Insubmission

a feature film by Luíza Fazio

Genre: Adventure, drama

Logline: In colonial Brazil, Formiga and other enslaved women conquer a ship and become fugitive pirates on their way to a safe land, while also searching for Formiga’s long-missing sister.

Synopsis: 17th-century Brazil, a tropical land of fanatical Catholicism and brutal enslavement. Taken away from her country and family as a child, FORMIGA (20) is an enslaved strategist determined to find her sister MENE (20), and return to her hometown Kétou – for the only thing the Portuguese couldn’t take from her is her ancestry. When an influential landowner visits the plantation and has all attention on him, Formiga seizes the opportunity to break free. OLÍVIA (15, frightened bookworm), MARIANA (22, headstrong warrior), and a group of women follow her. But they get caught and are put in a ship to be sold to a cruel slaveowner.

Formiga, determined to find her sister, leads the women, cutting the sailors' throats and conquering the ship. She is finally free to find Mene – but the others want to head to a quilombo (a safe land/settlement). She pretends to give in. They must quickly learn how to master the sails and face violent sea storms. As they run out of food and weapons, Formiga selects the villages they will loot – all locations secretly connected to Mene. As the women steal, Formiga finds leads to her sister. But they draw the Royal Portuguese Navy’s attention. Formiga eventually lays her hands on Mene’s location: a missionary encampment in a Navy-controlled area.

Olívia and Mariana want to reach the quilombo, but Formiga deceives them and changes the course of the ship. As the Navy gets suspiciously closer, the women discover that Formiga betrayed them and ban her from the vessel. By herself, Formiga manages to reach her final destination, where she spots Mene. The sisters reunite, moved. But Mene doesn’t want to follow Formiga: this is her [home?] and the Church is her family. Formiga’s soul is shattered. Suddenly, she spots a Navy officer with Olívia’s turban in his hands and realizes they caught the women—they caught them because of her selfish actions.

Guilt-ridden, Formiga heads back to their rescue, convincing Mene to follow her. They approach the ship where the women are held hostages, Formiga hides Mene, and reveals herself to the Navy officers. There is just one way to save them: sacrificing herself. Months later, Olívia, Mariana, and Mene (transformed by her sister’s act) attack a slave ship and bring the free Africans into their vessel – their very own quilombo moving with Formiga’s spirit as their motor.
FADE IN:

EXT. LAKE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The sun shines bright against the deep blue ocean. Birds sing. Tree leaves brush against one another.

TITLE: KETOU (NOW BENIN), 17TH CENTURY.

The hand of a black girl, SANJO (6), gently plays with the water. On her wrist, a blue bead BRACELET.

She floats on the center of a lake surrounded by the savannah’s red sand. Eyes shut, peaceful smile.

Her eyes open up: the right one is white and blind.

She takes the hand of a girl identical to herself: MENE (6) -- healthy eyes. On Mene’s wrist, a red bead BRACELET.

They’re identical twin sisters. Mene floats with difficulty, breathing hard.

The dialogues in italics are entirely in Yorubá language:

SANJO

Bubble in the tummy.

Sanjo demonstrates. She inhales deeply and her stomach inflates. She floats easily, her belly facing the sky.

Mene tries to mimic her sister, but to no avail: in two seconds she is coughing.

SANJO (CONT’D)

This one is super easy. Bubble.

(inhales)

Tummy.

MENE

You stole my lung in mom’s belly!

SANJO

Oh, yeah? And you stole my eye!

Annoyed, Mene throws water on her sister’s face. Sanjo strikes back with even more power. The sisters face each other: it’s war!

Amidst the water war, the sisters have real fun.

Mene breathes with her mouth and swallows water. She coughs desperately. Loses her breath. And SINKS.
Sanjo paralyzed -- before diving after her sister.

**EXT. SEA - NIGHT**

A dark-skinned WOMAN swims amidst the waves of a violent sea. Her right eye is white. It’s SANJO, now 20 years old.

But this is not her hometown and Sanjo is no longer her name. In colonial Brazil, she is known as FORMIGA. (And that’s how we are calling her during scenes set in Brazil).

She exhales all the air from her lungs and continues to swim until the veins of her neck pop up.

Her body craves for air, but she insists on swimming. Her moves slow down. Her eyes shut. The sea drags her body.

Until -- she SPLASHES her way back to the surface. She gasps for air in desperation.

When she finally recovers, she repeats the moves: swims underwater, loses her breath, returns to the surface.

It’s a survival exercise.

**EXT. LAKE - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

UNDERWATER: Mene twists and turns desperately. Sanjo holds her by the waist and they--

SPLASH their way back to the surface. Sanjo embraces her sister, teary-eyed. Mene coughs and spits water.

Mene lets out a hollow laugh. But Sanjo is worried.

**MENE**

If I’d died mom would be so mad at you. She never lets me go swimming.

**SANJO**

No dying. It’s the sisters’ rule, remember?

**MENE**

...sorry.

**SANJO**

One plus one equals... one. You promised me.
MENE
I know. No dying, pinky promise. Unless we’re together.

They stare at each other without blinking. The pact is made.

EXT. SEA - NIGHT
Formiga leaves the sea and walks toward a deserted beach. Her breathing evens. A wet men’s shirt covers her body.

Over a rock, there’s a Portuguese sailor’s outfit. Formiga puts it on. On the corner of the beach, a moored ship.

She stares at the sky and analyses the stars.

Takes out a compass from her pocket and takes one, two, three large steps north.

She digs a hole in the sand and finds a tiny wooden box.

A hollow smile takes over her expression when she sees what’s inside: Mene’s red bead BRACELET. Her missing sister’s favorite item.

OVER BLACK: INSUBMISSION

EXT. STREAM - DAY
A stream surrounded by old-growth forest.

TITLE: RECÔNCAVO BAIANO, BRAZIL. 17TH CENTURY. PRESENT.

Formiga (Sanjo), 20 years old, washes white linen sheets without much care.

Her eyes are attentive to the SLAVE PATROLLER (35).

He hums a romantic tune in Portuguese while leaning against a tree. A near-empty bottle of cachaça* in hands. Depressing.

*sugarcane liquor produced in Brazil.

SLAVE PATROLLER
I spy on little missy while she stares at the sky...

Around Formiga, MARIANA (22), OLIVIA (15), LETICIA (18) and ESTER (30) also wash white linen sheets. None of them is fully focused on the task. They have something else in mind.
FORMIGA  
(re: Patroller)  
She dumped him yesterday.

OLIVIA  
Did Mr. Galhardo find out?

MARIANA  
If he had the guy’d be singing with his head on a stick.

FORMIGA  
She was promised to some rich man in Maceió. The engagement party is next week. In here.

The women share a glance. They know what it means.

ESTER  
So this is it.

FORMIGA  
So this is it. (beat)  
Now we just need a little something.

Formiga eyes the Slave Patroller once again, who’s even drunker now. But that’s not what Formiga is interested in. What she’s staring at is the GLASS BOTTLE of liquor.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The sun is almost down amidst the old-growth forest. The forest is so dense it is impossible to identify a trail.

PATROLLER (O.S.)  
Forward.

The five women move forward in line, the large baskets balanced over their heads, the clean linen sheets inside.

Behind them is the Patroller, as alert as his drunkenness allows him to be. He takes the last sip of his drink and throws the bottle among the trees.

The women hold their breaths and watch as it rolls down and hits against a rock. Clink.

The atmosphere is tense.

Formiga instinctively grabs Ester’s arm, the first in line. The girl turns right.
PATROLLER (CONT'D)

I said forward.

The women stop and stare at each other for a brief second.

Formiga glances behind her: Olívia, the closest to the bottle, cautiously moves her feet to the left, almost reaching the object.

ESTER
I can’t see where I’m going.

The Patroller marches in Ester’s direction with his cane machete in hand and plunges it into the tree trunk--carved in machete marks.

PATROLLER
That’s how we know. Move, it’s almost dark.

He’s back to the end of the line and Olívia withdraws her feet. She failed to get the bottle.

EXT. BEACH / DIRT ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A red dirt road surrounded by sparse tall trees.

A soaking wet Sanjo STORMS across it, running with all her might in her tunic. The dialogues are in Yorubá:

SANJO
Run, Mene! I’m gonna win!

MENE
Wait for me so we can win together!

A few meters behind her, Mene, equally soaked and in a similar outfit, runs as fast as she can--which isn’t much.

SANJO
Sanjo crosses the finish line and wins! Again!

Sanjo slows down as she reaches the part of the road with sun-dried adobe brick houses.

Mene catches up with Sanjo. They continue at a slow pace.

However, something is off with those houses: the cooking spits with roasted meet have their bright red flames on, the clothes are hanging to dry, children’s toys left in the yard.
It’s like everything is working the way it’s supposed to, but there’s not a single soul there.

It’s as if everyone had simply... vanished.

MENE

*Did everyone travel without us?*

SANJO

*I feel like everyone’s still here... but invisible. Is it a new superpower?*

Sanjo receives no reply.

She glances at her side: Mene’s gone.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

PRESENT TIME. The women move forward. Formiga looks back -- the bottle meters away from them.

Distracted by the sight, Formiga trips and falls hard to the ground. The basket dramatically drops from her head. The clean white sheets turn brown as they touch the dirt ground.

FORMIGA

Fuck.

PATROLLER

Pick this shit up, come on.

Formiga gathers the sheets in a hurry. The Patroller moves a few steps forward, focused on her.

Formiga notices Olivia, the last in line, without anything to stop her. Olivia follows Formiga’s stare: the bottle, not too far away from them. It’s their only chance.

If only Formiga could hold the Patroller’s attention for another moment... An idea strikes her.

Formiga tries to get up -- and falls hard again. On purpose. But she accidentally takes Mariana with her to the ground.

The Patroller points his machete at them.

PATROLLER (CONT’D)

Can someone carry this woman? She’s not fit for fucking walking.

Moved by fear, Mariana gathers the dirty sheets and helps Formiga up.
Formiga glances at Olivia -- she tiptoes toward the bottle. Formiga “loses balance” again and falls hard on Mariana.

FORMIGA
I’m sorry I think I got something stuck in my foot.

MARIANA
Fuck, Formiga. Let’s go, no one wants to get beaten up in here.

This gives Formiga an idea.

FORMIGA
(whispers) Punch me.

What?

MARIANA

FORMIGA
I know you want to sometimes.

The Patroller marches in their direction, furious. The machete up in the air.

Meanwhile, Olivia finally gets closer to the bottle.

FORMIGA (CONT’D)
(fast)
Do you know that cake that took you ages to steal? That vanished? That you were beaten up for?

MARIANA
What the fuck are you up to?

FORMIGA
It was me. I ate it.

MARIANA
I don’t care. Let’s move.

Formiga signals for Mariana to glance behind her.

She sees the Patroller nearing. And, far behind, she spots Olivia -- who kneels by the bottle.

Mariana finally understands the plan.

PATROLLER
Okay, you animals.
FORMIGA
And that roast of yours is just the worst.

Mariana’s expression changes: now she’s truly pissed off and PUNCHES Formiga in the mouth. No one speaks ill of her food.

The Patroller backs off. He wasn’t expecting this.

FORMIGA (CONT’D)
And your chicken is disgusting.

Mariana punches Formiga again, who chuckles. They start a violent fight.

GUNSHOTS. The bullets move right past Formiga’s and Mariana’s heads, but they don’t stop. Amidst the punching and kicking, they stare at each other -- they are in this together.

The Patroller separates the women with his bare hands.

Formiga’s head collides against the dirt and she sees: Olivia grabs the bottle and hides it inside her long skirt.

Formiga’s nose bleeds profusely. She has a shy smirk on her face that quickly grows into a wide, bloody smile. Victory.

HIP HOP MUSIC PLAYS OVER THE SEQUENCE:

INT. SLAVE HOUSE - NIGHT

The women stand together in a circle.

They remove hay from the dirt floor and open a lid disguised as dirt.

CAMERA WIDENS TO REVEAL a deep HOLE in the ground, filled with herbs, fabrics, sharp rocks, knives, slingshots.

An empty spot in the center of the objects. Formiga places the Patroller’s bottle right there, a red liquid inside it.

The arsenal is finally complete. The women close the lid
with a THUD.

FADE TO BLACK.

Translated from the Portuguese by Luiza Fazio.