferdio. Available at <https://flagstories.co/>. Accessed on Sep. 03, 2025.)

It is important to highlight that flags are objects protected by law in many countries, being institutionalized in their respective Constitutions and official documents. In these official law documents, rules are usually outlined for the flag's display and what is considered an action of disrespect towards it, like changing shapes, colours, or the addition of any elements.

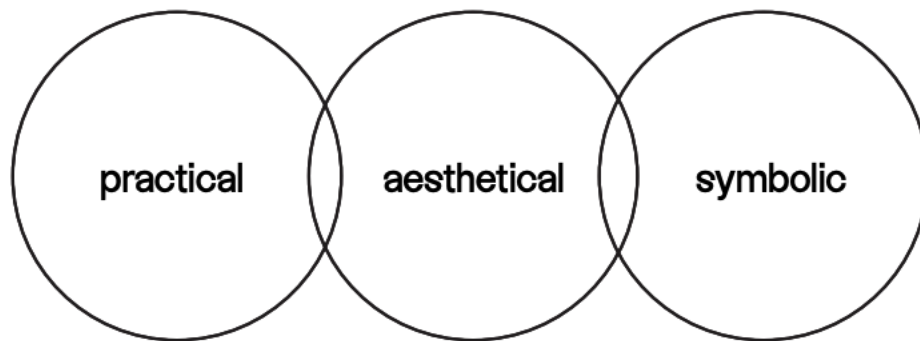
Taking Brazil as an example, the *Lei dos Símbolos Nacionais do Brasil* (Law of National Symbols of Brazil), nº 5.700/1971, protects the Flag, the Anthem, the Coat of Arms and the Seal, as they are considered national symbols. Disrespecting the flag or other Brazilian symbols, such as presenting the flag with the wrong ratio or in poor condition, can be criminalized as a misdemeanour under the law. The desecration of the national flag is also a federal crime in the country, whereas in other countries like Canada and the U.S., such acts are protected under “freedom of expression” legislation.

Because flags are such powerful icons, even with explicit rules (ratio, colours, textile, instructions on how to fly it) and legislation, it is common that flags are worn, burnt, remixed, shredded and pieced together as people use them as an object of belonging, identification, hate, or simply self-expression.

2.1. What do flags mean?

Flags are a full plate for design studies, both for their denotation and connotation depths. Löbach (2001) uses flags as the main example of the symbolic function that any industrial design holds. He says that “a symbol is a sign, a sign that exists for something. The reality (e.g. the State) that is represented by a symbol (the flag) is present in the human mind by the presence of this symbol.” The symbolic function derives directly from the object's aesthetic aspects, which in fact, are also influenced by its practical functions, completing then, the three essential aspects of any design

(Image 5). The flag as an object that identifies a nation is not detached from design; in fact, it is conceived to formally represent a country (practical) in a way that represents the country's shared history, values and/or landscapes (aesthetic) to invoke the feeling of belonging and nationhood in its members (symbolic).



(Figure 5: Graphic inspired by the book *Industrial Design* by Bernd Löbach (1976). Free creation of the author.)

As many other objects in our daily lives, flags have the ability of conveying a range of meanings and feelings. This also means that, sometimes, flags and its colours, shapes and texts can mean something they were not created to have, and vice-versa.

Taking Brazil as an example again, we could cite the year 2022 and its political effervescent events. The most traditional FIFA World Cup-winning country would compete in another edition, and just before the tournament, the presidential elections would take place. This context is important because the president in question, Jair Bolsonaro, would be running for a re-election against former President Lula, in what was, perhaps, the greatest ideological clash of recent decades³.

³ *Como a ideia de polarização se aplica às eleições de 2022* (How the idea of polarization applies to the 2022 national elections), by Isabela Cruz. June 12, 2022 (updated December 28, 2023). Accessed 20 Sep. 2025. Available at: <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/expresso/2022/06/12/como-a-ideia-de-polarizacao-se-aplica-as-eleicoes-de-2022>.

On January 8th of 2023, after a heated presidential race, Brazil was impacted by a coordinated invasion and vandalism of the national buildings of the Congress, Palacio do Planalto⁴ and the Supreme Federal Court⁵. The attack was made as a protest against the results of the federal elections (where President Lula was elected) and commanded by self-proclaimed patriots intending to incite anti-democratic acts. While invading and creating chaos, most of the people were using the national soccer team's jersey and national flags wrapped around their bodies as their main form of identification.



(Figure 6: Protesters invading the *Esplanada dos Ministérios* building in Brasília on January 8, 2023.
Photo credits: Sergio Lima, AFP.)

This visual pattern, as shown in Image 6, was crafted by right-wing-inspired movements to create an idea of nationalism and patriotism while denying any sort of political party affiliation. Professor

⁴ The official workplace of Brazil's president.

⁵ *Supremo Tribunal Federal*. The court where issues related to the Constitution discussed and addressed.

Campos, in an interview, says that “what was new during this period was the appropriation of the national team's shirt by supporters of right-wing politicians [...] the wearing of the green and yellow national team shirt in the way we saw, not even the military dictatorship had managed to achieve”⁶.

Leone (2021) analyses and expands on the discussion of flags' literal meanings and different emotional connotations by comparing Saussure's and Hjelmslev's contrasting approaches in semiotics.

For Saussure (1989), for example, the study of military signals (also understood as flags) meant an increased visibility of communication. According to him, forms, colours, and text should always be simple and easy to understand as a form to reduce ambiguity as much as possible; as different interpretations were a synonym of lack of knowledge of codes.

On the other hand, Hjelmslev (2020) offered a more robust idea of the flag as a sign, where each sign would be composed of two planes: expression and content. In each plane, the other two parts constantly interact with each other – form and substance:

⁶ *Realizada em ano eleitoral, Copa do Mundo tem histórico de uso político* (Held in an election year, the World Cup has a history of political exploitation). Rodolfo Stipp Martino, March 20, 2022, (Updated in March 22, 2022). Available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/realizada-em-ano-eleitoral-copa-do-mundo-tem-historico-de-uso-politico/>. Accessed August 11, 2025.

	Content	Expression
Form	Form of Content (Conceptual Structure)	Form of Expression (Pattern or Rules)
Substance	Substance of Content (Cultural meanings)	Substance of Expression (Physical Manifestation)

(Figure 7: Free creation by the author, inspired by Hjelmslev's semiotic theory (1963)).

This interaction helps explain how a system of signs expresses meaning and how that meaning is organized. In a flag, for instance, the form of expression is the actual design of the flag, its proportion and visual rules. The substance of expression, then, is the physical material of the sign itself. On the plane of content, the form represents the intended symbolism behind the flag's design. Substance is the cultural and historical meaning attached to the flag. It is the wide range of emotional responses that the flag evokes (p. 59-61).

In Leone's analysis, the emotional response to flags cannot be codified, established or organized officially because it escapes control. It is up to the people, usually of a determined country but not limited to, to decodify the flag according to their culture, experiences, political inclination, and occasion. To him, it is only by looking at what people do and interact with the flag that we can start to understand the range of its meanings.

Amid the political conflicts that led to the invasion of the Congress and the use of the Brazilian flag and colours as a “patriotic” right-wing symbol, several designers and artists started to create activist artifacts in reference to the national flag, as a way of changing the collective association of the national symbol to a right-wing icon.

The Instagram profile @designativista⁷ compiled many of them, serving as a platform for visual speculation and the construction of new imaginaries. These artifacts sought to criticize the national sovereign symbol, criticize its use as an object of exclusion, imagine new scenarios of national unity and, for many, an affirmation of identity. Azevedo (2024), when cataloguing and analysing these many creations, treats the national flag as an image of dissent.



(Figure 8: From left to right, Matheus Ribs, “KylomboAldeya”, 2020. Hal Wildson, “Re-Utopya”, 2022.)

⁷ Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/designativista/?hl=en>. Access on: 10/01/2025.

Making sense of this analysis, we can understand that under the expression plane, the flag is not only an image, but an object – its materiality affects the semiotic process. In this process, the flag's agency is generated. It is the interaction between the object's materiality (existing in the real world), the design and visual choices (colours, shapes, symbolism), and the wind (a kinetic natural element) that grants agency to it. Agency is the power and symbolic place that the flag occupies in society.

Under the content plane, however, Leone (2021) explains how different cultural forms influence the meanings generated by the expression plane:

“[...] depending on the position that we occupy in the semiosphere, our perception of the primary denotation of the flag does not change, but our beliefs and feelings as regards its connotations do, no matter how precisely the law strives to determine the features of its expressive plane” (p. 60).

2.2. What is vexillology?

The word vexillology comes from Latin and ancient Greek roots; the first half, vexillum, points to one of the first records of a flag-like object. The other half comes from the suffix -logia, which indicates a branch of learning.

Vexillology, or the study of flags, was coined by Whitney Smith in the late 1950s and proposes a scientific study of these objects - their types, forms, history, symbolism and functions with the objective of developing a body of related knowledge, theories and principles.

Vexillology is rooted in the social sciences, specifically stemming from Smith’s background in political science. Through his work, he aimed to formalize the field, which was previously a subcategory of heraldry (Orenski, 2003; Heimer, 2017; Guenter, 2017).

As we have seen, the Romans used vexillums, or vexilloids (Image 9) as a military sign: a piece of cloth, that flew their coat of arms attached to a pole.



(Figure 9: Roman vexillum Bas-relief from Hadrians temple in Rome (AD 145).⁸)

Although it has its own field of study, the literature on flags is scarce in relation to design. Theorists across various fields—anthropology, sociology, history, political science, geography, etc.—try to

⁸ Image 9 retrieved from Slater, S., & Znamierowski, A. (2007). *The world encyclopedia of flags & heraldry*.

thread the study of flags into theories of nation and nationalism, but very few place it within the field of design, despite flags being such a strong visual symbol with multiple interpretations and reinterpretations.

The largest organization of scholars in the field is the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), dating from 1967 and with more than one thousand members, they publish the annual research journal *Raven-A Journal of Vexillology*. Other institutes, such as the *Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques* (FIAV) and the Flag Institute, also mobilize academic knowledge in the field.

2.3. What is a nation?

The concept of nation is something that many authors of a variety of fields have studied and discussed. Bauer (2000) believed in *Charaktereigenschaft* - a community of character. According to that idea, the common fate (that encapsulates the common character) is primarily sharing a common history, and it involves, almost necessarily, a uniformity of language. He believed that nations are not naturally constructed; they are instead created through social differentiation, despite arguing for multiculturalism within socialist thought. Geller (2015) had an interesting view, arguing that nations are a product of nationalism. His theory relates to Bauer's in the belief that nations are artificial constructs from various elites across the world. He articulates a difference between nation and state, and ethnic groups, in which the state is a political entity with clear and defined territory and borders, whereas a nation is something fluid, usually characterized by a sense of belonging to a community or separateness.

Anderson defines nation as “...an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (2020, p. 5-6). He then proceeds to unpack what he means by “imagined”, “limited,” and “sovereign”.

It is an imagined community because of two factors. One, it is impossible for all the members of this nation to know each other, even the smallest nation. Yet, in their minds, lives the image of their communion - shared values, ideals and history. Two, because nations are conceived based on comradeship, a horizontal construction that overcomes inequality or exploitation.

Limited means that every nation has boundaries. There is no nation that imagines itself co-existing with another in the same space and time. And, finally, sovereign means that every nation dreams to be free, and the very emblem of freedom is the sovereign state that translates visually to the object of a flag (p. 7).

A nation is the product of modern nationalism (Bauer, 2000; Geller, 2015; Anderson, 2020). The contextualization of the ideological and historical comes into being of nations, is that nations, and consequently their identities, are not something natural or spontaneous, but rather a by-product of decidedly modern political interests and dynamics.

2.4. The “us” and the “others” and the national project

In contemporary societies, national identities are so intrinsic that it might seem that they are a force that arises from an almost magical collective understanding and assortment of traditions that, without warning, become the symbology of a nation. The fact is that national identities are anything but ‘natural’. They are crafted and are part of an affirmation of identity before the world,

and an effort to answer for themselves and to the others who they are. Hobsbawm (1977 and 2012)⁹ affirmed that national identity is an ideological process of tradition invention. This invented tradition is

“a set of practices that are normally regulated by tacitly or openly accepted rules, so that such practices, of a ritual or symbolic nature, aim to inculcate values and norms of behavior through repetition, which automatically implies a continuity in relation to the past.” (2012, p. 8)

The phenomenon of a nation's inception is a social phenomenon of symbolic creation, inventing and reinventing, affirming and reaffirming myths and traditions. Chauí (2000) stresses that above all symbolisms, the nation itself is the prime symbol, that which gives meaning, unity and direction to other symbolic elements of social life. She describes the nation as a semiophore¹⁰, in which the State projected the nation as the great integrating sign and producer of shared meanings, through schools, museums, monuments, and archives.

From this perspective, the idea of nation is configured as a constant ideological discourse that works as a central symbol in the construction of an invented past. However, national ideology is not limited to the past: in certain contexts, it projects images of the future, even if anchored in tradition, and acts in the present, whether to highlight or to cover up social tensions and conflicts.

Nation-states, as a modern phenomenon, require a shared social imaginary to legitimize themselves among others. As Anderson (2020) argues, nations are conceived to produce solidarity

⁹ Although Hobsbawm gestures toward the idea of national identities are not natural or ancient but are historically constructed and often ideologically shaped in his first article, it is in the book “The Invention of Tradition” that he defines and frames the concept even deeper, hinting that cultural symbols, such as flags, anthem, etc, are part of the historical narrative construction.

¹⁰ Semiophore comes from the Greek "sēmeion" (sign, signal) and "phoros" (bearer). Semióforo, in Portuguese, was coined and used by Marilena Chauí dialoging with Bruno Latour's (1992) ideas of carriers of symbolic meaning, the *quasi-objects*.

and intellectual and affective bonds of social belonging. It is based on this discourse that abstract and generalizable bonds take hold of the population, far beyond concrete statements, such as blood and geographic ties. This is how the "we" is invented. In a context that emphasizes individualism and the atomistic perception of the world, making the strength and persuasive power of this discourse enormous.

As Souza (2004) theorizes, national identity needs to be seen as at least something positive and must forge pride so that people can identify themselves as individuals and from there, produce belonging, as he states that “we define ourselves and are who we are largely based on this sense of belonging” (p. 12).

In conclusion, a nation is imagined and conceived as such. At birth, a national project is created, usually reflected in its flag. From this project, traditions and cultures are invented based on political interests and social dynamics. In many national cases, these traditions and cultures can be exclusive, focusing on some stories to the detriment of others. The next chapter will highlight the Brazilian historical and ideological context, how the national flag contains remnants of a flawed project, and Afro-Brazilian theories that are both a critical reflection on the country and offer tools for imagination and speculation.

3. THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT AND THE QUEST FOR RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Due to European maritime expansion, Portuguese fleets arrived in the lands that are now called Brazil in 1500 and began a colonial process that lasted until 1822, with the declaration of independence (Fausto, 2006). Around the year 1530, the Transatlantic Slave Trade began, and the colonizers brought, between the 16th and 19th centuries, around four million Africans to the country. Supported by the theories of Black populations being an inferior race, neither the church nor the crown was opposed to the trade of Africans across the Atlantic shorelines. In fact, the crown intensified the slave trade in 1570, creating different strategies of dehumanization — they were brought to a foreign land, obliged to speak a different language and separated from each other arbitrarily (p. 52).

During this time, individual or collective escapes, aggression against landowners, and daily resistance were part of the relations between enslaved people and landowners (p. 52). In an attempt to recreate forms of social organization like those in Africa, freed or escaping enslaved African people began forming *Quilombos*. One of the most important and relevant ones was known as the Palmares quilombo, which resisted attacks of Portuguese and Dutch colonizers for almost a hundred years, being suppressed in 1695.

The years before the end of the colonial period were not marked by tension or revolts, as the Portuguese Crown had successfully suppressed some popular uprisings (p. 129). Unlike the Spanish colonies in the Americas, Brazil's independence was achieved in a friendly manner, with a Portuguese monarch remaining as head of state to maintain political and economic stability,

which benefited from sugar exports. By this time, thirty percent of the country's population consisted of enslaved people.

After Brazil declared independence by the monarch Dom Pedro, a national project was put together, resulting in the 1824 constitution, whose idea of individual freedom, civil and property rights, was deliberately designed to coexist with the restriction of freedom for the millions of enslaved.

Therefore, in the decades after the country's independence (1822), the economy was still based on the slave model, which made the economic elites constantly disrupt the advancement of the abolitionist movement. However, amid external pressure from England and a shift in support from landowners, the Empire signed the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law), abolishing slavery in 1888 —the last country in Latin America to do so.

The immediate effect of the abolition was the creation of an institutional abandonment where formerly enslaved people were granted freedom but offered no compensation, land redistribution, nor any facilitated access to education and full citizenship. They were “left without resources in a society that continued to marginalize them.”¹¹

When critically analysing the post-independence national project, Nabuco (1883) stated that “slavery for us [in the case of Brazil] was not merely an instrumental material basis for sustaining the system. It was the main structuring and classifying element of the nation, leaving no aspect of it, whether political or social, exempt from its deep marks. Slavery, thus, founded a nation called Brazil. (p. 172)”

¹¹ Charlotte Dikamona, “May 13, 1888: The Golden Law Abolishes Slavery in Brazil,” Nofi Media, May 14, 2025, <https://www.nofi.media/en/2025/05/may-13-1888-the-golden-law-abolishes/94972>.

Aligned with this void created, an active state policy of demographic engineering of whitening was put in place. This policy was influenced by the scientific racism prevalent in the 19th and 20th centuries, which viewed non-white populations as an obstacle to national progress.

Fausto affirms that “the abolition of slavery did not eliminate the problem of the black population, but [...] resulted in profound social inequality. Partly a result of prejudice, this inequality ended up reinforcing prejudice against black people (p. 221).”

Following economic and political changes, the following year, in 1889, the military staged a *coup d'état* to proclaim the Republic. It was through the influences of positivism¹² and based on the national projects of idealists such as José Bonifácio that the republican national project was established.

3.1 Order and Progress as a national project

The Brazilian flag was designed by philosopher and mathematician Raimundo Teixeira Mendes in 1889. It was constructed with a green background and a yellow diamond in the center. Inside the yellow shape is a blue circle, cut by a white stripe that reads "*Ordem e Progresso*" (Order and Progress). In the top part of the blue circle, there is one star, and on the bottom, twenty-six stars.

¹² Positivism is a school of thought formulated by the French thinker Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Its emphasis, according to Fausto (2006), in the Brazilian case was on the action of the State and the country's conservative modernization formula.



(Figure 10: Brazil's national flag. Designed by Raimundo Teixeira Mendes. Credits: Public domain.)

According to historical records (Prado, 1903; Luz, 1923; Menezes, 1986), the green and the yellow were the colours of the European Houses of Bragança and Habsburg and the blue and white, a representation of the connection of the so-called old world (Europe) and new world (The Americas). The stars represent the twenty-six states plus the federal district, and the slogan is based on French philosopher Auguste Comte's positivist ideas. Teixeira Mendes, when talking about the conversations that led to the adoption of the current flag, right after Brazil's Proclamation of the Republic, in 1889, said that "it was essential that we did not lose our Latin traditions and that national thinking focused on France as the nation in which human regeneration was developed." It is safe to say that the national project was still based on European worldviews, and the national flag was supposed to represent that.

In recent decades, however, Brazilian public messaging about the flag has presented a semiotic interpretation that draws on Brazilian nature and heritage. As Image 11 shows, this rhetoric is reinforced through government channels.

In a social media post celebrating the 203rd anniversary of independence, the federal government described the flag's colours and symbols as "the green of Brazilian flora," "the yellow of the country's mineral wealth," "the blue of the rivers and the sky," and "white, the desire for peace."



(Figure 11: Federal Government's post on Instagram about the meanings of the national flag in celebration of the Independence.¹³)

Many historians have stated that the flag has nothing to do with forests or natural richness, but it is hard to pinpoint a moment in time at which the narrative shifted. Rezzutti, biographer of the

¹³ Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DOUOgQrkc5Z/?img_index=1. Accessed September 7, 2025.)

leading figures of the Brazilian monarchy, stated that “the explanation of the green of the forests and the yellow of gold was constructed later [than the Proclamation of the Republic]. It was a belated attempt by the Republic to modify the original symbolism of the flag, associated with the monarchy.¹⁴”

These ranges of meaning show that national symbols are constantly in dispute and are often reinterpreted according to prevailing ideologies. This dynamic cannot be overlooked by designers, who have both the technical capacity and social responsibility to critically engage in the study and creation of flags, as they have enormous power to mobilize societies and transform imaginaries. This is the case in Brazil. When it comes to Brazil’s national identity, it is evident that it struggles to truly represent its own people. Historically, this identity was constructed around the myth of racial democracy¹⁵, a narrative based on cordiality and the union of the races inhabiting the territory.

Fabricio Maciel, in his book *Brazil-Nation as an Ideology* (2007), traces the main records of the creation of Brazil's national identity and critically analyses them. His work contextualizes and legitimizes the fact that the search for racial understanding in Brazil has always been present, but has been ignored or treated too lightly, especially in practical terms.

Maciel shows that Brazil as a nation operated as a symbolic ideology of national unity and homogenization in order to silence racial, social, and political tensions, mainly by reinforcing ideas

¹⁴ Edison Veiga, *Dia da Bandeira: como as cores do símbolo brasileiro foram reinterpretadas para apagar ligação com a monarquia*, (Flag’s day: how the colours of the Brazilian symbol were reinterpreted to erase the connection with the monarchy). November 19, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-46255976>.

¹⁵ The *Mito da Democracia Racial* was coined by the sociologist Florestan Fernandes. He adopted the term “myth” to criticize the thinking of racial harmony proposed by Gilberto Freyre, whose work will be cited later on this research. Fernandes is clear about the type of racism that existed in the formation of the country and how this myth was used to silence the struggles of Africans and Indigenous peoples in Brazil.

of harmony and cordiality. With his contextual and critical analysis, the author identifies national ideology as a selectively constructed discourse, constantly excluding Indigenous peoples, Black people, and poor people from full and total belonging to the national social imaginary. Taking these symbolic mechanisms and the nation's historical context into account is the first step towards fully understanding it.

3.2. Quilombismo as a concept

It is in the work of Afro-Brazilian scholars such as Fernandes (1972), Nascimento (2020), Camilo (2021) and in the work of Maciel (2007) that is possible to affirm that there has never been a “union of the races”, let alone cordiality among the country's population, especially for a country which suffered with more than three hundred years of slavery. Despite the efforts of the Brazilian ruling class in denying the lives of enslaved Africans during the colony and their history and collective fights, quilombos were settlements of freed and runaway enslaved individuals seeking self-sufficiency and resistance against exploitation.

Assembling his academic work, Nascimento (2020) published the book *O Quilombismo: documentos de uma militância pan-africana* (The Quilombismo: Documents of a Pan-Africanist militancy). Quilombismo, in basic terms, is a sociopolitical proposal for Brazil, developed from the point of view of the Afro-descendant population based on the political and social organization that occurred in quilombos in the 17th century. Nascimento's ideas were in tune with the Caribbean and American (USA) studies of the Maroon resistance movements and the Civil Rights Movement, Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanism¹⁶ and debates about the myth of racial democracy in Brazil.

¹⁶ Marcus Garvey was a prominent leader of Pan-Africanism in the United States, although he was not the main theorist of the movement, as W.E.B. Du Bois was. Nascimento was influenced by some of Garvey's ideas when he was exiled in the U.S. from 1968 to 1970. Garvey was a highly controversial figure who lost

Quilombismo is a political, cultural, and civilizational project based on the black experience and community solidarity as the foundation for building Brazil. *Quilombismo* as epistemology is a mode of social organization whose principle is the institutionalization of black power anchored in self-determination and self-sufficiency, which, according to the author, are acts of “reversing history in our favor” (p. 33) and “creating a place where culture plays a critical role, both creative and liberating, in the individual and in national society.”

Nascimento (2020) argues that a *quilombista* (from the quilombo, in Portuguese) revolution comes with the complete reclaiming of African and Black visual cultures, visually repopulating then, the social imaginary that forms the national identity.

Quilombismo is a proposal of debating, codifying, and generating culture and cultural elements by and for Afro-Brazilians. The author stated that *Quilombismo* articulates the diverse levels of collective life whose dialectic interaction proposes complete fulfillment and realization of the creative capacities of the human being (Nascimento, 2020, p. 291). For the author, the institutionalization of self-determination and self-sufficiency of all the different diasporic African communities is extremely important and rather than being a static and neutral concept, culture plays a critical role, both creative and liberating, in the individual and in national society.

Nascimento not only emphasizes the defense of African values of culture, religion, art, social organization and worldviews against Brazil’s aggressive environment towards the Black population. In his understanding, culture is an inseparable interweaving of aspects that constitute

popularity and credibility among black activists due to his nationalist rhetoric and meetings with the Ku Klux Klan.

the historical, existential and metaphysical totality. And Afro-Brazilian culture, possessing an inherent dynamism, has always been a culture of liberation.

During the darkest period of the military dictatorship in 1970, Abdias do Nascimento, who was exiled in the United States, painted one of the most important works on the national flag. It's difficult to say it was one of his most important works, because Nascimento was an extremely prolific figure: a politician, playwright, academic, and painter. In his work "*Okê Oxóssi*", Nascimento subverts all aspects of the national flag. Firstly, the flag is no longer horizontal, but vertical. Subsequently, the positivist motto is replaced with the words "*Okê, Okê, Okê, Okê*", which is a greeting to the Orisha *Oxóssi*, an entity of Yoruba origin, present in Afro-Brazilian religions. The bow and arrow, which make the flag change orientation, represent the insignia of the hunting entity, symbolizing abundance and the guarantee of food. The importance of this artwork to the Afro-Brazilian imaginary is huge, as Duncan (2021) analysed

“The strategic overlapping of these symbols expresses political ideology and ancestry as inseparable issues. Art is therefore used by Abdias as a platform for communication and a tool for struggle, a transformative instrument through which we can propose other ways of existing.”



(Figure 12: Abdias Nascimento, “Okê Oxossi,” MASP Acervo, 1970, MASP, São Paulo, Brasil, <https://masp.org.br/index.php/acervo/obra/oke-oxossi>.)

Nascimento not only compiled a theory of liberation for Afro-Brazilians in the writings of *Quilombismo* but also created a vast visual repertoire that serves as a structure for new imaginaries that emerge and will emerge from the contemporary interpretation of his work, as in this research-creation.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research-creation follows mixed methodologies centred on the ideas of ontological design, quilombismo, and speculative design, investigating flags as central visual symbols of national identity, and in the context of this project, Brazilian identity. There is also an exploration of how flags not only carry within themselves the possibility of portraying the reality of a nation, but also of producing and transforming it, according to its diverse interactions and cultural manifestations.

4.1. Quilombismo as a methodology

If historically *quilombos* were “true prototypes of a free society” based on self-sufficiency, where Nascimento proposes culture as a means of freedom, *quilombismo* can be thought of as a methodology of research and creation regarding Afro-Brazilian identity.

Some core values of this methodology are political and cultural autonomy without isolation, empowering individuals to define their own path. It emphasizes reclaiming black memories, reconstructing national symbols to highlight black presence in history, and producing knowledge and culture rooted in black epistemologies.

Thus, *quilombismo* as a methodology aims to “make African and black cultures contemporary,” (2020, p. 55) since, for a long time, they differed from the Western, European, and American view of science. In this context then, quilombismo can be viewed as what Donna Haraway coined as situated knowledge, when criticizing the Western way of doing science as this detached, impartial “view from above, from nowhere”. As beautifully claimed by Haraway, “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (p. 590).

4.2. Ontological design

From the work of Arturo Escobar comes the notion that all design creates ways of being, doing, and knowing, and that these ways reconfigure the very world that created them. In Abdias do Nascimento, *quilombismo* is not just a text of national political proposal, but a methodological guide for the production and maintenance of culture in the Afro-Brazilian context, equipping its reader with Afro-centered epistemologies and the symbolic revolution in a collective work of memory recovery. Finally, based on the work of Dunne and Raby, speculative design is used as a tool for speculating on preferable futures, in which the artifacts created become narrative objects of an imagined reality centered on the Afro-Brazilian experience and autonomy.

Expanding on Arturo Escobar's ideas, design is understood as a set of actions that create ways of existence. This, according to the author, is ontological practice, which stems from the idea originally and brilliantly introduced by Winogard and Flores, in which “in designing tools we are designing ways of being” and later expanded with Anne-Marie Willis' statement in the phrase “we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us”.

This understanding removes design from its strictly instrumental position and reposition it as an act of world-making. The author describes that “design is ontological in that all design-led objects, tools, and even services bring about particular ways of being, knowing, and doing,” (p. 10) something extremely relevant when discussing national symbols, which not only serve as a visual container for national identity but also shape reality and political and social subjectivities. Escobar cites the Zapatista expression “*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*” (a world where many worlds fit) when discussing relational ontologies and the concept of the pluriverse. This is a vision that recognizes that there is no single legitimate way of life and social organization, but rather multiple ways that coexist and are often in dispute.

In the context of this research, this methodology allows us to understand that the creation of national flags in the modern world is an exercise that designs national narratives and, at the same time, is designed by them. No visual choice in this process is neutral. The analysis and creation of flags as an ontological practice makes possible their functional reinterpretation and their reimagining as mediators of plural worlds.

4.3. Speculative design

In *Speculative Everything*, Dunne and Raby explore and theorize a new axis of design function. Rather than being a discipline that seeks to offer solutions to the world's problems, speculative design creates spaces for critical reflection through artifacts, narratives, and scenarios. This is a type of design that “thrives on imagination and aims to open up new perspectives on what are sometimes called wicked problems”. Instead of looking at predictions of the future, what is probable or plausible, this method focuses on what is possible and preferable. As the chart below shows, this lens brings the possibility of creating objects that imagine alternatives, mainly by questioning the present, as described by the authors “designers should not define futures for everyone else, but [...] generate futures that act as catalysts for public debate and discussion about the kinds of futures people really want.”

As a method, speculative design provides real tools for project development, such as critical fiction and prototyping of hypothetical artifacts, as is the case with this research-creation. According to the authors, these resources enable operation “between reality and the impossible.” This method acts as a social experiment, making it possible, in a practical way, to think about and design quilombismo:

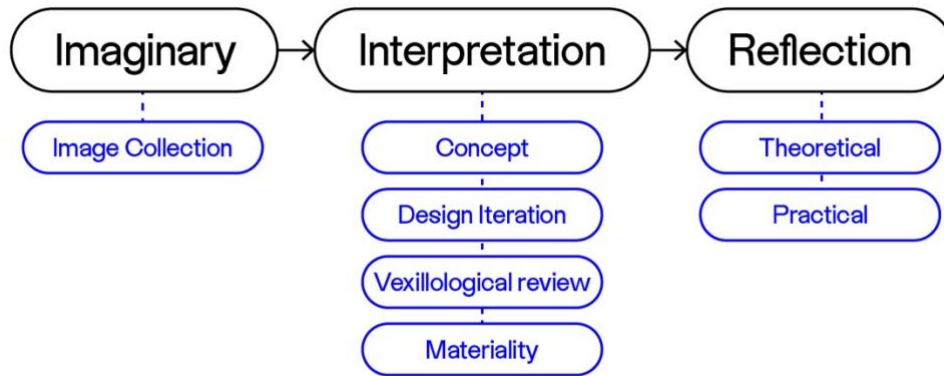
“We find the idea of creating fictional worlds and putting them to work fascinating. The ones we are most interested in are not just for entertainment but for reflection, critique, provocation, and inspiration. Rather than thinking about architecture, products, and the environment, we start with laws, ethics, political systems, social beliefs, values, fears, and hopes, and how these can be translated into material expressions, embodied in material culture, becoming little bits of another world that function as synecdoches.” (p. 70)

Just as designing flags is not simply an aesthetic task, but also a political and social one, designing speculative flags is an exercise in social imagination, in this case proposing blackness as the center of Brazilian identity.

4.4. Methodological approach

Quilombismo as a methodology was what guided this research. Alongside speculative and ontological design, this research creation constructed a methodological framework based on Nascimento’s writings and researchers’ interpretations of it.

The methodological approach, as visualized in Image 13, has three axes: imaginary, interpretation, and reflection. Imaginary involved collecting imagery related to my Afro-Brazilian experience and research on the topic (codification).



(Figure 13: Methodological Diagram. Free creation by the author.)

Interpretation involved conceptualizing and creating the work itself, which was an iterative process like many design processes. The interpretation phase consisted of 1) conceptual mapping and thematic definition, 2) design iteration, 3) vexillological review, and 4) materiality and agency. Not all creations followed the same linear pattern. Some began with a theme, while others started with materiality.

Reflection involved reflecting on the theoretical and practical lessons learned from the artifacts generated. These reflections were based on previous research, potential interpretations of the work, and other miscellaneous findings and interactions between me, the artifact, and the actual world.



(Figure 14: Afro-Brazilian imagery. Nascimento, Valentim, and Anjos.)

5. CREATION

5.1. Creation context

Like many processes in design, this one was not exactly linear. My curiosity to create flags dates back almost ten years, when I first encountered *Estúdio Lampejo's* design project “*Breves Bandeiras*” (Fleeting Flags) and its idea of constructing ephemeral symbols using an opposite platform (the flag). This desire intensified during the period of great political and cultural effervescence between 2018 and today. Still, this interest probably dates back to a much earlier period, when I discovered new countries and their flags through World Cup sticker albums in 2002, 2006, and 2010, as well as my passion for the Olympics and their diverse histories and rituals. However, since creative processes are sometimes nebulous and difficult to pinpoint with clear markers, this project adopted a linear approach to its evaluation and validation, undergoing transformations until reaching its final stage, presented in this thesis.

Since the first axis of the methods is the imaginary, I focused on extensively exploring Black and Afro-Brazilian creations, prioritizing the latter but not excluding other influences. I chose this approach to reshape my own imaginary, which is a key concept discussed throughout this document. The next step in the methods is interpretation. Design is often subjective (Alexander, 1979), involving the designer’s internal understanding and knowledge of the world as part of the creation process. By re-populating my imaginary, I aimed to expand my worldview, enhance my creative vocabulary, and then interpret this knowledge and experience with honesty while grounded in Black epistemologies.

Nascimento (2020, p. 54) already argued that the idea of a cultural revolution through Quilombismo is not about introducing new and unproven knowledge, but rather about renewing,

criticizing, expanding, and updating the existing knowledge based on the Afro-Brazilian experience. In this research-creation, the renewed imaginary informed the process and helped me establish the design parameters listed below.

The parameters were: 1. To only look for and use design elements, such as typefaces, shapes, and colour palettes, that are explicitly made by and/or for Black creatives. 2. To consistently reflect on and compare my reference board and iterations to understand and explore the interaction between the imaginary and creation. This is a way to acknowledge that this research-creation aims to propose a dialogue between my work and the thoughts and creations of those who came before me, rather than attempting to produce the definitive solution for Afro-Brazilian representation. After all, in a society programmed to systematically forget the past and let issues resolve themselves (Fernandes, 1972, p. 25-26), this project positions design not only as a tool but also as a space for searching and examining my own past. Through this process, I fill gaps that school didn't teach me or popular education hasn't yet reached me, and create with the intention of sharing knowledge. As Camilo (2021, p. 26) stated: "Individuals without a past are unable to politicize their futures." Lastly, 3. To continually analyse and critique, if needed, my intentions within the designs.

Guided by these parameters, then, the first step was to map out the central themes I wanted to focus on and to develop the pieces, grounded in quilombismo and my own experience as an Afro-Brazilian. This was followed by a survey of Afro-Brazilian symbolisms already known to me, such as works by Abdias do Nascimento and Rubem Valentim, but also with the help of the brilliant catalogue of the exhibition "*Negras Memórias do Design Brasileiro*" (Black Memories of Brazilian Design), which recalls the history of the black contribution to the country's visual knowledge. A prominent factor in this survey was the search for Adinkra symbols, which make up

a considerable part of this visual repertoire and serve as profound visual and philosophical inspiration. After this step, a board was created with the history of the Brazilian flag juxtaposed with works that directly reference it. Finally, the guidelines of vexillology were applied to understand its rules and potential ruptures conceptually. These guidelines ensure visual clarity and consistency within the field of study, but deviating from certain patterns was necessary to include central themes into this research.

Traditional vexillography, the practice of making flags, operates within a strict environment of pragmatic decisions about visibility, manufacturing, and communication. National flags are part of an ecosystem that limits their making.

Although most of the flags of the world nowadays are unique and reflective of symbolic decisions of their people, flags have historically been objects of imposed identity through colonialism. The British Empire, for example, used a standardized template across its many colonies worldwide — the Union Jack — as a form of cultural dominance over the colonized.

In cases like New Zealand, where the *Tino rangatiratanga*¹⁷ flag was pushed to be flown alongside the national flag, it demonstrates how a people can assert their sovereignty against a colonial state. It also shows the multiplicity of national identities within a country and how hegemonic decisions fail shortly in representing the totality of a nation. By going against simplicity and homogenization, this research-creation invites complexity and positions flags as objects of identity inquiry and affirmation.

¹⁷ Tino rangatiratanga is the national Māori flag. “Tino Rangatiratanga Flag.” Manatū Taonga | Ministry of Culture & Heritage, New Zealand. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.mch.govt.nz/our-work/flags-anthems-and-emblems/new-zealand-flag/tino-rangatiratanga-flag#:~:text=A%20nationwide%20consultationThe%20Tino%20Rangatiratanga%20flag%20was.that%20can%20coimplement%20the%20New%20Zealand%20flag.>

5.2. *Uma Bandeira Para Hoje* (A Flag for Today)



(Figure 15: “A Flag for Today” installed at FOFA Gallery in Concordia University. December 14, 2023.
Photo Credits: Bronson Jacque.)

Back in 2020, I never thought I could design a flag despite my strong interest in them. During the boredom of COVID lockdowns, I saw a project call-out on Instagram. A design creator and a studio launched a weekly challenge with different briefings to help emerging designers build their portfolios and receive feedback during critique livestreams. It was already the third week of the challenge when I discovered it, so I decided to join right away. The task was to create a flag that represented hope. There were no specific parameters or rules; it simply needed to convey the message (hope) through the medium (flag).

That entire week, I dedicated myself to researching and thinking about the concept of hope and how best to frame it. However, I was also studying and reflecting on the visual vehicle that would carry my design: the standardized understanding of a flag. As mentioned before, flags are limited to their format, and there are a lot of constraints on composition and colours to what is considered a “good” or a “bad” flag. Condensing this abstract feeling of hope and boiling different concepts into a flag composition was quite intriguing.

Finally, at the end of that week, I was able to create a digital mock-up of my flag and present it virtually. The feedback was very positive, and this project made me examine flag-making even more closely in preparation for this research-creation.

This flag has been the artifact upon which I built the creative output of this project. Although this flag existed before the formal stages of this research-creation, in the Interpretation phase, its original digital design was adopted and recontextualized, ultimately serving as the root for the subsequent work: its physical materialization, the digital flag, and the collection of postcards.

Reflecting on my past, I see that the same drive and approach I used then served as a creative and methodological foundation for what was to come. In this research-creation process, I revisited and scrutinized my conceptual and design choices, then pushed further by transforming them into a physical object. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the steps I took in creating this piece, which formed the basis for and contributed to the interpretive aspect of this research-creation’s methodological approach.



(Figure 16: Detailed shot of “A Flag for Today” installed at FOFA Gallery in Concordia University. December 14, 2023. Photo Credits: Bronson Jacque.)

Conceptual mapping & Thematic definition

As I was given the briefing beforehand, the creative process began with conceptual mapping, specifically the thematic framing. Thinking about hope, I questioned myself about the symbols we use to represent it and what I think about when I talk about it. At first, the mainstream images of a dove holding a branch of leaves, a pair of hands together, or even the primary religious symbols came to mind. Investigating it further, new questions arose. Questions like how I relate to hope, or what gives me hope, and even where I place that hope.

Furthermore, I realized that, for me, hope came from memory. It comes from struggles one has overcome; it comes from the thinking of better times and from the lessons one is taught. And in a lecture entitled “Hope, Despair and Memory”, after winning the Nobel Prize, Elie Wiesel (1986), using an ancient Jewish fable, explores the mystical concept of memory and how it is attached to hope. He said that “Without memory, our existence would be barren and opaque, [...] and if anything can, it is memory that will save humanity.” Expanding on the topic, he proceeded:

“Just as man cannot live without dreams, he cannot live without hope. If dreams reflect the past, hope summons the future. Does this mean that our future can be built on a rejection of the past? Surely such a choice is not necessary. The two are not incompatible. The opposite of the past is not the future but the absence of future; the opposite of the future is not the past but the absence of past. The loss of one is equivalent to the sacrifice of the other.”

This claim, therefore, suggests that the past and the future are not fixed in a linear process but are interconnected. The tragedy, then, is twofold: losing sight of the past means you are doomed to repeat its mistakes; abandoning hope for the future is to sacrifice all the achievements and historical struggles of our ancestors.

This connection between memory and hope sparked the conceptual framework for this flag. Acknowledging that one of the pillars of the African diasporic experience of knowledge is rooted in ancestry, I began collecting symbols, anecdotes, and other concepts that could visually guide the design's inception. Amid this collection, I came across the adinkra symbols, a form of ideographic writing from the Asante civilization in Africa, compiled by Nascimento & Gá (2009). These symbols can represent concepts, proverbs, or general philosophies of life, and one of them is Sankofa. In the conventional translation, it means “go back and fetch it”, “return to your past”, or even “it is not a taboo to go back and retrieve what you have forgotten or lost”. This symbol

then became a powerful representation of what hope could signify in an Afro-Brazilian context and as a diasporic practice.

Design iteration

Sankofa is often represented as a bird like the dove. The symbol below depicts a bird with its head turned backward, retrieving an egg from its back. Sankofa can also be reproduced as a heart-like shape, but it is used less often.

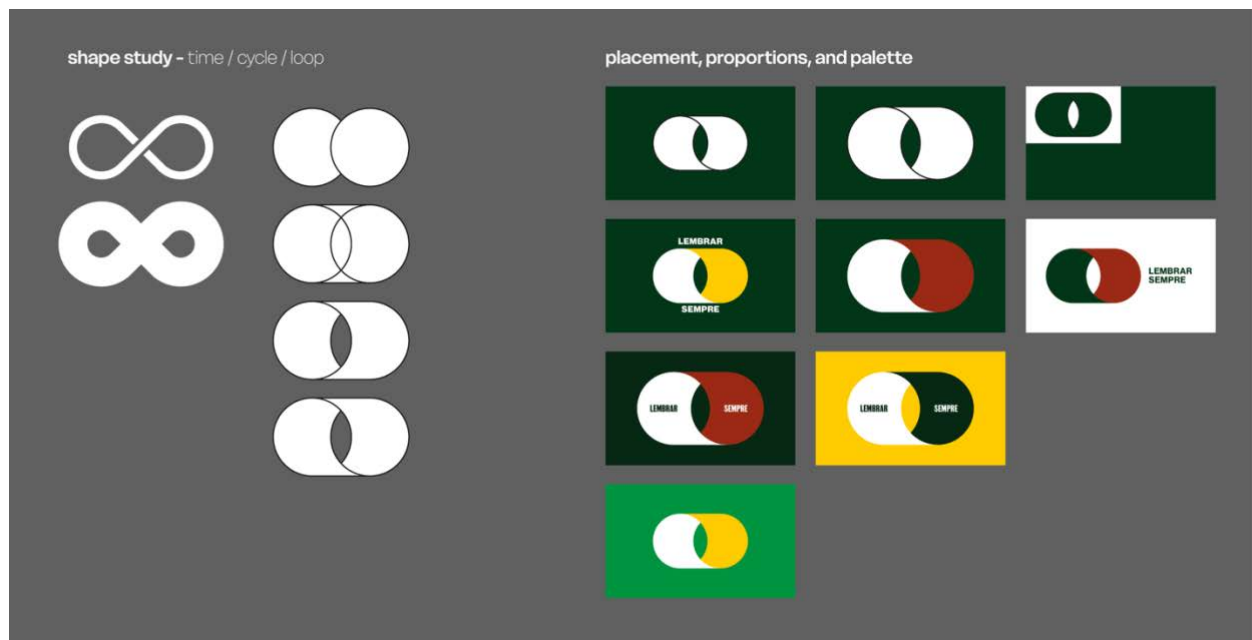


(Figure 17: Sankofa, one of the Adinkra Symbols. Credits: The Witness Tree Institute of Ghana.¹⁸)

Firstly, I explored various versions of what this bird could look like. Although this symbol itself carries meaning, it is quite complex to place on a flag. Additionally, creating a rectangle and positioning the symbol within it would not qualify as my original design. I then simplified the shape of the bird to geometric forms, as shown in Figure 18, while still reflecting the movement characteristic of the symbol. Many shapes proved satisfactory, including one incorporating the

¹⁸ Awutey, Samuel Delali. "Sankofa." The Witness Tree Institute of Ghana, July 25, 2022. <https://www.witnesstreeinstitute.org/2022-blog/sankofa>.

diamond from the national flag. However, two issues arose from these studies: first, the symbol could be misinterpreted as a lock; second, if viewers are unfamiliar with the Sankofa symbol, the ambiguity might be too great, reducing the flag's impact. While experimenting with different placements and colour palettes, I also noticed that a green background with a red design could be mistaken for the national flag of Bangladesh.



(Figure 18: Process documentation.)

Sequentially, on the next iteration, I was inspired by Estúdio Lampejo's *Breves Bandeiras*¹⁹ project. Their exploration of ephemerality and uncertainty, using the flag as a medium, was something I was looking to bring into this design. As we saw earlier, official flags carry an important and serious status with them, making it interesting to explore what is beyond these boundaries. Then I began to view time as the primary element of memory and to sketch ideas that would blend these concepts, referencing Sankofa.

¹⁹ Estúdio Lampejo. *Breves Bandeiras* (Fleeting Flags). Available at: <https://filipelampejo.com/en/projetos/brevesbandeiras>. Access on July 15, 2025.

Exploring the loop symbol marked the beginning of shaping this new version. Its movement and simplified form align with traditional vexillology norms. That's when I started examining the shape of two overlapping circles, with one starting the other, symbolizing infinity. After several placement iterations, two words appeared on each side of the shape as a statement. "*Lembrar sempre*" means "to always remember." In this flag, memory and hope are ongoing actions rather than static statements. It relies on agents to occur: continually examining the past to foster hope and envision the future. It reflects the idea of connecting the collective memory shared by Afro-Brazilians as a form of wisdom—looking back and retrieving what was left behind, understanding time as an infinite cycle, and staying active to imagine and bring about change.

The process of choosing which typeface to use or which is the best shape to represent the symbolism on this flag was not merely based on whether it looked good or not. Indeed, the graphic designer is concerned with how things look and how elements are laid out. However, the three principles I have set for myself during this research-creation process were what ultimately influenced and validated the creative process across the three artifacts.

In my imaginary research, many of Nascimento's paintings were of great source of inspiration. They are visually striking as well as carriers of immense symbolism. Looking at his paintings, but more specifically "*Eternidade*" (Eternity), made me realize that the way he used round shapes to explore time was very similar to what I was looking for.



(Figure 19: Abdias Nascimento, "Eternidade", 1972. Collection Museum of Black Art - IPEAFRO.)

On this flag, the motto is extremely important to the overall message as it is the typeface chosen. VTC Martin is a typeface created by Tré Seals from Vocal Type, a foundry committed to creating fonts that aims to inspire dialogue, bridge historical gaps, and celebrate diversity²⁰. The foundry defends that typography holds the power to represent and acknowledge marginalized groups while at the same time inspire change. VTC Martin was designed inspired by the posters "I AM A MAN"²¹ used on the Memphis Sanitation Worker's Strike during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Considering that the typeface was created by a Black designer, inspired by visual

²⁰ "History," Vocal Type, accessed November 17, 2025, <https://www.vocaltype.co/history>.

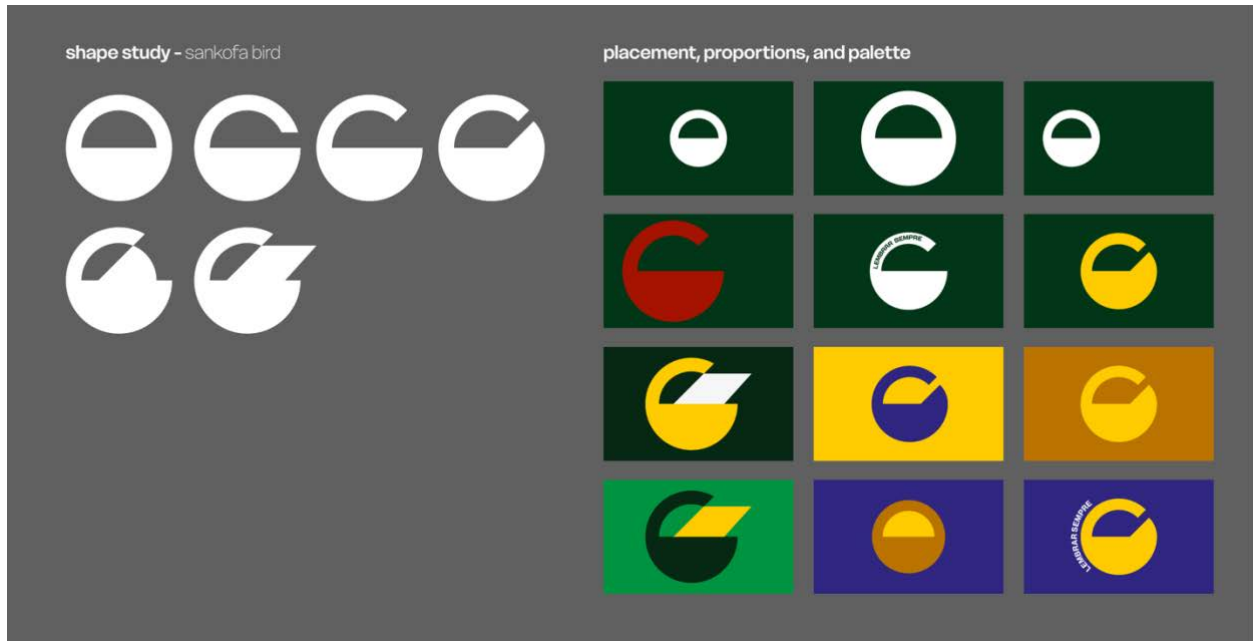
²¹ Poster, "I Am A Man," National Museum of American History, accessed November 17, 2025, <https://n2t.net/ark:/65665/ng49ca746ae-1539-704b-e053-15f76fa0b4fa>.

research in movements of justice and liberation, not only the aesthetic of the font made sense to the overall design but what it meant to use it on the flag.

When designing the colour palette, my initial reference was the Brazilian national flag. However, since this symbolism wasn't necessarily embedded in the national imagination, I looked for something applicable within the Quilombismo visual context. Nascimento discusses in his writings that he built his arguments around several liberation movements in North America and the Caribbean, including Pan-Africanism. This, in turn, led to the creation of sub-organizations like the UNIA in the United States, which, in 1920, developed the Pan-African flag. Hanchard (2017) states that the meaning of this flag to black people is:

"that they have some way of identifying themselves in the world. And... to also project to those people who are not members of this particular national community that they too belong, that they have membership in a world of communities, a world of nations."

Ultimately, I adopted this palette in honour of the African diaspora in the Americas and the community, as well as the national aspects it represents.



(Figure 20: Process documentation)

Vexillological conventions

As part of my self-evaluation process, I consulted the vexillological guidelines, reviewed each of the five topics, and reflected on whether I adhered to them and why. On a broad level, this flag follows one of the standard proportions of 3:5, used by countries like Poland, Sweden, and Argentina.

Keep it simple

The design is composed of geometric forms that occupy a large portion of the flag. Although there is textual information, capitalizing the letters makes it easier to reproduce and draw it from memory.

Use meaningful symbolism

When discussing this topic, Kaye explains that “the flag’s images, colours, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes.” In this context, the direct symbolic elements are the shapes and the slogan. The two overlapping circles indicate the dynamic nature of time. This shape represents time in a dynamic way, with past and future intertwined, suggesting that memory is not static but an ongoing process. The slogan builds on the theme, acting as a call for resistance by reclaiming memory.

Use two or three basic colours

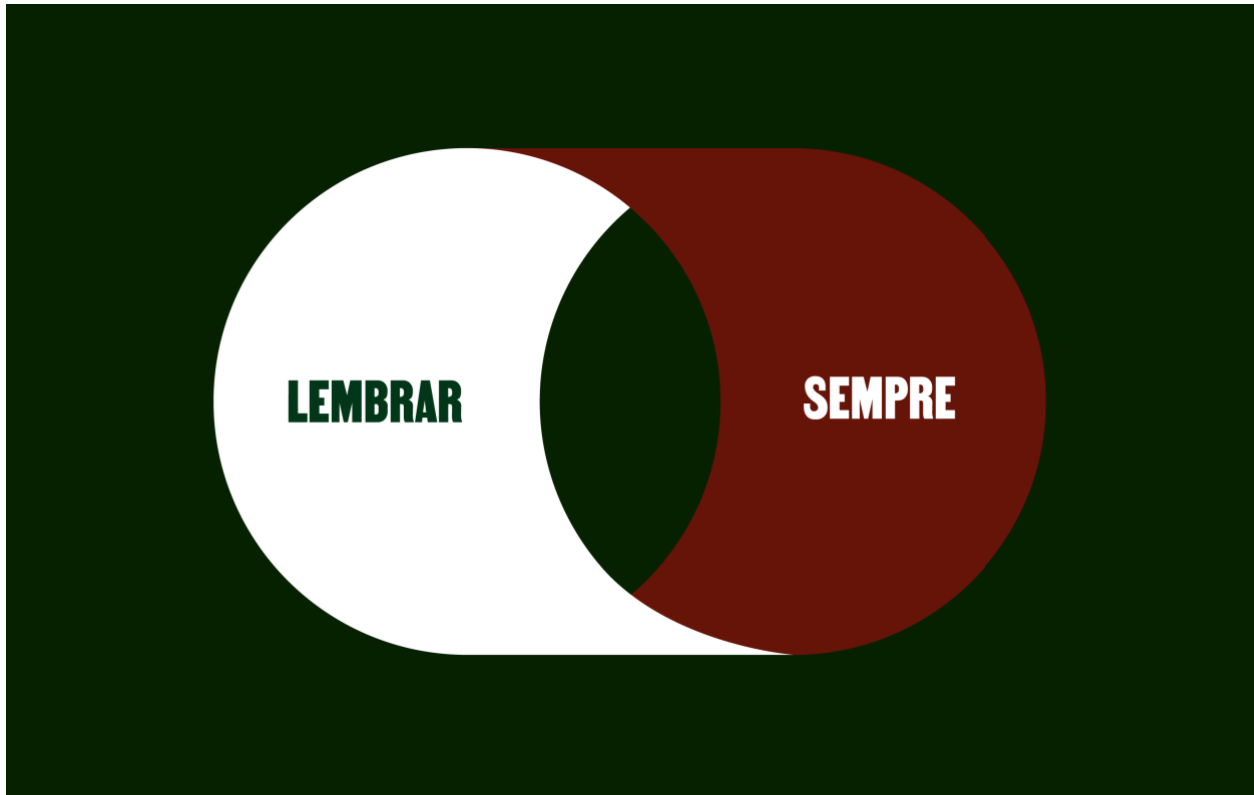
By following the Pan-African flag colours, this design follows this guideline. Replacing the black with the white was purely for contrast, since the hues of the green and red are already dark. Countries like Kenya, Malawi, Libya, South Sudan, and Mozambique have similar colour palettes.

No lettering or seals

It isn’t easy to move away from textual statements in flags coming from a country that has such a strong motto. “*Ordem e Progresso*” was the slogan that guided the republican national project, and it is used to this day as a political statement. By placing this proclamation of memory-seeking, I aim to subvert the positivist and European-based traditions that surround the Brazilian imaginary. One of the reasons that Kaye (2001) is opposed to the use of words in flags is that words are not reversible (p. 10). To counter that, this flag is mirrored on both sides, so it is readable on both sides, as intended from the beginning. What changed along the way was the possibility of exhibiting it in Canada, which made me opt for the English translation of the statement, broadening the audience.

Be distinctive or be related

There is no national flag in the world that matches this one in shape and design. However, its rounded shapes and colour palette make it related to many others, as previously stated.



(Figure 21: Final design)

Materialities and agency

The materiality of a flag is inseparable from its message. Although digital materiality is inherent in designs created in software like Illustrator or Photoshop, traditional flags demand textile materiality, as discussed in the previous chapters. They are usually printed on a light fabric to ensure visual consistency and make them easier to fly on poles.

In this process, I took a different route, mainly because this flag ended up being included in a few exhibitions, such as Milieux' The Commons and Museum London's Tropi-X: Brazilian Art in Canada, 1970s – Now.

Crafted to hang from the ceiling with a full-width rod instead of the regular side pole and displayed at eye-level, I wanted this piece to be approachable, engaging not only with the visual symbol but also with the fabric itself.

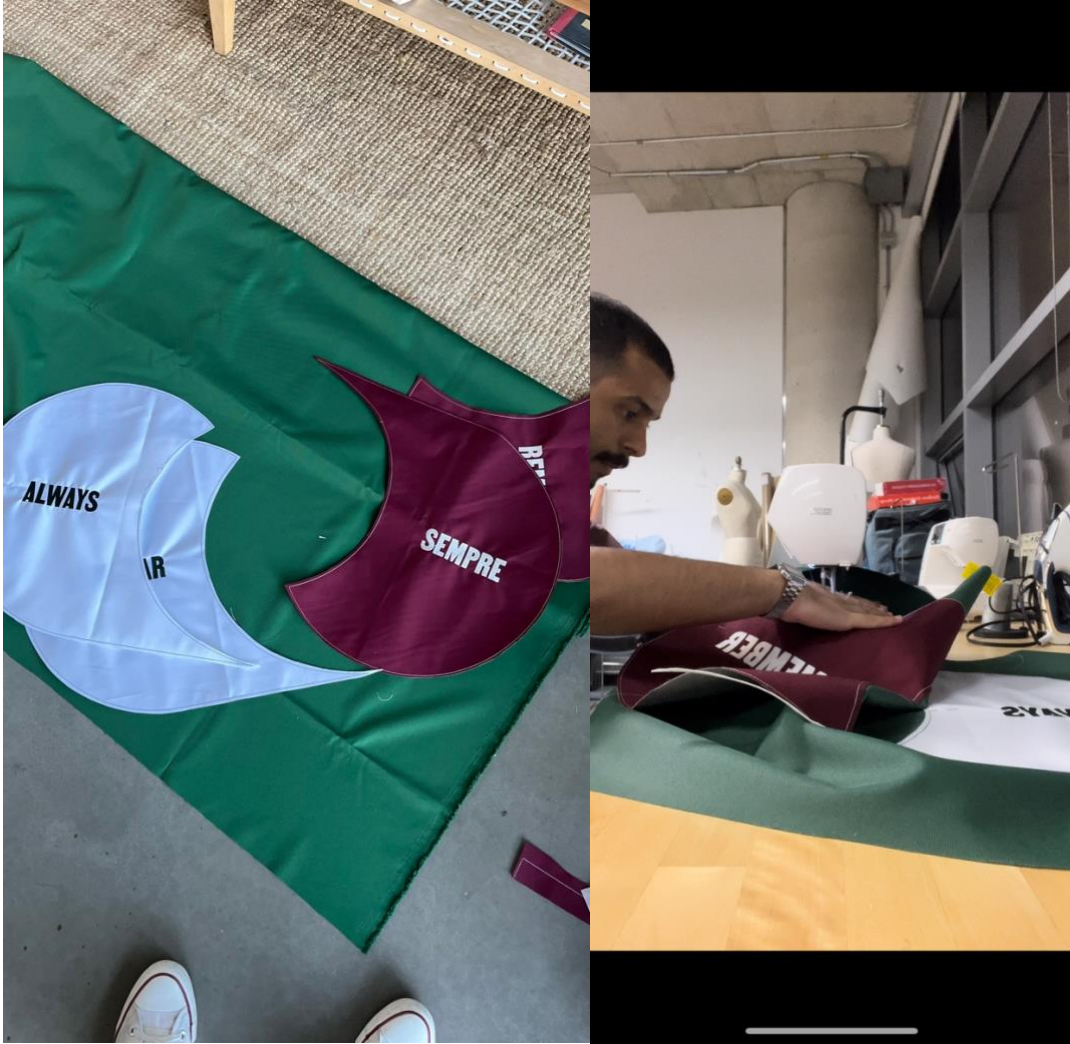
The process started with buying the fabric. It is a thick, opaque fabric so that one side is not visible from the other. Another decision was to patch the elements on top of each other instead of printing, increasing its replicability, as it is easier to have a sewing machine at home than a flag-sized printer.

Next, I marked and cut the fabric to its respective sizes and embroidered the letters. Once the lettering was done, I cut the white and red fabrics into their curved shapes.



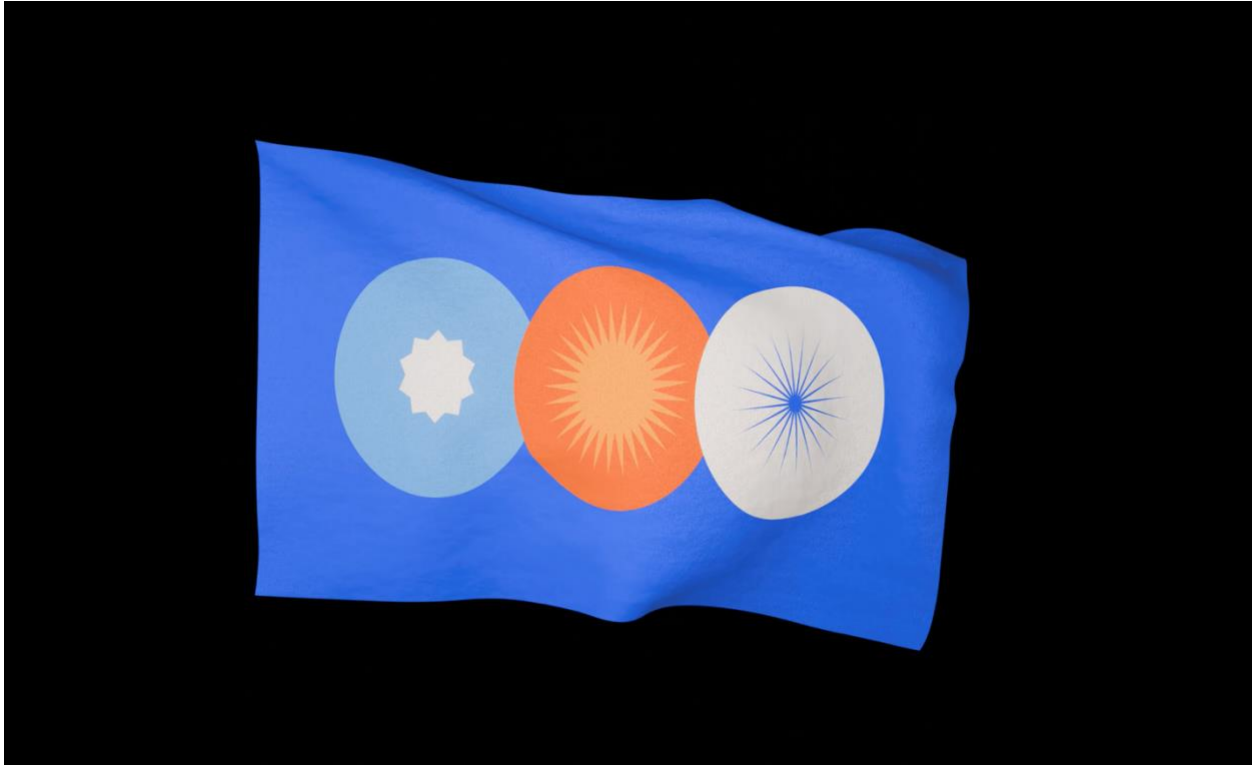
(Figure 22: Text being embroidered. With the support of the Textiles and Materiality research cluster at Milieux, Concordia University, 2023.)

Finally, to assemble the flags, I sewed these shapes onto the green fabric of both surfaces and stitched the two sides together, keeping the top edge open for the rod to pass through.



(Figure 23: Documentation of the process of sewing the pieces together.)

5.3. *Sonho* (Dream)



(Figure 24: Side 1 of “*Sonho*”. Render of a flag animation made in Blender.)



(Figure 25: Side 2 of “*Sonho*”. Render of a flag animation made in Blender.)

During this process, I kept thinking about digital flags. In social media nowadays, you can find plenty of flags being displayed and used. Much of our embodied communication, including gestures and tone, is lost in online communication. Emojis²² have emerged to address this gap by visually translating our expressions and emotions. As the domain of emojis presented too great a deviation from the subject matter of this research-creation, and given that I lacked the technical capability to engage with the world of digital emojis deeply, I sought an alternative.

By reflecting on Leone's (2021) framing of flags' agency as the interaction of the object with the natural environment (the wind), I returned to digital flags. How can a digital flag have agency if it is not a tactile object and does not interact with the wind? By observing flag emojis currently in use²³, I noticed they visually suggest movement in the wind, which inspired the next flag. When analysing the role of these emojis in online political communication in Germany and the United States, Kariryaa et al. (2020) found out that "as symbolic interactionists would expect, the uses and meaning of national flags as a symbol vary across cultural and political contexts and have different consequences as expressed in stimulating audience reactions", which has been in tune with the theoretical literature of this research.

The creative context of this work came forth during an artist's residency I undertook at FOFA Gallery at Concordia University, supported by NouLa, the Black Student Centre at Concordia. The "Black Arts Series" was a six-week residency that provided creative support and physical space for ongoing projects. In the space, I had the opportunity to test different projections, sizes, and installations, and to exchange ideas with other people. This inspiring, hands-on experience allowed

²² Grannan, C. "What's the Difference Between Emoji and Emoticons?." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 13, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-emoji-and-emoticons>.

²³ A full list of flag emojis can be found on the website Emojipedia. Available at <https://emojipedia.org/flags>. Accessed on September 2, 2025.

me to install the flags for the first time as intended. They were set up facing each other: one physical and one digital, one steady and one in motion. Image 29 shows this first iteration in place.

Starting from materiality and agency, I developed the flag “*Sonho*”, which translates to dream. In the next paragraphs, I will go over each step of the process, following the framework implemented for the creations in this thesis project.

Conceptual mapping & Thematic definition

After I decided that I wanted to create a digital flag, I mapped out concepts that would fit the narrative I was seeking to materialise. As these creations were being constructed following the same framework and one of the goals was to install them in a research exhibition, I knew that this one needed to relate to the other conceptually, but from a different perspective. As a collage of multiple inspirations, including the songs “*Continuação de um Sonho*²⁴” and “*A Vida é Desafio*²⁵” and the artwork “There Are Black People in the Future”, two major themes of this flag are *Dream* and *Continuity*.

Continuity concerns acknowledging ancestry. It is part of the memory reclaiming that Nascimento and Camilo examine. Continuity reflects the historical and cultural resistance of Afro-Brazilians against erasure and signifies agency. In relation to the previous flag, continuity indicates time, recognising those who came before, who is present now, and who is yet to come. By using the slogan “*Continuação de um Sonho*” (Continuation of a dream), I acknowledge those who dreamt before me. As a project rooted in Quilombismo, these creations are an essential part of its “constant updating, meeting the demands of historical time and situations in the geographical environment.”

²⁴ BK’. *Continuação de um Sonho*. Gigantes, 2022, Accessed September 28, 2025.

²⁵ MCs, Racionais. *A Vida é Desafio*. Cosa Nostra, 2002, Accessed September 28, 2025.

Design process

Continuity is also one of Gestalt's principles; it means that "we group elements that seem to follow a continuous path in a particular direction. The human eye follows the paths, lines, and curves of a design and prefers to see a continuous flow of visual elements rather than separated objects" (Interaction Design Foundation – IxDF, 2016).

Looking at Brazil's national flag, I began to explore and study what could serve as a visual element to convey continuity. My initial thought was to replicate the diamond shape and create a pathway using them. However, because of its many angles, it can be confusing with the negative space created by this duplication. Subsequently, the circle and stars became interesting visual elements for replication and exploration. By studying the shapes of the stars, I aimed to add more narrative elements beyond just their placement to signify continuity. In the lifecycle of stars, they start as clouds of dust and gas, then evolve into celestial bodies, and eventually explode. Following this cycle, the stars on this flag were arranged to reflect this process, symbolising life within this continuity. The circles were also placed overlapping each other to represent overlapping generations of people, learning from and dreaming with one another.

During my imaginary observation I could see that stars or star-like shapes are a prominent image across artworks and designs. In Yoruba religions, orishas—the divine spirits—are often portrayed by their weapons or tools. These weapons or tools are commonly pointed objects, such as axes, arrows, and spears, and are an important part of Afro-Brazilian imagery. These shapes were how I decided to move away from the traditional five-point star shape, depicted in the national flag and get closer to this imaginary with which I seek to have a dialogue.

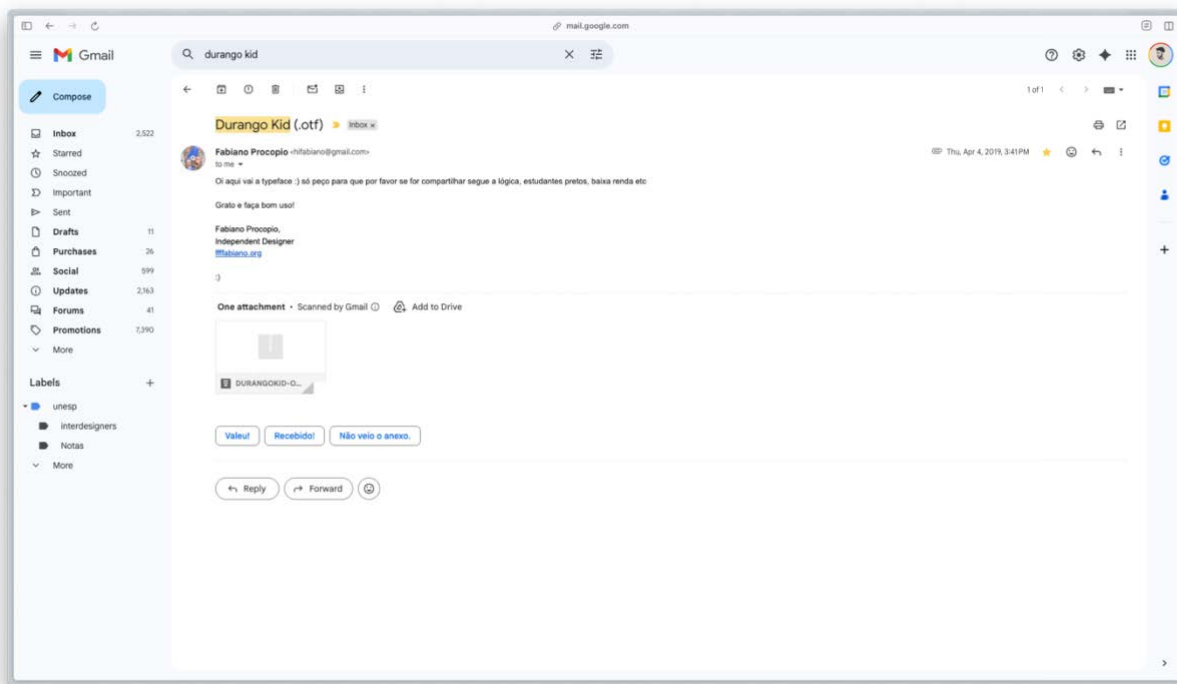


(Figure 26: Abdias Nascimento, "*Quarteto Ritual n. 5*", 1971. Private Collection.)

The other half of this flag is where I referenced the slogan "*Ordem e Progresso*" of the national flag. Although not a common element in flags, a piece of text, slogan, or motto is something familiar in the Brazilian imaginary. The text in this flag works as a statement. The typeface is a grotesque-style font to improve legibility from a distance, with an alternative glyph for the letter 'n' to create visual contrast. Then, thirteen stars are placed above and below the text, alluding to continuity but also referencing the twenty-six states of Brazil.

Durango Kid is a typeface created by Afro-Brazilian designer Fabiano Procópio, who is dedicated to the expansion of the Afro-Brazilian imagery and empowering emerging students. I discovered the typeface through a social media post of his in 2019. His goal was to enable Black students with low income to access custom typefaces such as Durango Kid.

While working on this project, I revisited this typeface during my typographic exploration and reflected on what it might signify to use a design element created by an Afro-Brazilian for Afro-Brazilians. After considering my intentions, I selected Durango Kid to represent the statement “Continuation of a Dream”.



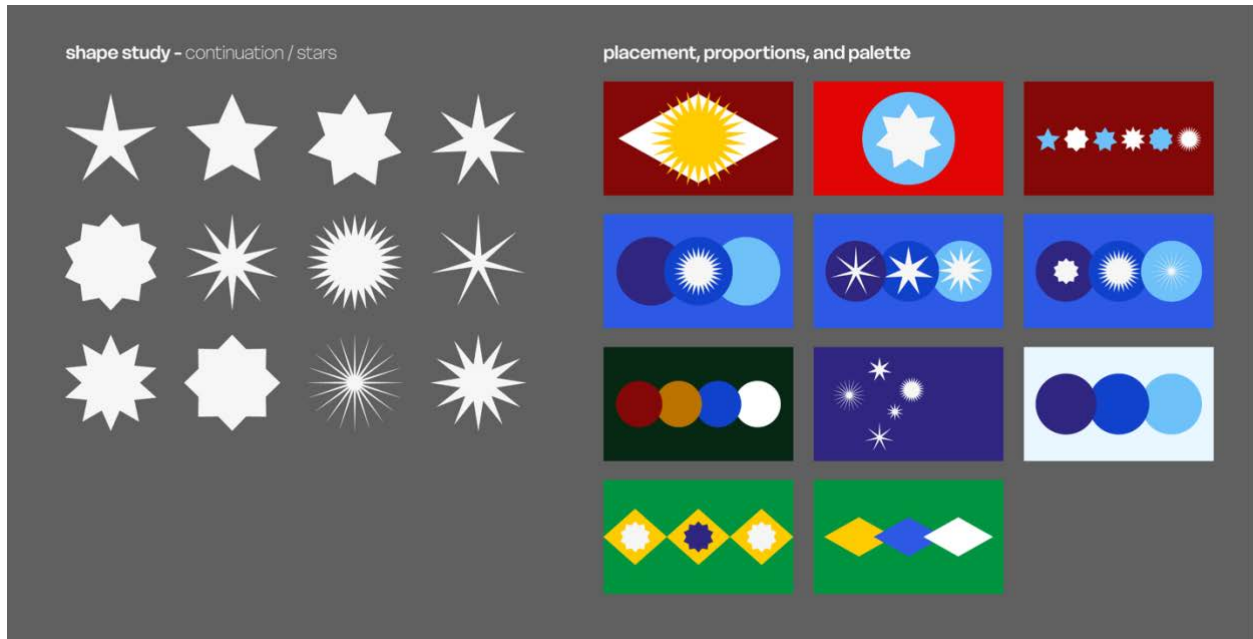
(Figure 27: The email I got from Fabiano in 2019 where he says: “Hi! Here is the typeface [attached] :) I just ask that, if you share it, please follow the logic: black students, low-income students, etc. Thank you, and make good use of it!”)

In Kaye’s (2001) booklet with flag-making guidelines, the last step is to be distinctive or be related by “avoiding duplicating other flags but using similarities to show connections”. Given its

parameters and constraints, flags can be tricky to place and colour. In Figure 29, the first two tests are using too many similarities with the flags of the Philippines, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, which was not intentional and has nothing to do with them. Although referencing Brazil's national flag, using the same green and yellow was not something I could get past because of its meaning. In the colour decision for this flag, I followed the shapes I was referencing and used different shades of blue, white, and an orange as vibrant as the yellow, but in this context that does not pay homage to a European monarchical house.



(Figure 28: Process documentation of the typographical study.)



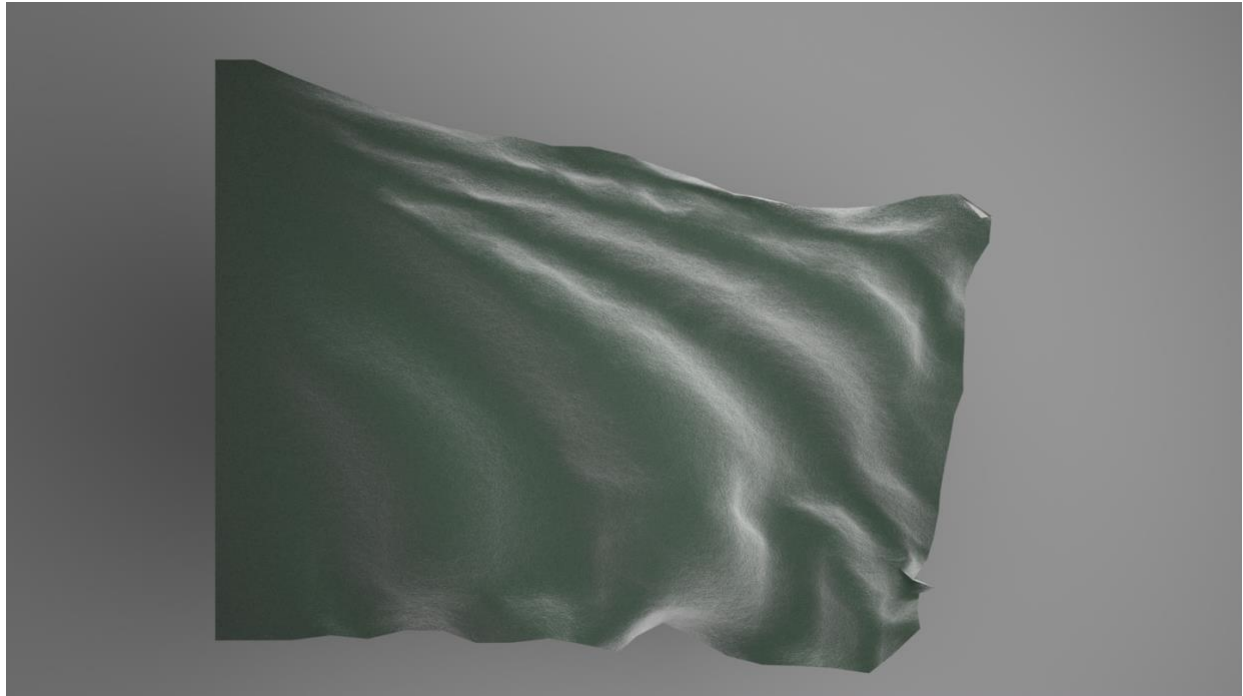
(Figure 29: Process documentation of the study of visual elements.)

Materiality

I previously mentioned that the idea for this flag originated from exploring its materiality and agency. After designing it in the vector software Illustrator, the next logical step was to transfer that flat, two-dimensional design into a three-dimensional environment, which I did using the free software Blender. Since flags are flat objects—usually a rectangular piece of fabric—the process of modelling the object was fairly straightforward. I started by creating a plane, subdividing its vertices to simulate movement, and then applied the cloth physics that the software already calculates.

Secondly, on the same physics panel, I added the wind to the scene. With the wind and the object in place, I could start iterating on their parameters. How strong the wind was, in which direction it was coming from, how the fabric was behaving, etc. I watched many videos of real flags flying in

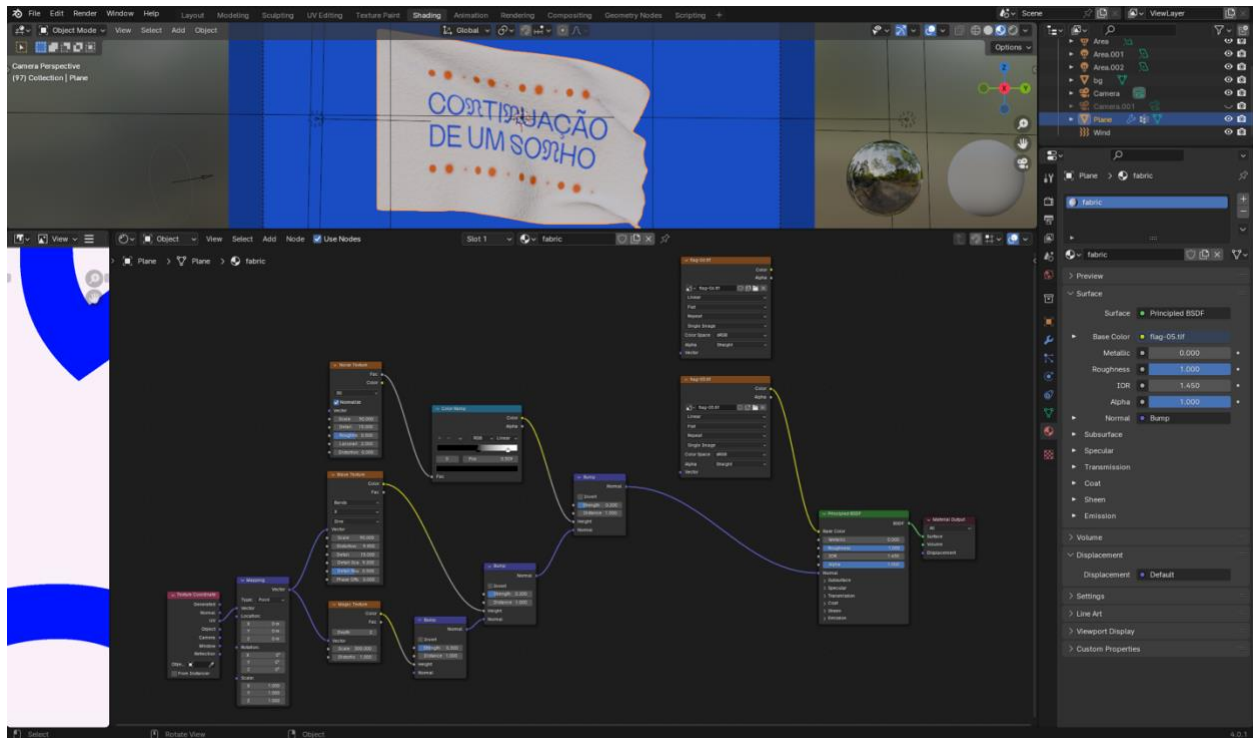
the wind to have a reference for this interaction between objects and natural elements. I had to adjust the object's flow a few times because, as shown in Image 27, the edges looked pointy. Also, flags are usually held up by the top and bottom left points only, leaving almost the entire left side flying, which was not the case in this version.



(Figure 30: Material testing for flag “*Sonho*.”)

After fine-tuning these details, I proceeded to UV mapping, placing the 2D design on the 3D object. This step was easy, too, because the flag is rectangular. With everything in place, the second-to-last step was simulating the cloth material.

The procedural material was created using three textures: Noise, Wave, and Magic textures. Bumps, a colour ramp, and texture mapping were also added. The details and specific nodes were based on a YouTube tutorial, help from my friend Teague Riordon, and many attempts of trial and error until I achieved what I believe to be the best result.



(Figure 31: A screenshot of the tab ‘Shading’ with all the procedural material details.)

After setting up the cameras and lighting, I adjusted the animation time and the exact keyframes for where the flag design would change. Finally, I rendered it frame-by-frame, avoiding data loss in case of a shutdown, and against a transparent background to enable projection on different planes.

Vexillological conventions

As part of the framework of self-evaluation, I consulted the vexillological guidelines, reviewed each of the five topics and reflected on whether I followed them or not and why.

Keep it simple

The overall structure of the flag’s first half is simple. It has three overlapping circles and starts within them. It gets more complicated when redrawing the stars, since they don’t follow the traditional five-point star shape. I wanted it to be complex and have two halves specifically because

the medium (digital) allows for instant replacement and interchangeability. It is a way to push against conventional boundaries lightly.

Use meaningful symbolism

Afro-Brazilian imagery often depicts cosmology, as activists and makers are closely connected to Afro-Brazilian religion. The use of circles and stars as metaphors for continuity and growth is meaningful and reflects on diasporic worldviews (Fu-Kiau, 2001). Moreover, the articulation of historical continuity with the design principle adds symbolic depth to the flag by transforming the conventional sign (the flag) into two parts that portray the flow of time and legacy, each dependent on the other.

Use two or three basic colours

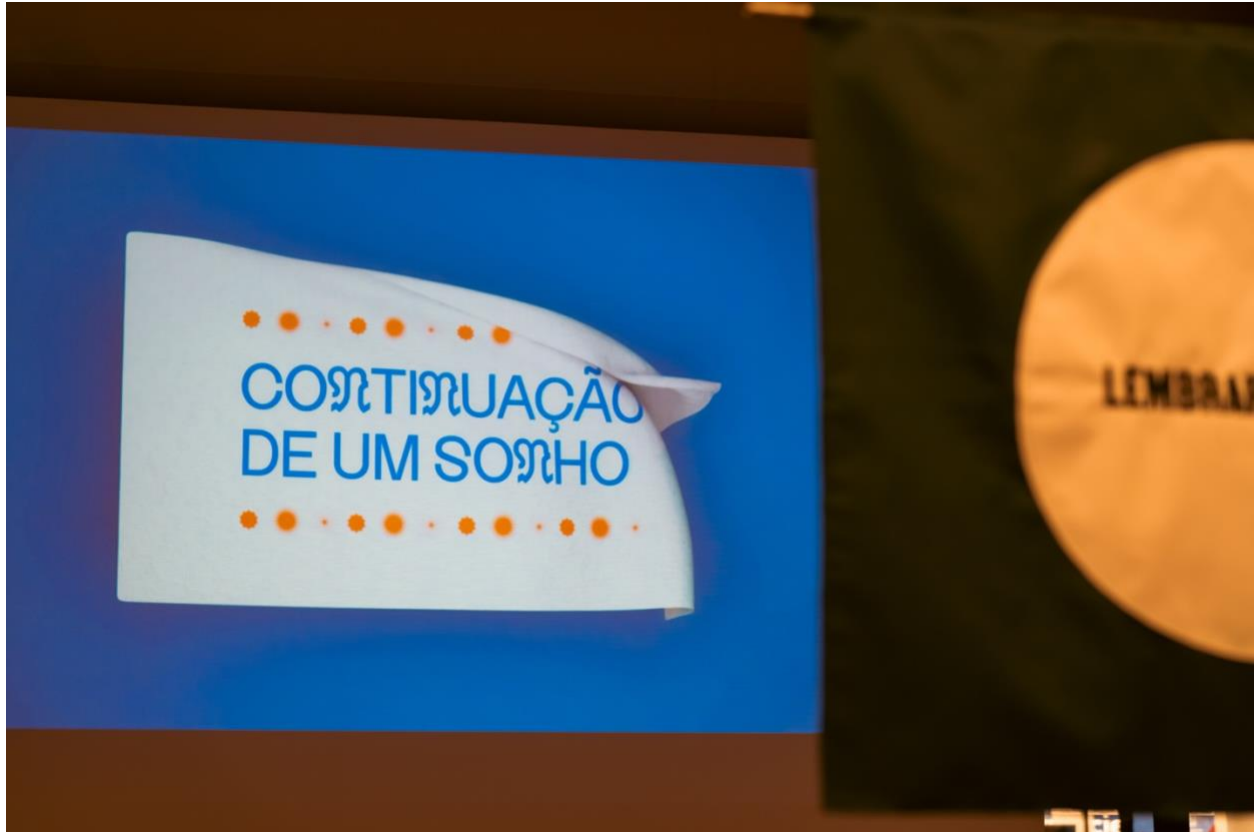
This flag features more than two or three colours. The first half is more complex, with different shades used. However, the other half has exactly three colours. The colour work of both flags aims to create strong visual contrast while maintaining a connection.

No lettering or seals

The main deal-breaker with the conventions is the lettering. As I mentioned earlier, having a slogan is so ingrained in the Brazilian imagination, being used in many practical and theoretical discussions about the country, that it feels hard to detach myself from it. To have lettering on a flag is to make a statement.

Be distinctive or be related

With the incorporation of elements of the national flag, their reinterpretation in a different design, and the avoidance of unintentional similarities, I believe this flag achieves this goal.

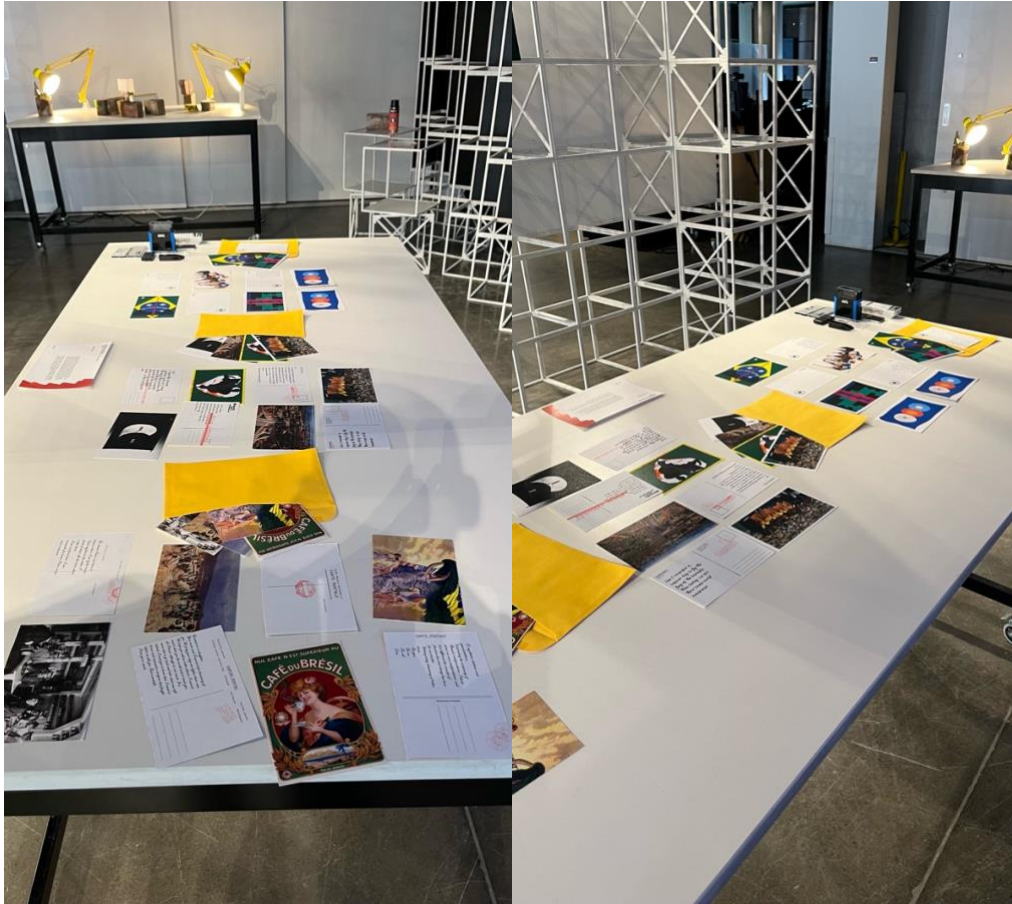


(Figure 32: Installation view, FOFA Gallery, Concordia University, December 2023.)

5.4. Postcards

To assist with the speculative trajectory surrounding my flags, I curated and created a series of 12 postcards from the same world that would hint at supporting narratives. Postcards are not only souvenirs but artifacts that archive memories and places in an intimate way (Prochaska & Mendelson, 2010; Broswell, 2024) and snapshots of a culture at a particular moment in time (Fraser, 1980). This project uses postcards to place the speculative flags into fictional memories of three distinct timelines in Brazil: The post-abolition period, the military dictatorship, and a near-future based on Quilombismo. Each period has four postcards that blend historical images with fictional messages.

In the exhibition, the postcards were placed on a table, positioned between the two flags, serving as a mediator and narrator between them. In the following paragraphs, I will present the process of curating and creating images, as well as narrating these periods.



(Figure 33: Postcards installed in the MDes final exhibition “Catalyst.”)

Design and process

The initial concept for the postcards came from a meeting with my co-supervisor, where we brainstormed a graphic medium that could serve as a narrative device for the MDes exhibition. While booklets or zines could place the flags within the presentation of this research-creation with textual information, he suggested using postcards to fill this gap. Postcards reflect a genuine connection with narratives of place and memory in a way that other formats cannot.

The collection features twelve postcards split into three timelines, with four postcards each. The historical events are: around 30 years after the abolition of slavery, dating to the early 20th century; the 1970s and 80s during the military dictatorship; and a speculative near future in which the political national project proposed by Nascimento is in effect. For each period, I curated a series of images that would accurately express the specific national projects. For period one, images of progress and identity-building were selected. For the dictatorship, I chose to use the ‘patriotic’ and state communication, like the slogan “*Brasil: Ame-o ou deixe-o*”²⁶ (Brazil: love it or leave it). Finally, in the speculative future, I used the flag ‘Sonho’ and other Afro-Brazilian images that would compose the national imaginary in this case.

The text on each card is a snippet drawn from myself and other sources, such as poems or songs, chosen to express the positionality of Afro-Brazilians within the specific times portrayed. The postcards are presented in full in the appendix section of this document.

Beyond the collage of curated images and text, I designed a few custom stamps inspired by the flags I created to link all the pieces together. The stamps were printed in a risograph after the postcards were printed to simulate the texture of actual stamps. Another overlay printing I did was on the dictatorship-era cards. Using images of resistance from this period and simulating activist interventions, I layered visual noise on top of the state imagery.

The base postcards were printed by offset on cardstock, simulating how postcards are usually printed. Their size is 4”x6” as a standard postcard. The other interventions and stamps were printed using a risograph, replicating a hand-stamped mark and providing a halftone texture. Once all

²⁶ Diedrich, Marlete Sandra. ““Brasil: ame-o ou deixe-o”: a produção de sentidos do discurso totalitário.” *Revista Conexão Letras* 14, no. 22 (2019).

printing stages were complete, the sheets were cut, the postcards were sorted by timeline, and then placed into envelopes, which were also stamped to complete the presentation.



(Figure 34: Graphic intervention detail and close-up shot of in-situ finished postcards.)

6. REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Whereas the previous chapter described how the creative output of this thesis came to be, this chapter outlines how the creation of these objects helps answer this project's two research questions and how they help fulfill this research's objectives of creating artifacts driven by identity exploration, assessing the intricate world of belonging and representation.

6.1. Research question one: How can flags be a visual platform of speculation and imagination for black individuals and communities in Brazil?

As seen in this research, for a nation to exist, it must be imagined and idealised. In a way, national flags are already speculative objects, as they carry the projects and intentions of those who created them. These projects, encapsulated in the object of the flag and the position it occupies in modern social organisation, reinforce social and racial problems. However, this does not mean that others cannot replace them and thereby create other scenarios. By appropriating the traditional concepts of vexillology in the technical field and creating artifacts that bring symbolism and ideas of liberation and social justice in the theoretical field, I gained autonomy and agency over my own idealization of the future. By applying the methodological approach described in this research-creation project, these creations can ultimately turn back and feed the initial process of Afro-Brazilian imaginary collection. That way, other researchers, designers, or enthusiasts seeking to expand on this topic can replicate the methods (Imaginary-Interpretation-Reflection) and enlarge the repertoire that would then be reinterpreted and reflected upon. This research has the potential to contribute to the field with a design approach and with new imagery.

As shown in the created objects and through what Nascimento says about revolution based on culture, the understanding of theoretical meanings and possessing technical capacity is what allows world-building for Afro-Brazilians.

The answer to this question, then, is not only in the final outcomes of this research-creation but in the process itself. Dunne and Raby (2013) state that “design speculations can act as a catalyst for collectively redefining our relationship to reality” (p. 2). A design speculation does not start in the making process, and in this case, it began by critically engaging with the country’s historical quest for national identity, proceeded by an exploration of Afro-Brazilian cultural productions. This act of memory claiming is what ignited the drive to create the pieces. Although the pieces reflect an individual output, by situating the theoretical framework presented in the field of design and combining them, this research-creation aimed to contribute with a structure of work for individuals and communities to create, update, and expand the *quilombista* imaginary.

6.2. Research question two: Considering Quilombismo as a creative design methodology for Afro-Brazilians, how can one visually imagine new models of plural national identities?

During my creative process, my focus was to construct imaginaries that did not seem futuristic and unattainable, but rather forward-thinking and possible. Often, the process of imagining the future only looks ahead to what is to come, when in fact, the *quilombista* practice involves renewing, criticizing, expanding, and updating our existing knowledge. Reclaiming collective memory and history was the compass that guided the creative processes presented here.

The practice of Quilombismo, that differs from a Western and colonial worldview, involves understanding memory as dynamic rather than static. The creative outputs of this research-creation are not intended to replace the national flag or to be treated like the only possible solution. In fact,

what I wanted was to contribute to an ongoing and growing re-imagination of the social imaginary of Brazil as the plurality aspect of *quilombismo* as methodology cannot be overlooked.

When collecting and analysing images of mobilisation and alteration of the Brazilian national flag, Azevedo (2024) observed that images categorised as ‘other futures and communities’ speculation’ exist in much smaller quantities than those of ‘denunciation’ or ‘affirmation’. From this result, she raises some hypotheses, such as the expectation that exists among designers regarding the functionality or usefulness of the visual pieces they create. Another point raised is that perhaps this speculative practice requires advanced political awareness, which is less common among designers.

Moreover, the author adds one more principle to the framework of design activism, which is to stimulate awareness and one of the ways to do this is to focus on subjectivity and broaden the debate on possible changes (p. 202). With the work presented in this research-creation, I would like to contribute to Azevedo’s exploration of political speculation around the national flag and suggest that quilombismo as a creative methodology is a strong invitation to political and creative consciousness - after all, “quilombismo is the main black movement [in Brazil] after the indigenous cause” and “there can be no development in the country without the development of the 104 million Afro-Brazilians” (Rodrigues, 2023).

This project is positioned to contribute to the expansion of the debate of *brasilidade*²⁷ as the national identity of Brazil. A key aspect of *quilombismo* as a design methodology is to challenge the temptation of creating a new single model to replace the old one. At a personal level, doing

²⁷ Can be translated to “Brazilianness”. It is an attempt to describe the Brazilian character. The term was coined by the Brazilian Modernists in the 20s, specially Mário de Andrade, and is the subject of different readings and interpretations.

this work was a natural response to everything that has happened in the country during the past few years and to the newness of living in a different country. When you leave your country, it may be the moment when you question yourself most about who you are, precisely because of your encounter with the “other”.

Reflecting on what Souza (2007) said about the influence that the national identity has over your own personal identity, was precisely where I questioned myself about myself and all the factors that made and make me who I am. By creating artifacts engaging with *quilombismo*, I was not only reflecting and answering this question for myself but practicing *ubuntu*²⁸, where no practice of reflection, creation, or discussion of Afro-Brazilians is made to reach an individual and atomistic worldview, but rather relational and communal.

6.3. Limitations and future work

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research-creation project. First and foremost, this work was and is based on my own positionality, being filtered by my lived experiences and interpretations. This work does not claim to be the definitive representation of what speculative vexillology is nor the ultimate Afro-Brazilian imaginary. Instead, it is an individual contribution to a larger conversation.

Secondly, the timeline and requirements of the master’s program also defined this research’s scope. The artifacts created were influenced by the format in which they were to be presented in the MDes exhibition.

²⁸ *Ubuntu* is the overarching philosophy of Black people of Africa (Mugumbate, 2023). The concept of *ubuntu* means that “people, country, environment and spirituality are intricately related. The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).

Finally, the community engagement I was able to achieve was limited by the physical location where this research was undertaken. Exhibitions, visits, workshops, and conversations around this work in Brazil would further extend its reach and impact.

The next steps for the work conducted during this project, therefore, concern moving from individual making to community making. I want to develop a workshop that uses the traditional vexillological conventions and the *quilombismo* framework to facilitate flag creation for Afro-Brazilian communities. This way, it will be possible to refine the approach and imagine and speculate on new futures together.

In the case of a workshop, I argue that Co-Design²⁹ would be a more appropriate approach than traditional Participatory Design³⁰. Participatory Design, historically, risks positioning the designer as an authority that dictates what can and cannot be produced or designed. Co-Design, on the other hand, decentralizes the figure of the designer to enable community members to better express themselves through the tools provided. Since Quilombismo, as a methodology, focuses on producing culture rooted in Afro-Brazilian experiences, it would be logical to approach the workshop in this way.

Conducting this workshop on flag-making would be a natural step for me after this research-creation work. It would be a hands-on, practical opportunity to create among different people with different perspectives and skills. This work talks about a lot about giving back and sharing

²⁹ Sanders, Elizabeth B.-N., and Pieter Jan Stappers. "Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design." *Co-Design* 4, no. 1 (2008): 5–18.

³⁰ Mackay, Wendy E., and Michel Beaudouin-Lafon. "Participatory Design and Prototyping." In *Handbook of Human Computer Interaction*. Springer, 2023.

knowledge to move forward, and I believe workshops could be a great vessel and start to build this.

I understand that not everyone necessarily wants to engage with design. However, in this research-creation, I argued that the flag as a design artifact holds power not only in its doing but also in its thinking. Approaching it this way would enable the people involved to collaborate in thinking together, critique, unpack concepts, and engage with speculative vexillology.

Furthermore, flags are a subject matter that requires a lower friction of prior knowledge, as they are an element that is present in everyone's imaginary. However, I envision that mine would be composed of two different sections: a theoretical but high-level introduction of what flags are, what they represent and their basic and more important components; as well as some basic principles of design, such as colours, shapes, fonts, layout, etc.

The second part of the workshop would be free time to let people interact with each other and adventure themselves in the creation and iteration process of making a flag.

To help the creativity flow, I aim to prepare a couple of thought-provoking questions, such as:

- What is something you believe your country's flag does not represent, and how would you incorporate it in your ideal flag for your country?
- If you could create a flag for your family, how would that look like and why?
- Think about your profession: firefighter, teacher, veterinarian. If your profession had a flag, what would be the elements you would choose to represent it?
- Reimagine a country's flag thinking of what represents it the most: what are the main characteristics that come to mind? Is it nature, language, weather, race?

Bringing flag-making as a playful and engaging activity to people would facilitate what I believe flags were conceived for: uniting people and starting dialogue. Workshops are open to the public

and count with many different audiences, and I believe that counting with different backgrounds would enrich the experience of creating, having fun and learning from and with each other.

Finally, we could all present our creations and give the participants space to share how their work was meaningful - or not - and reflect on what was easy and what was difficult.

The workshop outcome can generate an artifact that I have prototyped for a class when I first presented the concept of speculative vexillology: a quilt of flags. This piece is intended to push the boundaries of the flag's materiality and complexity by stitching together a visual object that is made by many. This quilt can serve as a validation and evaluation of the workshop's methodology and work as a narrative-based artifact that states that national identity does not need to be a single and defined flag but a plural collection of stories and voices.



(Figure 35: Flag quilt prototype made in Blender. In collaboration with Teague Riordon.)

Finally, I would like to use the “Good flag, bad flag” booklet as a basis to create a guide for speculative vexillology. By analysing works of speculation that might be collected by research or as a result of the workshop, this self-publication would outline a framework of creation based on speculative and decolonial theories.

7. CONCLUSION

In this research creation project, I have explored how flags are an important medium of representation, and how design plays a key role in it. I have extensively discussed and imagined what could be different in flags when putting Quilombismo and speculative design at the centre of the practice of flag creation; ultimately creating two of them, and a collection of twelve accompanying postcards.

In this research-creation, I discussed that the flag is beyond just a piece of cloth. In fact, it is a dynamic design object and a carrier of meanings (Latour, 1996). The flag carries history, memory, and deliberate political decisions. Overall, the display of a nation's flag influences its social organization. By unpacking the object, this research-creation revealed that national identity is not a spontaneous organism but rather a designed project that continues to shape people's daily lives, and it is no different in the case of Brazil.

Understanding the origin of the myth of racial democracy is to know that the racial issue is a national issue. Therefore, designing speculative artifacts inspired by Afro-Brazilian experiences and culture represents an act of self-sufficiency and agency advocated in Quilombismo. Through the creation of speculative flags (A Flag For Today and Dream), this research-creation seeks to shift the traditional understanding of vexillology and position the Afro-Brazilian community as designers of their own national project and architects of their future.

In Chapter 1, I conducted a high-level overview of how and when flags first emerged, as well as positioned myself as a designer who has always been interested in the power of telling stories through images. Chapter 2 expands on the history of flags and their evolution into the powerful

national symbols they are today. It explores the Brazilian political context and the construction of its national project, which emerged after critical historical moments. Chapter 3 dives into the Brazilian myth of racial democracy and discusses the creation, meaning, and later meanings attributed to the Brazilian flag. Chapter 4 discusses Quilombismo as a decolonial methodology, as well as ontological and speculative design methodologies and ideas centred on how design impacts us as we create and imagine it. Chapter 5 is a comprehensive report of my creative process; it is the chapter where I have applied the ideas and dialogues of speculative vexillology and thoroughly explored and inquired about my own national identity through flag-making. Finally, in Chapter 6, I reflect on and discuss how this work answered the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, and weigh what has worked and what still could be created, studied, and expanded on.

The importance of this work lies in its ontological framing. Speculating on new forms of social organization and redesigning national symbols can be an act of ontological liberation, in which we design, or speculate, our world and consequently, the world would design us back. Being grounded in Quilombismo means that when this process occurs, not only is memory reclaimed, but there are also real and profound changes in the Brazilian social structure.

This work operates as a counter to the colonialist logic of dispossession and memory erasure³¹, offering a methodology and a framework of agency that have an actual impact not only on identity exploration but also on a shared visual vocabulary. To Nascimento, a true Pan-African revolution is when the Black population “regain the ability to steer their destiny” (2020, p. 56).

³¹ Camilo, Vandelir. “Necromemória: Reflexões Sobre Um Conceito.” *Canoa Tempo* 13 (2020).

By using *Quilombismo* as a design method, this project acknowledges ancestral and shared memory as a valuable resource for future-making. It emphasizes that looking back³² is not going backward; it is essential for creating pluralistic futures. The artifacts I create demonstrate that design can contain a denunciation of oppression and historical prejudice with the announcement, or speculation, of a new way of living, thinking, and understanding.

This work strove to bring flag-making into a decolonial, introspective, Black-centered practice. Through this work and the creations that came out of it, I was able to explore different versions of nationalism, and dared to imagine a future where the past is taken into account with respect, learning and agency. It is my hope that other researchers, visual artists and designers take interest in the world of vexillology and its infinite canvas of speculation to iterate and create worlds, countries, nations and peoples we want to see and be seen in.

³² Looking back, in the context of this research-creation, constantly references *Sankofa*: It is not taboo to go back for what you forgot (or left behind).

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