

# Music, sounds and dissensus: the female poetic potency in the streets of Rio

## *Música, sons e dissensos: a potência poética feminina nas ruas do Rio*

■ CÍNTIA SANMARTIN FERNANDES<sup>a</sup>

Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Graduate Program in Communication. Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brazil

MICHAEL HERSCHMANN<sup>b</sup>

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Graduate Program in Communication. Rio de Janeiro – RJ, Brazil

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to rethink the vitality and moving capacity of the rhymed music and sounds in the female slam and hip-hop scene, which aesthetically and politically enhance activist experiences in the city of Rio de Janeiro, developing significant territorialities and dissensus. We assume that these actors have been deconstructing the discourses and practices associated with genders, which are naturalized in daily life, especially that of poor and black women in the country. Thus, we analyze the performance of these networks that engage in “Rio’s female rhyme scene” – which participate in the Battle of the Muses and Slam das Minas –, which have not only been building powerful heterotopias, but also reinserting several topics on society’s agenda, such as: citizenship, gender, post-gender, racism, machismo, heteronormativity and violence.

**Keywords:** Communication, urban culture, poetry slam, hip-hop, gender

### RESUMO

Nesse artigo busca-se repensar a vitalidade e capacidade movente das músicas e sons rimados na cena do slam e do hip hop feminino, que potencializam estética e politicamente experiências artísticas na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, elaborando territorialidades e dissensos significativos. Parte-se do pressuposto de que esses atores vêm desconstruindo os discursos e as práticas associadas aos gêneros, os quais são naturalizados no cotidiano, especialmente o de mulheres pobres e negras do país. Assim, analisa-se a atuação dessas redes que se engajam no “mundo da rima feminina carioca” – que participam das Batalha das Musas e do Slam das Minas –, os quais vêm não só construindo heterotopias potentes, mas também reinserindo várias temáticas na pauta do dia, tais como: cidadania, gênero, pós-gênero, racismo, machismo, heteronormatividade e violência.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação, cultura urbana, *poetry slam*, hip hop, gênero

<sup>a</sup>Professor and researcher of the Graduate Program in Communication at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, PhD in Political Sociology. E-mail: cintiasan90@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7501-6387>

<sup>b</sup>Professor and researcher of the Graduate Program in Communication at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, PhD in Communication. E-mail: [micael.herschmann@eco.ufrj.br](mailto:micael.herschmann@eco.ufrj.br). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8859-0671>

DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v14i2p163-179>



INTRODUCTION

SOME MIGHT SAY that music and, in general, art – especially the most engaged artistic manifestations, characterized as activism or *artivism* (Vieira, 2011) – have already enjoyed greater freedom in public spaces in the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro, entailing important consequences for the dynamism of this emblematic city, strongly identified with its cultural production. From 2006 to 2014, for example, the city had: public policies to support street music performers and, in general, street culture; progressive laws introduced to render occupying public spaces less bureaucratic; the process of building an “imaginary” (Legros *et al.*, 2007) of the city that favored exchanges and sociability among different social actors; interest, on the part of the Ministry and the Secretariat of Culture, in creating cultural poles that gravitate around music and developing the debate on the relevance of creative cities as part of a “local and national project”; an exponential growth in the number of groups and street musical festivals in the city’s daily life (for example, the resurgence of street carnival and circles) – initiatives that have been building *sonic and musical territorialities*<sup>1</sup> and *heterotopias*<sup>2</sup> that affect the dynamism and, in general, the urban social imaginary.

The current context – which began approximately in 2015 – underwent significant changes (especially of a political order), by which we can identify: the lack of public policies to effectively support cultural initiatives; the emptying of progressive laws, forcing artists to obtain licenses from the authorities to act in public spaces (a return of bureaucratic practices that pushes artists to illegality); and that the debate on public safety and social violence gains space (street occupation becomes, in general, a problem, a case of public disorder). The rise of *necropolitics* (Mbembe, 2018) can also be attested; a significant loss of dynamism of the urban musical networks and collectives that act clandestinely or unauthorizedly in the city’s streets; that authorities keep betting on mega festivals and spectacular events articulated to processes of gentrification (which evict part of the poorest population from strategic areas); and, finally, that we have a process of building an imaginary of the *city of fear* (explosion of narratives in the communication circuits describing an environment obsessed with order and social surveillance).

Considering these changes that have been taking place in the city of Rio, we intended to continue researching the “tricks and tactics” (to use terms dear to Certeau, 1994) that actors – be they musicians and artists, cultural producers, local leaders and fan networks – have been developing

<sup>1</sup>The notion of sonic and musical territorialities aims to value the importance of music and the countless sounds present in the daily life of cities for the reterritorialization processes conducted by the studied actors. Often deciding on the space to be occupied with music considers not only the circulation of the actors, but also the flow and intensity of the sonic flows of the place (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2014). In this valuation of spatiality, it is important to note that the appropriations and assemblages produced in different locations – which turn spaces into “places” (Santos, 2002) – may not be exclusive to the researched actors. Reason why we use the term “territoriality” and not “territory”: in fact, the notion of *territoriality* or even *multi-territoriality* (Haesbaert, 2010) seem more appropriate for analyzing the dynamics that generally involve social groupings in a contemporary world marked by nomadism and intense flows.

<sup>2</sup>As many sociologists have already pointed out, it is not a question of betting on the actors’ ability to (re)build a *utopia* or “traditional spatial utopianism” (Harvey, 2009). Therefore, the notion of *heterotopias* is used here not exactly in the Foucaultian sense – as a set of practices, most often, at the service of “biopower” (Foucault, 2013) –, but as Léfèbvre (2008 and 2015) understands it: as powerful initiatives that could lead the dynamics of the “biopower of the multitude” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2005 and 2009), thus being heterotopias capable of transforming, to some extent, urban life.

to continue “resisting” and acting on the streets, even in a clearly less democratic context. Using semi-structured interviews and field observations (of sensitive experiences) built on street parties and circles, we sought to assess the ability of rhymed music and sounds to create *territorialities* capable of reframing and enhancing the urban experience, even in this darker scenario.

Thus, “Rio’s female rhyme scene” – which materializes concretely in the Battle of the Muses and Slam das Minas, that occupy the public space of the city of Rio de Janeiro since 2017, producing *dissensus* (Ranci re, 1996, 2009), putting into play relevant *controversies* (Latour, 2012) – is the central topic of this article. Following the actors’ tracks, we sought to outline a *cartography of controversies* (Latour, 2012; Lemos, 2013)<sup>3</sup>, rethinking the articulations and tensions that have been intensifying in this metropolis in recent years. Tensions that involve, on the one hand, the city of urban interventions, of speed, saturation and impersonality, of big spectacles and mega events, that is, the city of technocratic planning, of fear and the privilege of functionalist and financial logic; and, on the other, the city that perseveres and persists in spite of everything, that is, the city of the dynamics implemented by social actors in daily life, who build and update a “metropolis of encounters, affects and sharing,” allowing pleasant and slowed down experiences to emerge, which allow the city’s inhabitants to often reframe the spaces.

Another central assumption that underlines our reflections here is that musical meetings organized by groups, networks and artistic collectives held on the streets of Rio – and not necessarily the so-called big events that require large resources and building adequate urban equipment – represent a relevant cultural and socioeconomic richness. That is, these practices that occupy public spaces in the form of *micro-events* organized as circles and small shows – most of which have little visibility in the traditional media, despite mobilizing an expressive audience – have been promoting a more democratic dynamic in this city for some time and, thus, should receive more attention and support from local public authorities (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2017).

In this sense, we must point out that several neighborhoods in the city of Rio de Janeiro are undergoing an intense process of gentrification in recent years. Public power has been betting on *city marketing* strategies and on the transformation of this territory into a more globalized location, directed to the entertainment industry (Reis, 2008). At the same time, in recent years we have had the opportunity to observe the growth of tensions

<sup>3</sup>Some of the artists and collectives mentioned here are part of the cartography that is being organized and made available as a digital platform (already available at <https://www.cartografiasmusicais.com.br>).



<sup>4</sup>On the criticism of the urban project that has been implemented in Rio de Janeiro in recent years, see Maricato (2014).

and conflicts, with countless actors taking to the streets to denounce the exclusionary dimension of the urban reforms underway<sup>4</sup>: in their opinion, these reforms were imposed on the population and were of particular interest to big national and transnational capital, so from the perspective of many actors and some experts, the argument that these great works have left “social legacies” has been quite questionable. The investments in 2019 for holding not only Copa América matches, Rio Open ATP 500 and events such as ART Rio and Rio Gastronomia, but also of major music festivals such as Rock in Rio or even Rio Montreux Jazz Festival have been signaling the continuity of a logic that keeps betting on the possible benefits brought by spectacular and media mega events.

Clearly, one must acknowledge that these big events may bring “positive externalities” (Reis, 2008) to the territories. The great success, for example, of international festivals that were territorialized, such as Lollapalooza (in Chicago), Sónar (in Barcelona) and SXSW (in Austin) are often mentioned as key events that have benefited some metropolises in different ways. Part of the literature will consider the moment of organization and execution of major music events and festivals as an occasion that brings together different social actors, which could produce synergies between more or less organized groups, entrepreneurs and the State, besides leveraging local development (Bennett et al., 2014). Without disagreeing entirely with this literature, what recent studies in several cities has indicated is that, although this eventually happens in some localities, there are developments that go in other directions and require a more critical and in-depth reflection (Fernandes & Herschmann, 2018). In this sense, we must also recognize the existence of sets of initiatives glamorized by the media, which result in exclusionary processes (which do not necessarily meet the interests of the local population, especially its poorest segments), in general, focused not only on leisure and elitist tourism, but also on the interests of some economic groups (Reis, 2008).

We also assume that sound micro events are relevant, as they, in a way, have been “pollinating” the urban fabric and strengthening local culture. Using the *metaphor of bees*, economist Moulrier-Boutang – who inspired some of the considerations made here – identifies in the daily interdependent practices of social networks this type of work, which, like that of bees, is unrecognized, but vital for the functioning of contemporary capitalism (Moulrier Boutang, 2010). Thus, the contribution of these insects to the pollination of the biosphere is priceless because it is so crucial to the survival of life on the planet. Likewise, the power of positive externalities

produced by (online) social networks is fundamental to the functioning of today's capitalism: it is from where much of today's wealth is extracted (as large communication and entertainment conglomerates such as Google, Amazon or Facebook do, for example)<sup>5</sup>.

This object of study involving Rio's female street sound culture captivates and interests us particularly because it creates, today, a *space of struggle*, in which emerges tensions and conflicts when discussing current issues that not only pollinate Rio's street culture, but also includes in the current social agenda relevant topics, such as: tolerance, gentrification, citizenship, gender, post-gender, racism, machismo, decolonialism, heteronormativity and violence.

From this ongoing research – which involved numerous field observations, semi-structured interviews, mapping news articles that circulate in different medias and significant narratives that have been found in social media and offering opportunities to develop enriching reflections about this territory – we sought to follow these young women's trail in their “associations and movements”, aiming to build a cartography of controversies capable of opening the *black boxes* (Lemos, 2013) of this context. We may say, therefore, that the rhyme scene, led by women in Rio, pollinates and puts into play *body alliances* (Butler, 2018) and important controversies and tensions. In fact, as discussed below, it puts into play a set of mobilizing performative acts, which articulate in a particularly creative manner gender, post-gender and ethnic-racial references.

## FEMALE PERFORMANCES IN RIO'S STREET MUSIC

One might say that the female rhyme circles that have been occupying public spaces in different parts of the country – be they hip-hop or poetry slam – certainly constitute today, vital spaces for expression and visibility of the new feminist waves growing globally, even if in a more authoritarian context, as is the case in Brazil. What we would like to underline here is that one of the striking presences in recent years in the city of Rio de Janeiro has been the street circles and parties held by groups of women who, using music, sounds and gestures, update feminist<sup>6</sup> and post-feminist demands that have emerged with great force since the early 2010s and guided local and global public manifestations such as, for example, the SlutWalks in Brazil<sup>7</sup>, the Women's March against Trump, the Black Women's March in Brazil, the Women's International Strike, the Women's March in Washington, among others. Demands such as the right to one's own body, the right to be

<sup>5</sup> On the profit obtained by high-tech companies with the circulation of information on social networks, see Jenkins (2015).

<sup>6</sup> One of the historical perspectives, in the field of social movement studies, of feminism suggests understanding the feminist movement as *waves*. According to Gohn (2014), the first wave would reflect the struggles for equal rights, in the 18th and 19th centuries and the beginning of the 20th century; second-wave feminism (from 1960 to 1980), emerged in the midst the debate “the personal is political,” expression attributed to journalist and radical feminist Carol Hanisch, which would become the motto of the second wave in 1969; and the third wave, a term credited to Rebecca Walker, due to her article “Becoming the Third Wave” (published in 1993, in *Ms. magazine*), beginning in the 1990s, had as object of fight and action the criticism of the female representation by the mass media. Regarding current feminist demands, we understand them not as a *fourth wave*, since it is not a historical continuity of the previous waves, for it presents itself as a movement that questions this understanding by taking root in the decolonial movements of the “global south,” emphasizing the *intersectionality* (Davis, 2016) between race, class, gender and sexuality, highlighting the coloniality of power. Based on US black feminism, the decolonial proposal generated, and continues to instigate, profound transformations in Eurocentric values, causing epistemological, subjective and intersubjective changes when weaving other ways of understanding and analyzing

# A

global socio-political-cultural relations. As Mignolo (2013) points out, this proposal began the moment we decided “to abandon the universal idea of humanity imposed on us by the West, modeled on the reigning ideal of ‘white, heterosexual and Christian male’ and undo it, to rebuild it in the beauty and uncontrollable diversity of life, the world and knowledge. Today, we are all on this path of reducing the universality of the report of modernity to its just measure, recognizing its merits and repudiating its aberrations” (p. 23). By tensioning, revising and, at times, breaking with the universalism of the political subject of white women – whose theories exclude the realities of racialized women from colonized territories –, decolonial feminism proposes another place for the speech and action of groups of marginalized women (such as indigenous, black, Latinx, mixed race, immigrants, lesbians, etc.).

<sup>7</sup> As Gomes (2019) points out, “the SlutWalks started in 2011, in Canada, demanding an end to gender violence and victim-blaming. According to the movement’s Brazilian website, the first walk was prompted after a policeman’s speech on safety and prevention at York University (in Toronto), who suggested that for women to stop being victims of violence, they should avoid dressing as ‘sluts.’ The reaction is because the speech, precisely, reinforces blaming women for the violence suffered. The criticism provoked by the movement when adopting the word ‘slut’ is the one that highlights women’s social representation, that is, no matter what a woman does she can always end up being called a slut. Thus, in reclaiming the term, this movement shifts the discussion to what really matters: the aggression and the aggressor” (p. 80).

and enjoy the cities, the right to abortion, to pleasure and other possible transitiveness permeate the performances (Zumthor, 2000) of these artists and activists who use the street as a stage and political writing for their bodies.

In this scenario of growth and intense scene of collective and politically engaged cultural production in urban spaces, and of articulation of “feminist cultural collectives” (Hollanda, 2018) in particular, we decided to investigate two relevant case studies in Rio’s culture: the Battle of the Muses and Slam das Minas (itinerant events with editions in the main cities of Brazil), which have been carrying out activities in Rio regularly since 2017.

Therefore, it is evident that women are becoming an increasingly prominent presence in the rhyme scene<sup>8</sup>. It is worth mentioning not only the growth of a national circuit of hip-hop knowledge battles led by “young women” (generally black and poor)<sup>9</sup>, but also the emergence of groups that encourage reading and publishing female writers (such as *Leia Mulheres*) and the increase in female representation in soirées and slams<sup>10</sup>, the latter popularized in recent years, based on the intensive work of Estrela D’Alva and the recent release of a documentary on the subject<sup>11</sup>.

It is worth noting that these female rhyme circles had, to a great extent, the freestyle male hip-hop battle circles as a recent historical reference, especially the so-called *knowledge battles*<sup>12</sup>; the latter have always valued the “quality of messages” and not the defeat at “all costs” of competing rappers (Cura, 2019) – as in the *blood battle* circles – in intense and verbose disputes<sup>13</sup>.

We must also remember that hip-hop, funk and other “popular and marginalized musical genres” (Trotta, 2013) took a long time to be recognized by critics and public authorities in Brazil, thus having minor action in the country – even if some artists reach a prominent position in the music market – giving visibility to the black movement’s agenda and denouncing the *very precarious living conditions* (Butler, 2018). Hip-hop itself – like other marginalized popular musical genres – has faced a demonization process and difficulties to be valued by critics and conservative segments<sup>14</sup>, only being considered intangible heritage of the State of Rio de Janeiro as of 2017 (Cura, 2019).

Thus, feminism emerged in hip-hop as a minority movement within this marginalized musical universe (in general, persecuted by the country’s elitist and conservative sectors), denouncing especially the reproduction of machismo, exclusion and violence against women by this cultural expression. In fact, the emergence and growth of knowledge battles is due, in part, to the accusations and questions raised by b-girls who were deeply uncomfortable

with the evident gangsta and/or *politically incorrect* posture of blood battles<sup>15</sup>. Although most men remain more interested in the playful dimension of these events (regardless of what *is* said and/or *how* it is narrated), some b-boys and rappers started to incorporate part of these criticisms and have been changing their stance regarding several topics, even changing (their) song lyrics<sup>16</sup> or pulling out of blood battles circles (becoming even more directly involved in knowledge battles).

It is also important to note that hip-hop battle circles can be “shop windows” for younger and lesser-known rappers. Many female rappers, in search of more recognition for their creative work, have been denouncing female invisibility in these circles. Aline Pereira, who is an important leadership, highlights on social media that the low presence of women in battle circles is related to a strong prejudice within hip-hop, for the vast majority (especially men) believe women have no talent or ability to compete with men. Local imagery perpetuates the idea that freestyle rap is for “strong men” (that women who compete are necessarily “lesbians”), that women’s voice tends to become very high-pitched and distorted during tense situations in these circles or that the Brazilian market has little interest in the work of female artists (Cura, 2019).

Despite these challenges to be overcome in a macho and heteronormative environment, we observe, roughly speaking, two major lines of action of the activists (most of them black and poor young women) working in this rhyme circles present in street art: part of these *artivists* (Vieira, 2011) and the female audience find it important to occupy all spaces, even if in confrontation and tension with men, thus participating in blood and knowledge battles with hip-hop b-boys. The other part – who felt less valued in these environments, intimidated or even invisible in the hip-hop universe – chose another path: through tactics and tricks, they built a separate dynamic, creating numerous knowledge battles or poetry slam events, dedicated exclusively to women, such as our two case studies.

It is important to emphasize that, in our understanding, these interactions between body, city and aesthetic experience are collective performances, or “embodied forms of action” that engages, according to Butler (2018, p.14), provisional solidarities, or what she called sudden assemblies, in which different and diverse bodies come together with the desire and potency of action to redesign the urban socio-political experience. Thus, they offer other perceptions about the social and political conditions of bodily existences: not only when performing *in* and *around* the city, but also when building

<sup>8</sup>The examples highlighted here are the female rap circles – with the Battle of the Muses as one of its most expressive examples – along with the increasingly extensive circuit of female slams, or the Slams das Minas organized in different Brazilian states, such as: Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and São Paulo.

<sup>9</sup>Although most actors involved have the following profile: are between 15 and 30 years old, live in the periphery and slums of the city, are LGBTI+, and declare themselves as black and brown; it is important to underline this article considers the notion of youth as a *cultural construct* (Margulis, 1996).

<sup>10</sup>Slam is a kind of recital and competition of spoken word poetry (which may or may not resemble hip-hop improvised rhymes): the slams performed in Brazil were also based on the poetry slam movement created in Chicago, still in the 1980s, by poet Marc Smith. Seeking to bring poetry closer to the public, Smith and other poets began to organize competitions in pubs, popularizing the movement, which later spread across the globe (Somers-Willett, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>Graduate in Communication, Roberta Estrela D’Alva was one of the founders of the movement in Brazil: she is one of the curators of Rio Poetry Slam, held annually at the Festa Literária das Periferias. Awarded at the Slam World Cup and winner of a Shell award for best actress (in 2012), D’Alva also directed with Tatiana Lohmann the documentary *Slam - voz de levante* (*Slam - voice of uprising*, released in 2018).

<sup>12</sup>To size the atmosphere created around this type of hip-hop freestyle circle (the so-called battle of knowledge) we suggest some YouTube videos: <https://bit.ly/3hBd2AH> or <https://bit.ly/3loL6lO>.

# A

<sup>13</sup>Some examples of the competitive climate created in this type of hip-hop freestyle circle (the so-called blood battles) can be found on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/32uPMY1> and <https://bit.ly/3b888IT>.

<sup>14</sup>Evidently, despite the persecutions and prejudices present in society, hip-hop has also been, on several occasions, (re)appropriated by the market (since the 1990s), characterizing an ambiguous and simultaneous process of demonization and glamorization on the country's media scene (Herschmann,

<sup>2000</sup>).  
<sup>15</sup>On machismo and the gangsta posture of hip-hop b-boys, see: Cura (2019); Herschmann (2000).

<sup>16</sup>Case of rapper Criolo (and some other hip-hop artists) who recognized a certain machismo present in lyrics previously written (during his youth) and have been changing some verses and song lyrics (available at: <https://bit.ly/3gwLTgN>).

<sup>17</sup>The institutionalized universe itself has brought poetry slams and hip-hop battles closer: a commemorative week was recently instituted in the State of Rio de Janeiro dedicated to the Circuito de Rodas de Rima e Slam de Poesias (Rhyme Circles and Poetry Slams Circuit) (by PL 2,901/2017, has been celebrated for some years, from March 25 to 31).

powerful alliances that allow them to live – and survive – in precarious conditions.

Before discussing the two case studies – one of music and the other of poetry –, we would like to highlight that both were analyzed together because we identified: a) first, a large incidence of female rappers (the vast majority of them young) who – having little space (an environment that discourages them from participating in events) in male hip-hop battle circles (and the existence of few circles intended solely for women in Brazil) – began participating in slam poetry events as if it were an obvious extension of the artistic activities they were already developing, that is, as another opportunity to showcase their work; b) secondly, that the rhyme scene (of poetry slam and hip-hop freestyle<sup>17</sup>) slightly blurs the borders between sung and spoken word. We assume that the rap and poetry performed in *slams*, whose language includes a series of hybrids (with music and theater), are strongly connected. As Cura (2019) suggests, the musicality and rhythm of spoken word are crucial elements for internalizing the senses that emanate from the poetic text: their impact is observed by how the audience is lulled by the performance, as even slight variations in timbre, tempo, breath, pitch or rhythm of the voice make all the difference to reception. The author also recalls the ongoing debates on whether rap is more situated in the domain of words or music, due to its *spoken singing*, an issue that seeks to be solved by the technological production of sound (i.e., by accompanying the lyrics with a beat, differentiating rap from poetry):

we also listen to a capella rap, rap is heard in slam, so its nature would be defined especially by its context... evidently, by the rules of slam, music support is not allowed along with the text, but we could also ask if the singing that regularly echoes from the poetic performance would not sound to most as music. (p. 265).

c) and, finally, this connection is relevant because the poetry slams and knowledge battles organized by these young women put into play innovative feminist agendas, or rather, by a set of *performativities* that form assemblages of *bodies* and *words* (oral and written) they continue deconstructing a naturalized and heteronormative perspective of poor and black women in Brazil (the so-called *black mother*), even opening up the possibility of developing cross-sectional alliances – building articulations among these women marked by *intersectionality* (Davis, 2016), in which gender relations intertwine with race, class and sexuality as part of strategies to confront the systems of oppression in force – among precarious minorities (Butler, 2018).



## BATTLE OF THE MUSES RJ

The recent trajectory of Batalha das Musas RJ<sup>18</sup> received support from rappers of both genders who have always been critical of blood battles and who often continue to defend the need to expand knowledge battles in Brazil – also known as events that favors the *fifth element*<sup>19</sup> – highly valued by hip-hop leaderships (Mendes & Neiva, 2019).

More than just occupying the streets, Rio's Battle of the Muses has been holding its events in protected or hybrid spaces (not only in alleys and small squares, but also in spaces controlled by the government or with a public vocation), such as foundations, museums and cultural centers (such as Museu do Ingá, Museu de Arte do Rio and Instituto Moreira Sales)<sup>20</sup>. Its founders believe that this has been fundamental for advancing the initiative, because, on the one hand, women feel more safe from possible violent reactions by the State and the male public (they are held in streets of little circulation); and, on the other, for seeing in these spaces a certain vocation to inspire and raise the level of critical and poetic games. Holding these events in “hybrid spaces” also allows to overcome the great difficulty in obtaining (since 2016, with the beginning of Crivella's municipal management) licenses and permits to occupy public spaces in the city of Rio de Janeiro (strategy also adopted by Slam das Minas, with similar objectives). It appears that public authorities tends to drive – by bureaucratic obstacles and the lack of incentives – small events and street circles to go underground or illegality (Reia et al., 2018).

Many of the attendees, in informal conversations, describe these artists and producers as “courageous young women” who face men and the State in the public space. Asked if it is worth to continue confronting men in the sexist universe of hip-hop, rappers Aika Cortez and Aline Pereira (founders and producers of Battle of the Muses) praise with some recurrence on the collective's Facebook page<sup>21</sup> the political importance of women remaining “daring” and/or to continue questioning the hip-hop universe, that is, of increasingly occupying all possible socio-cultural spaces, especially in freestyle battles (inspiring the trajectory of other young women). In their speeches, they often add the need to continue deconstructing traditional gender roles, which almost always suggest that “a woman's place is at home” or even that “rap is for strong men”<sup>22</sup> (Cura, 2019, pp. 87-89)<sup>23</sup>.

They recall that, from the beginning of its trajectory in Brazil, the rap movement had many talented women (many b-girls often mention the performance of pioneering artists who, in search of acceptance in the scene, tried to fit the “tough” stereotype and often adopted a more closed posture

<sup>18</sup>There are artistic collectives that organize editions of the Battle of the Muses in several Brazilian cities and states. Rio's collective is one of the most dynamic and active in the country.

<sup>19</sup>The fifth element refer to the knowledge passed orally in the cultural universe of hip-hop. The other four elements are: rap, graffiti, breakdance and DJs (Herschmann, 2000).

<sup>20</sup>Conceived by producer Aline Pereira, Rio de Janeiro's Battle of Muses has been held annually, since 2017, at Museu do Ingá. Besides Rio's edition, Battle of the Muses has events taking place regularly in some of the country's main capitals in the last two years (Cura, 2019).

<sup>21</sup>Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/batalhadasmusasrj>.

<sup>22</sup>In the analyzed material, it is evident that male rappers adopt a more or less deliberate posture of trying to exclude these artists. Many of the b-boys interviewed during the research defend themselves, arguing that the dynamics of this type of battle should be assessed from a playful perspective.

<sup>23</sup>To grasp the difficulties and prejudices faced by women when participating in blood battles – predominantly male – we suggest watching the emblematic battle between rappers Emicida and Negra Rê held some years ago with great repercussion among the fans (available at: <https://bit.ly/3hCHZnY>).



and/or wore loose clothing, abandoning their own, more feminine styles), but that the historical invisibilization process, operated by the media or by the movement itself, continues to “silence” the female voices of hip-hop (Allucci et al., 2016). At the same time, due to the b-girls’ effort of organizing their knowledge circles, such as the Battle of the Muses, today we can find not only more b-boys reflecting on feminism and actually interested in the female rappers’ artistic works, but also identify in hip-hop events more producers, b-girls, graffiti artists and DJs than in the past, when such reflections were minimal in Brazil.

Although advocates of women’s participation in hip-hop spaces – whether in blood and knowledge battles (although the latter, according to them, often lack dynamism and a greater depth of topics when organized by men) –, many of these artists and producers (founders of the Battle of the Muses RJ) denounce their tendency of infantilizing (and even delegitimizing) female rappers who dare to venture in freestyle (often several stereotypes are engaged and the environment becomes hostile to this presence)<sup>24</sup>. In fact, several of them defend investing more regularly in knowledge battles led by women, which have, in general, a more constructive and dense proposal (Cura, 2019).

Thus, for these actors, women’s knowledge battle circles have prioritized topics dear to the new feminist wave, such as: gender violence, rape culture, motherhood, abortion, empowerment in the labor market and, in general, the naturalization of the gender-based division of social roles (Cura, 2019). Many of the female rappers interviewed state that the performances have an environment marked by great reciprocity on part of the audience<sup>25</sup>, very distinct from the male competitiveness and manly dispute (even when it comes to male knowledge battles, of a more reflective and educational trend).

### SLAM DAS MINAS RJ

Created in 2017, Rio’s Slam das Minas is one of the most active in the national circuit<sup>26</sup> counting dozens of editions, including the local, state, national classification stages and special participation in acts, debates, festivals, cultural projects in squares, schools, universities, theaters and museums. From the beginning, the group included women and LBGTI+ people, differentiating themselves from other Slam das Minas who, for the most part, do not accept transgender persons.

Understanding itself as a “network of affection and protection” for black, lesbian and transgender women, its birth reflects the desire to create a space

<sup>24</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/batalhadasmusasrj>.

<sup>25</sup> Evidently, at the end of each battle, the audience (whether women or men) evaluates – as is traditional in hip-hop – which rapper had the best performance and, therefore, who will go to the next phase. In other words, a competitive environment exists in the event, although not as highly valued as in male events.

<sup>26</sup> As Leticia Brito (poet and founder of Slam das Minas RJ) points out, “the first Slam das Minas appeared in 2014 in the Federal District, in 2016 in São Paulo and soon after it spread throughout the country... today we have more than 25 initiatives throughout Brazil, I believe” (interview with the authors on August 10, 2019).

for women to discuss lived situations, such as rape, harassment, racism, etc. This space was created – and continues to be of extreme importance – to establish spaces in the city open for listening to female diversity, for interacting with sexual, gender, race differences. As Cura (2019) suggests, young women there feel safe, welcomed and represented. According to the author, in several events, the winners were black and lesbian women, which reinforces the idea of the space of poetry as a space of political resistance. In this sense, Leticia Brito states: “the local championship is just kind of a game or backdrop... the most important thing is the political exercise of poetry, as a possibility of resistance and the existence of art in marginalized urban spaces”<sup>27</sup>.

Throughout its two years of existence, the group organized several events, among them: an edition held at Morro da Providência, which aimed to promote lesbian visibility, and the edition dedicated to Rio’s councilor Marielle Franco (due to her brutal murder in March 2018). It is important to underline that these types of themes and denouncements – which refer to the set of violent acts suffered by black and poor women in Brazil – were a constant in the 2019 meetings, becoming icons in the fight against the oppressions these women have historically suffered. The interviewees also pointed out that the fight for women empowerment, especially black and queer women, are also present in other types of activities: they translate, for example, into incentives for female and Afro entrepreneurship, accessories sale, exhibition of graphic projects and magazines and fanzines’ release, including editions containing texts by slammasters and regular poets of Slam das Minas<sup>28</sup>.

Although the event accepts any thematic proposal, as Leticia Brito points out, some themes are unavoidable, due to the fights against current political-social-economic-racial, gender, transgender and post-gender oppressions in Brazil: antifascism, antiracism, the fight against machismo, transphobia and queerphobia are among the most prominent. It is precisely the particular set of themes treated in the Brazilian context that dimensions the existing difference between the style of rhymes of international poetry slam circles and those organized by Slam das Minas.

Another relevant characteristic we would like to emphasize here is that, although the first slams were organized by hip-hop collectives and divulged by rap (Cura, 2019), their style of poetry may differ, because in slam performers can use rap or any other modes of poetry, like *repente* or poem, in their performances. Performance is essential (it is central to slam) and, evidently, a good performance is one that manages to play the

<sup>27</sup>Interview granted by Leticia Brito to the authors on August 10, 2019.

<sup>28</sup>For more details, see the Slam das Minas’ Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/slamdasminasrj>).



game of body-poem-public interactions. It is interesting to note that many “minas” who already practiced poetry through rap, that is, who were already – according to the organizers – “empowered by spoken music,” naturally became involved in the slam scene. Several of the poets interviewed stated that they stayed at slam due to the *welcoming* environment, *much less confrontational* (than the blood battles, where humiliating and diminishing female rappers is common)<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup>For more details, see the Slam das Minas’ Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/slamdasminasrj>).

In a sense, we may say that Slam das Minas became a space where rappers found greater freedom for denouncing machismo (as well as other forms of oppression). Thus, according to slam organizers and participants, through these playful-poetic events, they sought to create a safe and oppression-free space for developing the artistic potency of these women from the outskirts – white, non-white, black, lesbian, transgender or non-binary –, using the occupation of public space as a means to fight the invisibility of these groups and to stimulate encounters and affections between all those involved<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>30</sup>Interview granted by Leticia Brito to the authors on August 10, 2019.

Combating the invisibility of black female bodies in cities is not a new practice. Women participating in the rhyme game understand the historical process of their demands and feature them constantly in their performances. In this sense, following Fernandes and Barroso (2019), we emphasize the importance of the historical action of women’s bodies in celebration in the cultural spaces in the city of Rio de Janeiro. As for the authors, we propose here a reflection and interpretation to understand how the action of the female bodies of cultural collectives today are permeated by and update the “vestiges and marks of the gestures and practices of female bodies in celebratory situations in the past centuries” (p. 3)<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>31</sup>According to these authors, since the 19th century, there has been an intense dialogue “between contemporary cultural practices and those that have existed in the city for a long time, marking the historical presence of festive scenes of a dissensual nature, in which the continuity of women’s action is verified, almost always looking for gaps in the institutional dynamics of the city” (p. 3). For these authors, female action would have been relevant in Rio’s history, paving the way for the creation of significant artistic scenes (Fernandes & Barroso, 2019).

We might say that the bodies in performances are valuable for stimulating thinking about themselves as a transmuting potency of everyday life and the city (those involved seem to have a clear perception that their poetic performance is also political): these actors’ poetry and staging in urban spaces operate producing *glimmers* (Didi-Huberman, 2011) and/or planting seeds that, finding fertile soils (and spurred by the desire for change) can flourish throughout the city, in the playful activities of circles and parties (in a way, the young women gathered in the slam scene perform to include voices and dissensual bodies). The organizers claim to believe that even the competitive climate tends not to divide the women in the circles and *emphasize* that the dispute is countered by the atmosphere of companionship, welcome and encouragement that participants find in the events<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Interview granted by Leticia Brito to the authors on August 10, 2019.

Just like the female hip-hop knowledge battles, women’s poetry slams end up choosing to occupy some of the city’s alleys and small cozy squares

(such as Beco das Artes and Banca do André, in which traders and producers already work with permits), but especially they prefer hybrid spaces, such as museums, foundations and cultural centers (such as the Museu de Arte do Rio, Parque Laje, Circo Voador, Casa Porto, etc.): as a relevant strategy to make participants feel safer (or as a tactic to avoid the difficulties of getting permits to occupy the streets of Rio). These are *tricks*, that is, a possible approach to face possible situations of gender-based violence or a probable State ban (which increasingly and brutally repress unauthorized occupations in this city), now visibly less democratic.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Another relevant aspect observed in the rhyme scene (whether in the slam or hip-hop circles) is that, in general, body language and narratives seek to reinforce building a more collective and cohesive body. Thus, the proxemic behavior and body agglomerations of the attendees or quoting expressions that are very much in vogue – “you mess with one [woman], you mess with all [women]” (referring to gendered violence), “not one [woman] less” (referring to daily femicide) or “no one lets go of anyone’s hand” (signaling risk of attacks against human or citizens’ rights) – often appear interwoven to the narratives sung or spoken by these young women in this cartography of controversies (Lemos, 2013).

In fact, the body in performance is key to understanding the relationships between artists, audiences and the spaces in which they operate. These bodies in action in urban spaces create environments capable of subverting the spatial-social-temporal logics of places. Gestures, voice intonation, proxemics with the audience enhance sensitive interactions capable of transmuting territories (of the body and the city) through play, playfulness and theatricality. Thus, we consider the sets of gestures, memories (which are expressed in a poetic and discursive way) and intonations with which the bodies perform (sensibly mapping the space) – founding places based on *dissensual initiatives* (Rancière, 1996) that aim to promote *molecular revolutions* (Guattari, 1977) – as relevant expressions capable not only of altering urban imagery, but also of creating powerful *territorialities* (Haesbert, 2010). These gestures and expressions manifest and materialize in the dissensual bodies desires for change that, potentially, can be transformed into a kind of possible becoming (Guattari, 1977), which could be one of the starting points for developing more democratic, solidary and open cities (Sennett, 2018).



Finally, two brief observations. First, both the Battle of the Muses and the Slam das Minas end up constituting refuges, centers of resistance, which try to reframe the world from the inside out, using art. They are sonic and musical territorialities that project possible worlds (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2014). It is worth emphasizing that, being in contact with these cultural expressions of youth, one can also observe how much *love* – in its Spinozian sense, more communitarian and political (Hardt & Negri, 2009) – has become so necessary in a country more divided by intolerance, because what these activist or activist practices (Vieira, 2011) seek is to strengthen a more collective spirit. In short, the “act of loving the *other*” takes on a more political meaning in darker times and marked by hatred.

Secondly, we can draw attention to the relevance of the dissensus (Rancière, 2009) produced on these circles, which creates relevant glimmers in the often dark urban space (Didi-Huberman, 2011). If the molecular dynamics of these circles share a kind of sensitivity of what is “common,” it also evidences what is left out of these “dynamics of distribution, of what is political and not policing” (Rancière, 1996, p. 72). Thus, at the borders of this *distribution of the sensible* (Rancière, 2009), one creates alternative dissensual (and political) scenes that confront what is established as common, showing the existence of ruptures, fissures of meaning in what is perceived as immutable or naturalized. This perspective helps us understand the political potency of the experience of Rio’s female street rhyme sound culture: these artistic expressions have been revealing fragmentations in this metropolis’ idea of the social body, that is, they have been pointing out the existence of controversies and disagreements in inclusion (or exclusion) politics and the signification process of bodies in the city.

It is in this sense that these rhyme circles emerge as temporary sonic and musical territorialities (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2014), through which we can investigate the uses *against the grain* of the city (Benjamin, 1987). If, on the one hand, the city’s traditional financial and technocratic planning proposes to regulate urban rhythms and spaces for promoting the capital; on the other, the street and its *molecular* dynamics (Guattari, 1977) may present alternative scenes beyond this functionalist and excluding logic, vested in sociability policies and encounters, that is, in festive spaces for protecting and expressing activism, such as the small rhyme events presented here. In short, Rio’s rhyme scene led by women, despite everything, suggests relevant aesthetic-political dynamics of a city that aims to be more *intercultural* (Canclini, 2011) (which continues to attract and welcome different kinds of minority social groupings) – highlighting a cultural diversity beyond

the postcard of the globalized and cosmopolitan city –, which resists being simply reduced in the imaginary as a locality strongly identified almost exclusively to entertainment and elitist tourism; to the predominantly heteronormative aesthetic patterns; and, finally, to social divisions and urban violence (in which there would be a need for an immediate increase in social surveillance and police repression). ■

## REFERENCES

- Allucci, F., Allucci, R., & Valencio, K. (2016). *Mulheres de palavra*. Allucci & Associados.
- Benjamin, W. (1987). *Obras escolhidas* (vol. 1). Brasiliense.
- Bennett, A., Taylor, J., & Woodward, I. (Eds.). (2014). *Festivalization of culture*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2003). *Problemas de gênero*. Civilização Brasileira.
- Butler, J. (2018). *Corpos em aliança e a política das ruas*. Civilização Brasileira.
- Canclini, N. G. (2011). *Conflictos interculturales*. Gedisa.
- Cura, T. (2019). *Minas de batalha: Feminismo em rodas de ritmo e poesia* [Dissertação de mestrado, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro]. Arquivo do Programa de Pós-Graduação ECO/UFRJ. <https://bit.ly/31Coerj>
- Davis, A. (2016). *Mulheres, raça e classe*. Boitempo.
- De Certeau, M. (1994). *A invenção do cotidiano*. Vozes.
- Didi-Huberman, G. (2011). *Sobrevivência dos vagalumes*. Ed. UFMG.
- Fernandes, C. S., & Barroso, F. (2019). Presença e atuação de mulheres em espaços culturais no Rio de Janeiro do século XIX: O que podem as mulheres em festa? *Contracampo*, 38(1), 7-21. <https://doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v38i1.27985>
- Fernandes, C. S., & Herschmann, M. (Orgs.). (2018). *Cidades musicais*. Sulina.
- Foucault, M. (2013). *O corpo utópico, as heterotopias*. N-1 Edições.
- Gohn, M. G. (2014). *Novas teorias dos movimentos sociais*. Edições Loyola.
- Gomes, P. G. (2019). *Reflexo da Medusa: Imaginários sobre femininos e gênero a partir da performatividade das Madalenas Teatro das Oprimidas*. [Tese de doutorado não publicada]. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
- Guattari, F. (1977). *Revolução molecular*. Brasiliense.
- Haesbaert, R. (2010). *O mito da desterritorialização*. Bertrand Brasil.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Império*. Record.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2005). *Multidão*. Record.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). *Commonwealth*. Harvard University Press.



- Harvey, D. (2009). *Espaços da esperança*. Edições Loyola.
- Herschmann, M. (2000). *O funk e o hip hop invadem a cena*. Ed. UFRJ.
- Herschmann, M., & Fernandes, C. S. (2014). *Música nas ruas do Rio de Janeiro*. Ed. Intercom.
- Herschmann, M., & Fernandes, C. S. (2017). Repensando a relevância dos microeventos para a cidade do Rio de Janeiro. In A. Pereira, & I. Coutinho (Orgs.), *Comunicação e cidade espetáculo* (pp. 119-136). Ed. Intercom.
- Hollanda, H. B. (2018). *Explosão feminista: Arte, cultura, política e universidade*. Companhia das Letras.
- Jenkins, H. (2015). *Cultura da convergência*. Aleph.
- Latour, B. (2012). *Reagregando o social*. EDUFBA.
- Léfèbvre, H. (2008). *A revolução urbana*. Ed. UFMG.
- Léfèbvre, H. (2015). *O direito à cidade*. Centauro.
- Legros, P., Monneyron, F., Renard, J.-B., & Tacussel, P. (2007) *Sociologia do imaginário*. Sulinas.
- Lemos, A. (2013). *A comunicação das coisas*. Annablume.
- Margulis, M. (Org.). (1996). *La juventud es más que una palabra*. Biblos.
- Maricato, E. (2014). A Copa do Mundo no Brasil: Tsunami de capitais aprofunda a desigualdade urbana. In A. Jennings et al., *Brasil em jogo: o que fica da Copa e das Olimpíadas?* (pp. 17-24). Boitempo.
- Mbembe, A. (2018). *Necropolítica*. N-1 edições.
- Mendes, G. G.; Neiva, G. C. (2019). O rap na cidade. *Tríade*, 7(14), 199-219. <https://doi.org/10.22484/2318-5694.2019v7n14p199-219>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2013). Decolonialidade como o caminho para a cooperação. *Revista do Instituto Humanitas*, (431). <https://bit.ly/3gBixhi>
- Moulier Boutang, Y. (2010). *Labeille et l'économiste*. Carnets Nord.
- Rancière, J. (1996). *O desentendimento*. Editora 34.
- Rancière, J. (2009). *A partilha do sensível*. Editora 34.
- Reia, J., Herschmann, M., & Fernandes, C. S. (2018). Entre regulações e táticas: Músicas nas ruas da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. *Famecos*. 25(3), ID30608. <https://doi.org/10.15448/1980-3729.2018.3.30608>
- Reis, A. C. (2008). *Economia criativa e desenvolvimento*. Ed. Itaú Cultural.
- Santos, M. (2002). *A natureza do Espaço*. Edusp.
- Sennett, R. (2018). *Construir e habitar*. Record.
- Somers-Willett, S. (2009). *The cultural politics of slam poetry*. University of Michigan Press.
- Trotta, F. (2013). Entre o borralho e o divino: A emergência musical da “periferia”. *Galaxia*, (26), 161-173. <https://bit.ly/3jm8YF2>



Vieira, T. J. B. (2011). *Artivismo: Estratégias artísticas contemporâneas de resistência cultural*. Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto.  
Zumthor, P. (2000). *Performance, recepção, leitura*. EDUC.

---

Article received on December 9, 2019 and approved on July 10, 2020.