

**“THE PERIPHERY IS THE PERIPHERY EVERYWHERE”:
CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN URBAN PERIPHERIES**

Sonic narratives from Cohab Feitoria: the case of rap by the Mesclã group

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Abstract:

Considering urban peripheries vivid and complex subjects, I articulate a key concept — *sonic narratives* — that may provide relevant insights into the dynamics of peripheral life. I attempt to present the sonic dimension at the research locus, Cohab Feitoria, a neighborhood in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil, often characterized as working-class; it is based on the sonic dimension of the neighborhood that I explore the musical narrative of a rap crew, Mesclã. As I aim to demonstrate, Mesclã’s performances emerge as *sonic narratives* from Cohab, with the group facing challenges and responding through socio-musical strategies shaped by their condition as a crew from southern Brazil. *Sonic narratives* from Cohab dynamize life in the urban periphery, creating meaning where there are “shots from here and there,” both literally and symbolically; sounds from “here and there” also become sonic entities that reverberate the very existence of *cohabeiros* and the sense of belonging immersed in a *sonic ethos*.

Keywords: Sonic Narratives; Raps; Musical Performances; COHAB; Urban Peripheries.

Narrativas sônicas da Cohab Feitoria: o caso do grupo Mesclã

Resumo:

Considerando as periferias urbanas como um tema vívido e complexo, busco neste artigo articular uma chave conceitual — *narrativas sônicas* — que possa fornecer ideias relevantes sobre as dinâmicas da vida periférica. Tento apresentar a dimensão sônica no *locus* da pesquisa, a Cohab Feitoria, um bairro frequentemente narrado como da classe trabalhadora na região metropolitana de Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil, e, a partir daí, o percurso narrativo musical de um grupo de rap, o Mesclã. A partir desse contexto, as performances do grupo emergem como narrativas sônicas, enfrentando desafios e respondendo por meio de estratégias sociomusicais moldadas pela sua condição enquanto rappers do sul do Brasil. É possível afirmar que as narrativas sônicas da Cohab dinamizam a vida na periferia urbana, fazendo sentido onde há ‘tiros daqui e de lá’, tanto literal quanto simbolicamente; sons de ‘aqui e de lá’ também se tornam *entidades sônicas* que reverberam a própria existência dos/as *cohabeiros/as* e o sentimento de pertencimento imerso em um *ethos sônico*.

Palavras-chave: narrativas sônicas; rap; performances musicais; COHAB; periferias urbanas.

Sonic narratives from Cohab Feitoria: the case of rap by Mesclã group

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A FIRST BEAT

As our car approached Curumi's place, the home of my longtime rapper research collaborator, my husband — and longtime partner on the research as well — and I noticed several children playing *taco* ¹[as all of us used to refer to the *tacobol* street sport]. The sound of children playing immediately brought back memories of our own childhoods, since *taco* was one of my husband's favorite childhood games, practiced on the neighborhood's street, and is part of the sonic dimension of anyone who lived there in the 1990s. That was our case — although we experienced different parts of the place and different experiences based on gender: we lived in the same neighborhood, Feitoria, called *vila* [hood] by some, *community* or *neighborhood* by others, and *periphery* by many.

The children — black and white, of various ages — sounded as though they were thoroughly enjoying the game; the rhythmic echoes of *taco* filled the air of the makeshift park. This improvised space was surrounded by recently built houses, a contrast to the original housing complex initiated in the 1980s in São Leopoldo, a mid-sized town known as an industrial town in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul. The working-class housing complex called COHAB — an acronym for the *Companhia Estadual de Habitação* [State Housing Company] — is just a hood [a *vila*] in the Feitoria neighborhood. For a subject who lives in the neighborhood, the housing complex section is just called “Cohab”; for someone who lives outside the neighborhood, it is important to refer to the place as “Feitoria” or “Cohab Feitoria” (a.k.a. Feitoria Cohab).

However, in accordance with the social dynamics of peripheries in Brazil, Cohab became a metonym for the entire neighborhood, although all *vilas* are different from each other, even if they are all working-class living spaces. In a way, it could be said that the metonymic relation between Cohab and Feitoria — as the latter is known to outsiders through the dis-

1 A Brazilian game played with two bats, one ball, and plastic bottles used as wickets. The game is related to cricket.

courses around the former — is very similar to what *favela* tends to represent in relation to Brazil (Zaluar and Alvito 2004).

The sonic dimension of that place makes the sound of children playing *taco* echo a specific sense of belonging to Cohab. As spontaneous as they could sound, the polyphony of children's voices unravels some apparent contradictions of living in a place intended to be a working-class neighborhood historically narrated in town as "poor and violent." This condition is modelled by stigmatized images that constantly position Cohab as "dangerous," connected to the "criminal factional universe,"² and "noisy." Despite these discourses, children were there, surrounded by what looked like a secure network (families, apparently), playing their *taco* and experiencing a kind of childhood in a 2025 world that constantly defies ways for humans to be truly present — without a smartphone or even (alleged) artificial intelligence. At that moment, I could realize my reading and listening skills as an ethnographer were crossed in my positionality as mother, professor, and a person who somehow ascended from that place.

In my role as a researcher and as part of my commitment to the community, the purpose of that meeting was to begin outlining a project proposal intended for an application for public cultural funding — long-awaited funds — for a place currently called *Galpão do Hip-hop* [Hip-Hop Warehouse, a community space for hip-hop], based at the rapper Curumi's house for about the last four years. On this way, my reunion with Curumi resulted from the extensive and intensive fieldwork,³ through the interaction between anthropology and ethnomusicology,⁴ for nearly fifteen years.⁵ This allowed us to follow movements and turns

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- 2 Multiple elements contribute to the construction of Feitoria, specially Cohab, as a stigmatized space, as seen from the outside — and I cannot provide a comprehensive account of all of them here. Practices associated with the criminal universe are among those woven into such narrative configurations. One example is the discourse portraying Feitoria as the place of origin for certain criminal leaders who are widely known across the state.
 - 3 The fieldwork was conducted during my doctoral research in the Post-Graduate Program in Music at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (PPGMUS/UFRGS). The resulting doctoral dissertation was aligned with the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the *Grupo de Estudos Musicais* [Musical Studies Group] — GEM/UFRGS, led by Professor Elizabeth Lucas. It received the Prêmio Funarte de Produção Crítica em Música [National Art Foundation Prize for Critical Production in Music], which led to the publication of the book *Todos na Produção: Etnografia de Narrativas Sônicas e Raps em Espaços Urbanos Populares* (2017).
 - 4 The interdisciplinary nature of Ethnomusicology — usually academically located in departments of Music and/or Anthropology (most frequently in the former) — is historically based on anthropological roots and frameworks in its attempt to understand musical/sonic practices from sociocultural perspectives. It is worth mentioning works such as *The Anthropology of Music* (Merriam 1964), albeit in a functionalist paradigm, and — much aligned with the perspectives of this article — the work of anthropologist/ethnomusicologist Steven Feld; years later, Feld's work prompted reflections on sound that influenced the then-emerging field of Sound Studies, particularly the concept of acoustemology (Feld 1996), which resonates with Murray Schafer's ideas on soundscape.
 - 5 Although I started the fieldwork reflecting on my positionality as a local resident — exploring the meanings and boundaries of an autoethnography (Strathern 2014) not in a spatial sense, but an epistemological one, regarding communities of meanings shared or not with my collaborators — I now understand the limits imposed by the "shadows in the field" (Barz & Cooley 2008) at that time. My interactions, considering my position as a white woman striving to act as an ally (Davis 2016), are not rigid or fixed, but always in process. This requires an understanding of gender issues that takes race, class, and religion into account (hooks, 2019), all of which appear to be central issues impacting the intersubjectivities that emerged from the fieldwork relationship.

in national politics, cultural politics, and social development with impacts on the trajectories of people from Cohab, especially those connected to sonic/musical practices.

Considering urban peripheries as vivid complex subjects, I articulate a key concept — *sonic narratives*⁶ — which, I argue, may provide relevant insights into the dynamics of peripheral life. I attempt to present the sonic dimension at the research locus, Cohab Feitoria, a neighborhood in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil, often characterized as working-class; it is based on this dimension that I explore the musical narrative of a rap crew, Mesclã. As I aim to demonstrate, Mesclã's performances emerge as sonic narratives from Cohab, with the group facing challenges and responding through socio-musical strategies shaped by their condition as a crew from southern Brazil. Sonic narratives from Cohab make life in the urban periphery dynamic, creating meaning where there are “shots from here and there,” both literally and symbolically; sounds from “here and there” also become *sonic entities* that reverberate the very existence of *cohabeiros* and the sense of belonging immersed in a *sonic ethos*.

SONIC NARRATIVES AT COHAB

What can the sounds of an urban periphery mean? What about their fade-ins and fade-outs?

Entering a neighborhood like Cohab Feitoria is undeniably a sonic experience, whether due to the multiplicity of its sounds or the apparent absence of them. Having lived in the neighborhood for much of my life,⁷ I witnessed the population growth of the 1990s and 2000s — which reached around 20,000⁸ inhabitants by the time I began my fieldwork in 2011. It is a neighborhood of considerable size, especially when one considers that the town of São Leopoldo has approximately 210,100 inhabitants.

I came to understand that, just as children learn how to play or attend school, they also learn to comprehend the space and its moral codes by listening to the specter of silences and to the sounds that reverberate through Cohab. These listening skills are constructed in several ways, but, for the purpose of this article, it is worth noting that, for an inhabitant of Feitoria Cohab, a *cohabeiro/a*, it is as if there were a sonic calendar that rhythmizes the

6 The concept was elaborated in a critical dialogue with *Sound Studies*, an interdisciplinary field with post-structuralist influences. Jonathan Sterne, an important scholar in the field, defined it as such: “Sound studies is a name for the interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it redescribes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world” (Sterne 2012: 2). Although it could be considered a somewhat anthropocentric definition by other sound scholars, this definition is helpful here for providing the scope of the field.

7 Currently, I realize that, in 2011, when I started an ethnography in a place where I have lived for so long, I had something that is in tune with the “courage of looking at neighbors” mentioned by the Brazilian anthropologist Ruth Cardoso, when interviewed by urban anthropologists Cornelia Eckert and Ana Luiza Carvalho (2011). The exception is that my positionality was/is that of an insider, in the sense that I am from the periphery — something that always caused some discomfort in academic realms.

8 The data from the 2010 and 2022 *Censos* [Census] has not shown a significant rise of population, although this could be problematized, in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic and President Bolsonaro's position towards taking censuses.

lives of people, bringing their social positionalities to the surface through the sonic territories that constitute urban periphery.⁹

Departing from this *peripheral listening*, it can be said that the residents configure definitions that defy hegemonic classifications of sound. On the one hand, the sonic specter is usually approached by less evaluative and dichotomic categories than sound x silence, music x noise, demonstrating some social intelligibility that unfolds in the history of the place, as well as that of several other *vilas* across the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul. These sonic understandings intersect with the way the town narrates the neighborhood and vice-versa.

Understanding the space and narrating it through sound at Cohab means listening to and producing audible sounds — as well as non-audible ones — as a gateway to understanding and participating in social life. In this place, crystallized categories do not hold up, since “noise,” “music,” and “silence” — to mention just a few words frequently related to the sound spectrum — are not merely physically or externally defined, but, instead, culturally. In this sense, in his seminal work, the anthropologist/ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann (2004) introduces the concept of *hearing cultures*, suggesting that

(...) it is possible to conceptualize new ways of knowing a culture and of gaining a deepened understanding of how the members of a society know each other. It is not only by accumulating a body of interrelated texts, signifiers, and symbols that we get a sense of the relationships and tensions making up a society. The ways in which people relate to each other through the sense of hearing also provide important insights into a wide range of issues confronting societies around the world as they grapple with the massive changes wrought by modernization, technologization, and globalization. (Erlmann 2004: 3)

An ethnographic ear can easily envision the inefficiency of applying evaluative categories to sound; instead, it seeks understandings of sound — audible or not — that depart from the local, while recognizing that such perspectives are inextricably linked to broader macroscales.

9 For reasons of space and scope, this article does not define the concept of urban periphery; however, recognizing it as polysemic in the urban popular spaces in Brazil, it might be worth making explicit that urban peripheries are defined more as a social-historical construction, a narrative, than a proper fixed category. At the end of the day, it surely keeps lots of divergences in a conceptual perspective (see Feltran 2014), but, once it is appropriated by the peripheral subjects, it has the power of becoming a potency, a reason for pride (D’Andrea 2022).

By conducting an ethnography of the street and of listening from 2011 to 2015 and nurturing connections with local actors and the neighborhood ever since, I have had the opportunity to walk the streets of Cohab, listening attentively to its sonic dimension and, by interacting with its people, understanding how it dynamizes their lives.¹⁰ According to *awkward scale* ethnography (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003), Cohab's sonic dimension relates to many other spaces intersected by capitalist modes of production, positionalities, and demands. More than a simple application of a research method, this ethnography of the street involved traversing Cohab's spaces to understand their meanings and situate them within urban narratives and memories, following the urban anthropology of Cornelia Eckert and Ana Luiza Rocha (2003). In my case, it consisted of vibrating that experience in convergent sonic chronicles, mediated by an ethnography of listening (Erlmann 2004), regarding the ethnographer's position as listener — as well as the interlocutors' cultural references. Convergently, “depending on the positioning of hearers, a space may sound totally different. If you hear the same sound in two different spaces, you may not even recognize it as the same sound. Hearing requires positionality” (Sterne 2012: 4). This principle applies as much to a Cohab resident as to an ethnographer. Beyond mere “meaning” or “expression,” sounds inform ways of living, just as the narratives emerging from them speak of the (inter)locutors' subjectivities. Perceived by an *ethnographic ear*, Cohab's sonic dimension, which likely shares structural homologies with other Brazilian peripheries, is composed precisely by a non-linear superposition of spaces and temporalities. This is why walking through its streets provides such an intense and dense sonic experience.

On the one hand, the sounds of buses traveling to and from industrial zones — from early morning until late evening — mix with children's chatter and laughter and teenagers moving to and from the schools inside the Cohab. These daily rhythms sonically signal a space projected as a working-class neighborhood. On the other hand, walking through its streets, one hears sewing machines — either from the many small shoe workshops (often called *ateliers*) that serve the footwear manufacturing industry (which finds it cheaper to outsource certain production steps) or from homemakers who also work as seamstresses, repairing clothes. Other sounds include those of the movement in several shops, among them stores selling products for African matrix religious practices, generally near *terreiros* (the places for African matrix traditions), more than thirty at the Cohab Feitoria, making the sonic dimension in the evening be all

10 Although most of the fieldwork among the rappers I will describe later were with the collaboration of my husband Fabrício, the ethnography of street and of listening here mentioned were almost totally experienced alone as a researcher. In both situations, our presence and construction of attachments in the field also were about our own positionality, as both origin from working-class white people, descendent of poor european immigrant which compose part of population from Feitoria, and, as most of them, have in their families histories of the unknown and erased about their own ancestralities, since it articulates with a possible indigenous past (my case) and Jewish (Fabrício's). In the case of the fieldwork ties with the rappers, it is important to mention that, besides gender issues, the positionality of Fabrício would seem important as a mediator by being as well a worker as the rappers, differently from me, who were in a position of ascendant education (PhD). I expect in another article to be able to articulate reflections on fieldwork about this scenario in a deeper way.

about sacred chants and drumming, except during Lent; the silence of Christian bookshops, in contrast to neo-Pentecostal temples nearby, which are very loud during worships; and the sound coming out of people's houses, which alternates celebrations of wedding anniversaries, birthdays, and baptisms, all full of *pagodes* [a kind of samba] and samba circles. Near the “7 de Setembro” [September 7th, the Brazilian Independence celebration], one can hear the two public schools' fanfares rehearsing parades at the streets — they usually play the “expected” repertoire, but also what, in the teenagers' understanding, resembles their identities, playing the grooves of Brazilian funk. When the Carnival season ends, samba schools come and go, depending on public financial support, experiencing years of glories and disillusionment. In the evening, usually in street corners, rappers meet for improvising — some of them evolve and go to stages, as I intend to present here.

Actualized and narrated from the outside, all of these sounds — just a sample of the sonic dimension of Cohab Feitoria — have been the target of different waves of discourses. The sounds of Feitoria carry memories of social interactions marked by forms of apparent clandestinity, due to the need to handle high unemployment rates in the 1990s, or as the sonic/social counterpoint to silent drug dealer operations — usually at bus stops or parks — or gunfire among criminal groups or with the police.

Cohab's sonic dimension can be understood as similar to many other urban peripheries, since it tells the story from a place that went and still goes through some levels of precarity and stigmas of violence — which are among other social tactics that lead to the historical lack of support by the State. At the same time, it is important to mention that its sonic dimension offers an alternative narrative to the common view about Rio Grande do Sul. After all, the state is historically narrated as “predominantly European,” although Afrodiasporic sonorities in Cohab Feitoria tell another story, through the presence of songs and beats, in addition to the Afrodiasporic religions' sounds that coexist with the shouts and singing of the neo-Pentecostalism temples. This sonic dimension reverberates in a place that deals with racial issues, since it has a population that, until the beginning of the 2000s, included the poor descendants of 19th century European immigrants and Black communities, and, by the 2010s, began to have an indigenous community nearby. Although racial conflicts are not openly discussed among neighbors, the sonic dimension exposes and brings some of them to the forefront.

On the other hand, this scenario has contributed to the transformation of these elements into narratives that have gained particular importance, as they have been appropriated by political arenas where diversity is leveraged in economic terms (Yúdice 2006), despite remaining in service of a neoliberal and functionalist understanding (Walsh 2012).

In academia, examining cultural productions — specifically musical productions — through analyses of lyrics and some interpretation of context has been relatively common. Although I agree that this offers new angles or perspectives on sociocultural dynamics in urban peripheries, methodologically, it is important to understand musical construction and,

as I argue, the sonic dimension, as part of ethnographic elaboration, in order to attempt to comprehend from within the social values imbued in musical practices as a whole — neither merely in lyrics, nor as something separated from “the context.”

In that sense, an immersion into the sonic dimension of spaces such as Cohab Feitoria becomes relevant, understanding that it is neither more nor less important than the sounds of major Brazilian and Latin American capitals. Because the examination of cultural productions in Brazil has historically been centered in the Southeast region, the reflections presented here come not only from a geopolitical South, but also from an epistemological one, in terms of the visibility of musical productions performed beyond the Southeast.

Since every position is situated, it may be worth asking which elements of the sonic dimension in a specific urban periphery in southern Brazil can be presented as relevant to broader discussions on urban peripheries. In Cohab Feitoria, what belongs to Brazil?

“Here, it is all about dogs, *crentes* [evangelical Christians], children, and *batuqueiros* [practitioners of southern Afro-Brazilian religion].” These are the social figurations I heard from several inhabitants describing Cohab during my fieldwork, from 2011 to 2015. The discourse presented by my interlocutors gives shape to a narrative around the neighborhood that allows one to define a sonic dimension based on the superposition of sounds and on its temporalities and territories. All of these *sonic entities*, as I understand them — dogs, *crentes*, children, and *batuqueiros* — evoke high audibility and may or may not challenge the acoustic space. Whether amplified or not, from the preaching, emotional singing, and shouts of the *crentes* to the sacred drumming and collective chants of the *batuqueiros*, these sounds are mediated in distinct ways, yet all of them affect *cohabeiros*.

However, it must be said that this is neither by chance nor related to a sonic ontological force in itself.¹¹ It represents more of a sonic potentiality — and perhaps a necessity — for narrative, enabling people from urban peripheries to articulate a discourse on their sounds. When *cohabeiros* create definitions based on the rhythms experienced in the neighborhood, simultaneously relating them to prefigured time (their experiences), these definitions immediately connect with the need for configuration (arranging them in discourses) and refiguration (shared with others). In Paul Ricoeur’s (1991, 1994) theory of narrative identity, the whole process encompasses narrative configuration.

These components operate as sonic entities, which, once narrated, (in)form territories and materialize a sonic potentiality. They allow the recognition of existence while simultaneously forming part of a shared sonic ethos. Ultimately, this ethos is a cyclical process sustained by the lived experience of the sonic dimension and its continuous narrative elaboration.

11 Here I position somehow differently from the arguments present on some lines of sound studies (especially Goodman 2010), which, trying to get distance to the phenomenological perspectives, credit some ontological force to the sound. Although we recognize the political force, we understand it from its anthropological perspective, together with ethnomusicology.

Even in a single day, those sonic entities — dogs, *crentes*, children, and *batuqueiros* — are sonically present. For example, dogs are part of the daily life of Cohab as non-human neighbors who help to extend the streets into humans' homes while constantly signaling the continuous precarity of the place by chasing leftover food, especially the leftovers that remain after garbage trucks pass. The barks and sounds of dogs competing for food, which extend from the moment the truck passes by to the next two or three days, make the lack of sanitation strategies for the neighborhood explicit. Moreover, they reflect the original COHAB project, which initially allocated a very limited budget for sanitation, in the context of the national policies for the construction of housing complexes in the 1980s.

If the current lack of sanitization is evidence that must not only be visualized, but heard, it reverberates a contradiction: the formation and social configuration of Cohab echoes the “sanitation tactics” from the beginning of the 20th century, when poor populations, especially Black people, were removed from downtown Porto Alegre (the state capital) to remote areas. Seeking jobs, several families in the 1980s migrated to the town of São Leopoldo — 25km from Porto Alegre — which, at the time, was consolidated as an industrial hub mainly related to the metallurgical sector. Some people went to Cohab with some government financial support, others, as “irregular” inhabitants, dispersed across a housing complex formed by houses and apartments. The funds originally designated for the housing complex were not fully used there and the quality of the construction work was precarious, an aspect similar to several COHABs across Brazil.

As the working-class neighborhood was established, the ground-floor houses and apartments were quickly transformed; residents altered the original constructions by adding rooms, doors, and windows (or at least new coats of paint) — anything that could express their identity and disrupt the standardized “housing project” pattern.¹² Given the precarious materials used in their construction, the proximity of the dwellings and their thin walls force individuals from diverse backgrounds to negotiate their coexistence through the sonic dimension, by creating a specific *sonic architecture* — “an architectural proposal imposed by dominant spheres of power, which reverberates in a sound acoustics that vibrates similarly across urban popular housing contexts” [peripheries] (Santos 2017b: 109). This environment compels *cohabeiros* to navigate a sonic dimension that profoundly affects moral regions, local politics of listening, and musical/sonic practices. In a context where one can literally hear almost every sound from a neighbor's home, this shared acoustic space simultaneously impacts the construction of bonds of solidarity and points of conflict.

It is not by chance that the sonic entities *crente* and *batuqueiro* are so frequently mentioned by *cohabeiros*. These definitions narrate racial conflicts that come to the forefront through

12 When describing breaking practices at the Maré complex, in Rio de Janeiro, Raposo (2011) mentions the houses' constant state of change, which is very similar to what I have found in Cohab — here, this kind of house is called “*puxadinho*.”

tensions, as told by Rudi, a Black professional singer from a samba school and a *cohabeiro* who resides in the apartments:

Here, it is all about music. Some, you like; others, you do not. How can you be bothered by other people's music? I try to manage it, because I really do not want quarrels with my neighbors, I really want them to respect my [Afro-Brazilian] religion, so I listen to them, and try to learn with their music. (Interview with Rudi in 2012)

Sonic frictions — sometimes converted into conflicts, sometimes into new perceptions of solidarity even in the face of differences — inform the politics of listening among social territories that evoke the temporality of state politics aimed at communities marked by class and race, as was the case of COHABs across Brazil, in light of the National Housing Plan from the early 1980s (Panizzi 1989).

Conflicts emerge from some kind of sonic simultaneity, which reflects the layers of meaning present in the place, as well as its density. Although the name “Feitoria” comes from a farm that manufactured ropes for ships during the era of colonial slavery, the territory preserves a memory of resistance — part of the neighborhood is called “*quilombo*” [the term for “maroon communities,” traditional territories of Afro-Brazilian resistance]. While one cannot definitively claim direct descent from the original *quilombolas*, the *cohabeiros* who practice Afro-diasporic religions to whom I talked affirm that the sounds echoing through the area reverberate the resistance of those who occupied the land long before the official arrival of German immigrants in 1824. This official “founding” narrative renders the Black presence that preceded it invisible. Today, this same territory — the *quilombo* — continues to be a site of rearticulated resistance, as a *Kaingang* [an Indigenous people] community was relocated there by the municipality in 2007. This creates a complex superposition of colonialities, where the Indigenous presence — though belonging to a Native people — is positioned by the state as a marginal “outsider” within an already precarious urban periphery.

The coexistence of people from different backgrounds, which demonstrates both territorialization and circulation around the town, and its sonic dimension indicate other social intersections, even if the place was designed under capitalism as a working-class neighborhood, allowing us to interpret a life other than that of narrow lines of class systems, as D’Andrea (2022) has argued. It is possible to understand that, through its sonic dimension, Cohab activates multiple cultural references, probably bearing some resemblance to other popular urban spaces from the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul.

While people from different backgrounds might consider it noisy, the constant “tum tch, tum tch” coming from the streets — the calls of those selling fruits, ice cream, or gas — creates a sonic ambience that, for many *cohabeiros*, makes it impossible for them to live elsewhere. “It is all quiet outside,” Dani, the mother of a young fanfare player, once told me, referring to her brief experience living in another town. This suggests that Cohab’s sonic density and intensity take the form of a narrative trajectory in its inhabitants’ lives.

Ultimately, this dimension is formed by sonic entities that (in)form territories within a particular acoustic environment — a sonic architecture that reverberates the historical neglect of the state as the *cohabitantes* demarcate their existence. By moving about these streets, I was able to compose a sonic chronicle, an excerpt of which I share here. Its purpose is to make sense of this sonic simultaneity.¹³

The sonic simultaneity that chronicles like this attempt to capture is precisely what fuels the creative urgency of peripheral music. Therefore, it is no coincidence that so many researchers of the periphery direct their attention at some point to rhymes and songs. In the forefront, we can find funk and raps, usually understood as ways of cultural *expression*. In this realm, a prevalent analytical approach pays attention to lyrics, and it certainly brings many clues for understanding peripheries. At this point, the cultural production of Racionais MCs, in themselves, provide keys to comprehend the periphery, frequently apprehended through its lyrics.

On the other hand, ethnographic commitment allows us to penetrate the narratives presented in cultural productions of the contexts in which we are immersed, providing closer interpretations of their sounds and what the periphery can be in another place. Seen from this perspective, the periphery's cultural production is not limited to an *expression*, but is instead necessary to help people's lives make sense, to understand themselves, and to confront the numerous attempts at cultural erasure.

This way, it is possible to understand rap as a sonic narrative from the urban periphery. Because of this, several musical practices and groups such as Mesclã can emerge. In the next section, I will try to approach Mesclã's songs as sonic narratives that contribute to an understanding of the urban periphery.

RAP AS SONIC NARRATIVES

In November 2024, the Mesclã crew closed the concert related to the activities around *Consciência Negra* [November 20th, Brazil's Black Consciousness Day] in downtown São Leopoldo with their best-known song, “Bãh.” At that point, after around 45 minutes of a concert based solely on their original songs for a crowd of around two hundred people who followed their energy on stage, “Bãh” was apothecic. As I have noted elsewhere (Santos 2017a, 2017b), the song performs their narrative identity through the sonic dimension, going beyond their lyrics. For Mesclã, composed of two recently self-declared Indigenous people and two Black people, being on stage in a Black event represented the municipality's recognition of them as representatives of hip-hop. After all, following perhaps a backward path in terms of racial consciousness in their songs, when compared to other crews, their presence at the event represented their legitimation within the regional hip-hop community, since, in the

13 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmVeoWC5mRQ&feature=youtu.be>.

town’s hip-hop narrative, they figure as the first acknowledged crew. The energy of “Bãh,” therefore, was not only that of a “simple” song — it reverberated the narrative density of their trajectory, their desires, the construction of their artistic *personas*, and their lives as Cohab and *peripheral* residents.

“Bãh” became part of the crew’s narrative as one of the first songs that its members recognized as capturing their identity and territory — elements that run transversally through their musical production and resonate with hip-hop’s territoriality rhetoric (Soares 2013: 152). The word *bãh* [ˈbɐ̃] is an interjection that expresses surprise. Its variant, *bah* [ba], which is less nasalized, generally speaking, tends to be perceived as less intense by people from Rio Grande do Sul. Based on this distinction, my interlocutors pointed out that in our region it is more common to hear *bãh* than *bah*, associating the latter with the interjectional patterns of the state capital, Porto Alegre. According to Curumi, upon noticing this territorial nuance around the early 2000s, he and his brother, who formed the duo Pacificadores MCs, decided to rhyme based on local sonority. That’s how “Bãh” emerged: it became a hit in Feitoria — beyond Cohab — and contributed to a strengthened sense of belonging.

The interjection “bãh” sonically structures the song. It marks the strong and low beats of the refrain with verses whose sonority rhymes with it (“ã”):

“Bãh” (refrain), 2008 version, Pacificadores MCs:¹⁴

/: Bãh,	(free translation)
guerreiro curte rap até amanhã de manhã	/: Bãh,
No frio eu me aconchego no meu poncho	bro listens rap till the morning light
de lã	In the cold I tuck into my wool poncho tight
E o mate é amargo com aroma de hortelã,	And the yerba mate’s bitter with that minty
ahã, ahã, bãh:/	bite,
	ahã, ahã, bãh:/

The local sense of belonging presented in “bãh” in the refrain dialogues with the images of the *gaúcho* regionalism (references to the cold and yerba mate), aligned with a search for space in the regional hip-hop scene. At the same time, the lyrics activate scenes and people from Cohab and Feitoria — often in metonymic ways — revealing the group’s need to narrate things that belong to them. In an interview conducted years ago, Curumi said to me: “I do not live in a *favela*. I live in Feitoria, in São Leopoldo, and I do not see the *favela*” (Interview with Curumi, February 27, 2012).

When Curumi emphasizes that he does not live in a *favela*, he refers not only to the physical environment, but to the entire symbolic and geopolitical construction surrounding the *favela* in Brazil and to the hierarchies faced by people from peripheries in capitalism. Therefore, it can be said that the song “Bãh” reconfigures the *cohabeiro* experience by per-

14 Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/pacoeditorial/faixa-8-bah>.

forming a sonic narrative that helps to compose the group's narrative identity. It renders the ambiguities uttered by the periphery visible, since, as is argued by (peripheral) sociologist Tiaraju D'Andrea in São Paulo, some territories come to be "too well positioned to be target audiences for NGOs and too badly positioned to have a car in the garage" (D'Andrea 2022: 27, my translation). For Pacificadores MCs, at the beginning of the 2000s, territorializing and attempting to approach Porto Alegre crews as a quest for visibility, in a dual movement of identification and alterity, became an imperative, since every periphery has something in common, but each periphery is different at the same time. Musically, this occurred through the interplay between rhymes and sonic layers.

Several versions of the song "Bãh," as I have been told, were recorded, but only two still circulate on YouTube, Spotify, and SoundCloud. Both versions activate sonorities that, for a person living in southern Brazil, can evoke the state's regionalism. One example of this musical mark is the presence of the accordion, which is its main instrumental motive — a musical instrument strongly associated with the musical regionalism of Rio Grande do Sul.

"Bãh" is narrated as one of the songs that were able to imprint the marks of the Pacificadores RS, formed by two brothers who have a work relationship at the town, inside the metallurgical sector. Like most inhabitants of Cohab, Curumi and Dedi, his brother, are children of parents who came from the countryside and tried to establish themselves as working-class people. Although the family's musical references were Brazilian country, *sertanejo*, Curumi and Dedi, as well as their sister, were immersed in the sonic dimension of Cohab and were experienced in the worlds of samba, *pagode*, samba schools, fanfares, and *batuque terreiros*. They were also there, in the presence of the "dogs, *crentes*, children and *batuqueiros*." This sonic dimension can also be noted in "Bãh," whose lyrics include verses mentioning the universe of Afro-diasporic religions and an evangelical morality — probably reverberating the practice of certain Brazilian Southeast groups (notably Racionais MCs).

The regularity and cyclical sonic character of "Bãh," with a refrain that has the potential to "catch the ear" and stick in memory, mingled with stanzas on reclaiming Cohab's territory, makes the song well recognized in the neighborhood and has inspired other young people to create their own rhymes. That is the case of Prefácio's MCs, formed by two Black *cohabeiros*, younger than Curumi and Dedi, who also decided to become rappers. When I first met both of them, in 2012, Jesse — a.k.a. Preto-Fumaça — worked at a downtown hotel, while Jonathan Teilor worked at a metallurgical plant that specialized in weapons in an industrial neighborhood of the town. Much of the fieldwork took place either in the studio or at musical gigs, alongside the *guris* [guys], as I usually call them: Curumi, Dedi, Jesse, and Jonathan Teilor. For some time, they did not have the equipment for recording and musical production, so they would go to a different neighborhood and pay a friend to record them and edit their songs. This happened on weekends, and the money from their jobs went to

their families and “to provide for their art,” as they used to say. Making a living from hip-hop, for most of them, is still a dream, as I will try to point out once more.

When I started the fieldwork in 2011, Pacificadores and Prefácio’s MCs performed together, whether in new recordings or on stage. They called the connection between the two crews *Mesclã*, inspired by the hip-hop group from New York Wu-Tang Clan. According to them, the idea was to become stronger in terms of collaboration; as a larger crew, they could be less dependent on the town’s political party scene. Although the crew understands that the left wing apparently converges on cultural politics, as a peripheral movement, they feel limited by and susceptible to political situations. In a certain way, their position as peripheral narrators puts them in vulnerable situations, demonstrating the inherent susceptibility of the periphery itself. The case of the song “*Não Confio*,” recounted to me during fieldwork, is an example.

In order to handle the tessitura of the need to narrate the drama, the song incorporates the peripheral sonic dimension in its lyrics, including onomatopoeias, as noted in the refrain:

“*Não Confio*” [I don’t trust] (refrain), by Pacificadores RS, 2003:¹⁵

*Ra, tá, tá, tá, tiro de lá e de cá,
Tomou tiro, polícia não tem dó de você,
Não confio, rá, tá, tá, tá tiro de lá e de cá,
Tomou tiro, polícia não tem dó de você,
Não confio, rá, tá, tá, ta*

Rat, tat, tat, tat, shots fired from there and here,
Got shot, cops show you no slack,
I don’t trust ‘em, Rat, tat, tat, tat,
shots from there and here,
Got shot, cops show you no slack,
I don’t trust ‘em, Rat, tat, tat, tat

“*Não Confio*” [I don’t trust] was performed by them once in a cultural festival downtown; when the *guris* from *Mesclã* got off stage, they were beaten by the police.

The sounds of shots, literally criticizing the police, can be heard both in the instrumental base and as sound effects. However, as narrators from *Cohab*, the meaning of the “Rat, tat, tat, tat, shots from there and here” is amplified when we understand them as sonic entities that capture the challenges of a place constantly defied by diverse forces, whether institutionalized or not. Amidst this, they perform a sonic composition (a song) that makes sense in a world that often does not (after all, shots come from everywhere), by rhythmically reflecting aspects of the daily life of *cohabitantes* (which perhaps makes sense for other people from peripheries), while simultaneously criticizing it.

As a narrative component, the first stanza assumes the commitment to name — to speak of something that is taboo or not supposed to be spoken, but must be revealed — evoking the fundamentals of hip-hop, well documented in hip-hop literature (e.g., Rose 1994; Smith 2005):

15 Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/natan-mc/n-o-confio?in=jesse-magalhaes/sets/mes-clan>.

*Cohab, Zona Leste, na noite escurece
Nas ruas o perigo e o medo prevalece, é só estresse
Pilantra não cola, não, desaparece
Polícia dando mau exemplo, é o que acontece
E eu vejo isso desde criança, na minha infância*

*Várias mortes que eu guardo na lembrança
E a vizinhança só fala mal da juventude
Não se preocupa com a circunstância, com os fatos ocorridos,
Que é isso, que é aquilo, vacilou já toma tiro.
E não dá nada, é madrugada
Em casa a coroa que não dorme, de preocupada
Esperando o seu filho que não chega
Era, tá de virada
E se tem blitz, acredite, todo mundo tá no pique
Não dorme, quem tem flagrante esconde
Não sobra tempo nem para se explicar
A violência tá assim em todo lugar, não dá, não dá
Então como encontrar um bom lugar? Assim não dá*

*Ra, tá, tá, tá, tiro de lá e de cá,
Tomou tiro, polícia não tem dó de você,
Não confio, rá, tá, tá, tá tiro de lá e de cá,
Tomou tiro, polícia não tem dó de você,
Não confio, rá, tá, tá, ta*

Cohab, East Side, night falls
On the streets, danger and fear prevails, it's all stress

Scammers don't stick around, they disappear
Cops setting bad examples, that's what's clear
And I've seen this since I was a kid, my childhood years

So many deaths I keep in my memory
And the neighbors only bad-mouth the youth
They don't care about circumstances or facts

It's this and that, slip up and you get shot
And it's nothing, it's just the night
At home the worried mom can't sleep right
Waiting on her son who won't show up tonight
Era, he is up all night
And if there's a police raid, believe me, everybody's on the run
No sleep, those caught hiding, no time to explain
Violence is like this everywhere, impossible, impossible
So how can you find a good place? Impossible, this way

*Rat, tat, tat, tat, shots fired from there and here,
Got shot, cops show you no slack,
I don't trust 'em
Rat, tat, tat, tat, shots from there and here,
Got shot, cops show you no slack,
I don't trust 'em, Rat, tat, tat, tat*

Understanding a rap song as a *sonic narrative*, in the context of an ethnographic trajectory, means comprehending that the search for the narrative identity activates a set of subjectivities — the idea of periphery, in this case. An area often associated with the stigma of violence, it has been incorporated in the lyrics of “*Não Confio*,” but it means somehow an activated social category that makes more sense for people from outside Cohab Feitoria than for *cohabeiros*. The sonic narrative conducted through voices and sound effects demonstrates a need to relate events and experiences from a vulnerable place. Here, however, violence is activated through its sonic entities and operates as a symbolic key to the periphery, echoing Gabriel Feltran’s argument that violence has been reified as a central category in social theory (Feltran 2014).

On the other hand, the song’s sonic dimension presents another perspective. As narrators, the MCs perform the refrain and moments with vocal overlaps (more than one rapper performing the final lines of a verse), providing evidence, through timbral diversity, of their operation as a collective, i.e., there is no intention of making the vocals sound like a single voice. This intention of conferring polyphony to voices contrasts with the homogeneous ideas of violence also presented in the lyrics. Far from being considered a flaw, an error, or a contradiction in the songs, it can be understood as narrative layers: some of the lyrics’ aspects deal with more generalized issues related to the periphery (such as public policies

from the 2000s and beyond), while some sonic aspects address the performers' specific set of subjectivities. The different timbres and sound effects, related to the latter, all point to a central argument: the periphery acts in society as a pivot, getting “shot” from everywhere. The central musical motive, reverberating an “Old West” North American aesthetic, can also be read as a need for defense, since the periphery creates its own systems, codes, and morals, generating a scene for the development of social abilities to understand the different social positionalities that inhabit it, as has been well discussed (Feltran 2014).

After the aforementioned performance at the cultural event, it seemed that the crew could further consolidate their sonic identity, assuming a position as peripheral narrators and preparing themselves for it — something that was already anticipated in the “prophetic voice” introducing the song:

São Leopoldo, Feitoria, uma das maior periferia do Vale dos Sinos
Cujo onde as drogas, a miséria e a violência se proliferam entre os jovens
E a violência é a consequência de tudo isso.
E não confio (não confio).

São Leopoldo, Feitoria, one of the biggest peripheries in the Sinos Valley,
Where drugs, misery, and violence spread among the young,
And violence is the consequence of it all.
And I don't trust (I don't trust).

This is why the words “*não confio*” [“I don't trust”] echo after the initial verses, as a strategy for them and their listeners to be prepared and try to survive. After the performance, they were beaten by the police and could have been penalized. In each subsequent performance, the song was intensified by that scene. In the case of “*Não Confio*,” the instrumental base came from a pre-existing sample,¹⁶ demarcating a sonic narrative through its combination with sound effects — sounds of shots and echoing voices, for example. These elements created a sound atmosphere that, with each “get-on-stage situation,” triggered the performances to alter the voices of the crew, since they retained the memory of the scene, what it represented for them and the way it contributed to their sense of resilience. All the experiences channeled into a song form layers of a sonic narrative that transforms them in urban periphery narrators.¹⁷

16 Using pre-made samples is a common practice, especially among those who are just beginning to compose rhymes. Although the use of such samples has become increasingly widespread — with more accessible sample libraries available — it is still considered more sophisticated and creative when artists have the resources to produce their own beats.

17 It is worth noting a limitation of Paul Ricoeur's concept of time and narrative (Ricoeur 1994), as he considers music incapable of producing narratives, viewing it solely as an imitation of them. Here, we diverge from his perspective by recognizing the dominance of visuality and textuality in his argument, which ultimately limits its applicability to anthropological and ethnomusicological work. This is why the sonic narratives created by Mesclã are understood here as performed.

For the *gurus*, their positionality was tied to their experiences as *cohabeiros*, which provided them with the possibility to convert sonic abilities into narrative refiguration. At the same time, as rappers, their search for legitimation in the capital's hip-hop scene began to carry weight. During this quest, they recognized that they did not share the same daily life as workers in the industry scene. They were not highly engaged with the hip-hop scene, as they had to work in their formal jobs as working-class operators, and they often mentioned that they had to balance work in order to perform for the “average” well-behaved employee. One of the challenges, according to them, has always been finding balance while circulating through these social positions and maintaining their trajectories' authenticity.

One way of understanding this search for authenticity — through narrative identity (Ricoeur 1991) — is by listening to the melodic arrangement of the voices presented in “*Guerreiros de Bronze*.”¹⁸

The song's theme is a historical scene: a 19th-century battle in which a squad of Black people was almost entirely killed in the *Batalha dos Farrapos* [Farrapos Battle]. They were known as the *Lanceiros Negros* [Black Lancers], and the song recounts this still invisible episode, also associating it with the contemporary dramatic situation of Black people in Brazilian society.

It is only through listening that one can understand the different moods conveyed: the song begins with the aesthetic of a prophetic voice that narrates injustice, although not through rhymes. When the proper rhyme begins, it justifies the importance of rap. Soon, the voice becomes higher, including slams, in order to intensify the drama and lead to the refrain, which features a different narrator:

*Sou negro, sim, senhor,
e os meus passos eu vou dar.
Sou negro, sim, senhor,
e tenho peito pra falar.
Sou negro, sim, senhor,
e tenho história pra contar
Sou negro, sim, senhor,
Sou negro, sim, sinhá*

I'm Black, yes, sir,
and my steps I'll proudly take.
I'm Black, yes, sir,
and I've got the heart to speak.
I'm Black, yes, sir,
and I have stories to tell.
I'm Black, yes, sir,
I'm Black, yes, *sinhá*.¹⁹

Rhymed by Jonathan Teilor, the refrain seems to provide some continuity to the previous melodic pattern, assuming the racial questions through a necessary gravitas in the rhyme. The construction of performance in the hip-hop scene is also part of a path, and the ability to embody a character on stage is something that is learned. From an early age, trying to overcome shame, to getting up on stage and rhyming for an entire town, it is a process that involves learning to manage all performance skills.

18 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNiwT3sip78&list=RDsNiwT3sip78&start_radio=1&p=p=0AcB0gcJCccJAYcqIYzv

19 The term *sinhá* derives from the word “*senhora*,” and was used during slavery as a term for slave-owning women.

“*Guerreiros de Bronze*” was composed after “*Todos na Produção*” [Everyone in Production], a song considered a watershed in Mesclã’s narrative path. Recorded in 2014 and released in 2015, “*Todos na Produção*”²⁰ performs a sonic narrative that seems to assume the positionalities of their members, trying to make it explicit where they came from (everyone in production, a metaphor for working class), while simultaneously moving forward. By making each voice sound differently in the refrain and in the stanzas composed separately for each one, every rapper presents what his role [in fictional terms] in the crew:

Preto-Fumaça [Jesse] na produção	Preto-Fumaça [Jesse] on production
Teilor na locução	Teilor on the mic
Dedi na gravação	Dedi on the recording
Transmitindo a informação	Transmitting the information
Atenção, corre atrás, mostra que é capaz (negro)	Attention, chase after it, show that you’re
a arte traz (negro), os arsenais	capable, brotha
	Art brings it, brotha, the arsenals

In racial terms, “*Todos na Produção*” marks one of the first explicit mentions of the members, taking a direction contrary to the narrative trajectory of groups such as Racionais MCs, as described by D’Andrea (2022). Mesclã began by talking about the urban periphery and later started addressing race. By doing so, Jesse [Preto-Fumaça] activates his lyrics as a metaphorical weapon:

Ponho as palavras no papel, empunho minha caneta	I put words on paper, grip my pen tight
Protejo minha mente com os olhos no futuro	Protect my mind with eyes fixed on the future
Histórias do passado são tijolos para os meus muros,	Stories from the past are bricks for my walls
Pulamos no escuro, atrás da luz para iluminar	We jump in the dark, chasing the light that calls
Enxergar quem nasce preto, tenho que me orgulhar	Seeing who’s born Black, I gotta stand proud
Aceitar a miséria que os otários destinaram	Accept the misery that fools laid out loud
Honrar a Malcolm-X e a outros negros que provaram	Honor Malcolm X and other black souls who proved
Viveram e lutaram, caminhos nos deixaram	They lived and fought, left paths for us
Buscar por liberdade, a qualquer meio necessário	Seeking freedom by any means necessary
É o Mescla (negro), com atitude (negro)	It’s Mesclã, brotha, with attitude, brotha
Eu sou do sul que chegou, fumaça, maloqueiro	I’m from the South that arrived, smoke, hood rat
Traz a vila no enredo, sem segredo, sem medo	Bring the hood to the story, no secrets, no fear
A disciplina e o tempo dá o tempero perfeito	Discipline and time make the perfect season

In terms of its sounds, the song’s sample is one of the first created for them, not pre-recorded, and it activates their displacement. Unlike “Bãh,” for example, which strongly accentuates the first beat as an effort “to fit in,” in social terms, “*Todos na Produção*” brings a constant displacement from the first beat. The articulation on the first beat is present, but it is always dislocated, directing the listener’s attention to the second beat, as the beginning of the song demonstrates.

20 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d9jMZg057Y&list=PL-0Gw6E3WnQ83MYX9MWYA-3FoEG5WYPyr&index=71&pp=iAQB8AUB0gcJCcJAYcqIYzv>.

Understanding rap as a sonic narrative allows us to comprehend this particular element not as accidental, but as part of the need to *share the mission*. This displacement is not “merely” musical but sociocultural. At the same time, songs such as “*Todos na Produção*,” by calling attention to the narrative identity of the group, contribute to their consolidation as rappers and as people respected and valued within the hip-hop movement outside the capital — a kind of periphery as well.

“*Todos na Produção*” narrates the positionality of people from the periphery, among them Black people who, unlike those connected to the hip-hop movement in the state capital, Porto Alegre, do not have “the opportunity to make a living from the dream, their art.” At the same time, the song becomes a narrative by bringing together layers of meaning for both them and the neighborhood.

According to Jesse, the more recent songs must carry the attempt to narrate how their lives can improve. “*Todos na Produção*,” according to him, already carries that purpose, initiating a movement that reflects some progression within their careers, although they work at the same places. “*Tri²¹ Bom*” [Triply good]²² presents the sonic narrative of people who struggle, but also want to celebrate.

As we have pointed out, the sonic narratives in Mesclã’s rap prepare listeners for life, for its harshness, and for what is good. Sometimes, it seems as if they anticipated events in their songs.

At this point, it is worth going back to 2008, when the sonic narratives performed in their songs suggested that they sensed it would be possible to engage with global issues. “*Abalo Sísmico*” [Seismic Tremor] is a song from 2008 that demonstrates a somewhat prophetic skill. Curumi mixes spoken word and rhymes [Curumi’s rhymes are in italics] to make “*Abalo Sísmico*” understandable:

There are some guys in the company, you know, but I don’t really like to comment on that, it’s not really my thing, you know? I even prefer not to wear baggy clothes or caps, I try not to speak in slang, those guys have no clue, you know? Don’t they? Right?

One day we went to perform rap on Children’s Day. And when I got on stage, I looked out into the crowd, and there was my boss [laughs, embarrassed].

Ah, man, at that moment I felt all wrong, like, man, my boss. The guy never imagined I would be singing a song. Then I had to face that, man.

So, we presented “*Abalo Sísmico*” that day. And when I got off stage, he came to shake my hand, “Hey, man, your sound is cool, I didn’t know you sang, man.”

21 The word “*tri*” is an informal intensifier used in Rio Grande do Sul with various words. Something can be “*tri good*” or “*tri bad*,” for example, which means “very good” or “very bad.”

22 Available at: <https://youtu.be/B0oAi-uAV6U?si=jBF8lH3WpRI6yNEs>.

“You have to perform there, there are events happening at SESI, at the companies, man, you have to represent the company.” Then I got motivated, and we participated in... we won 2nd place at the SESI festival, the companies’ music festival, with “*Abalo Sísmico*,” right? Which is all about... “*Abalo Sísmico*” is all about environmental issues and stuff, out there people will relate, you know? Talking about deforestation, global warming, when it rains, floods come, in summer there’s water shortage, the fires, right? A pink river dolphin asking for help, you know? Extinction, the killing of fish in the Sinos River, *abalo sísmico*, the smell of wet earth that people no longer feel, right, it’s pure concrete and sidewalks, the spring waters, nowadays you don’t see springs, right? If you do, even if it’s pure, you don’t drink it because, how would you trust it, right?

*The smell of wet earth... The smell of wet earth nowadays is lost among concrete and walls, sidewalks. See, what a mess, what a wrong thing. High pollution, deforestation. Environmental imbalance and water extinction. A 40-degree sun causes fires, right? So, talking about all this, you know. Ah... bombings from religious wars, protests on TV against the bombings in the Gaza Strip. Kids being thrown from a balcony on the 6th floor. Fathers killing sons, sons killing fathers. What will become of the future of the world, where is it going? Yeah, the tsunami, earthquake and tsunami, right? Terrorism, I think and reflect, a submissive world, and our people don’t want that. If I live, then I exist, I think, I also exist, you know? I guess, you know, if I live then I exist, if I think therefore I am. Talking about, about this... people used to rebel, you know, it’s not gonna happen, rebelling means tear gas, right, shock troops. So, a person has to be smart, [talking about] environmental protection, floods, people buried under debris, many homeless, you know, who sweated, built, lost — a river of tears. The president who sees nothing [...]. For him, he does this, he gains nothing, you know? Either he sees or just leaves it as it is, and [President] Dilma is just a facade. But I think people are already getting it, you know, “*Abalo Sísmico*” talks about this. (Interview with Curumi in 2012)*

Due to its limitations, the text does not capture the vocal inflections present in Curumi’s voice when he rhymes, as the song is focused on the lyrics. Whereas the message has a very important role in “*Abalo Sísmico*,” it presents narrative layers through musical motives and sound effects. The sound effects create a war ambience, be it by including sounds of sirens, shots, thunder, be it through voice effects, a voice that is sometimes metallic, non-human, dystopian. This war, in fact, may be heard at the end of the song, through an a cappella, when the crew pronounces the name of the song and territorializes it in the national scene: “national rap, the seismic tremor.”

Whereas “*Abalo Sísmico*,” composed in 2008, can very much be analyzed through the lens of a Brazil discussing cultural politics of diversity and strategies for putting them into practice since President Lula took office, the intelligibility of *Mesclã*’s sonic narratives, as we have argued so far, opens up space for another reflection.

Although Curumi argues that “*Abalo Sísmico*” is a song which “people from outside will assimilate” — to use a term present in their songs — it became a “prophecy” for those who live in Rio Grande do Sul. The sirens, helicopters, and floods narrated through sound and lyrics became a reality in 2024. They emerged during a catastrophic climate disaster that affected Porto Alegre and several cities around it, including São Leopoldo. After weeks of

torrential rain, an extraordinary rise in river levels led to floods in most parts of the town. Since the *guris*' studios were not yet at the Galpão do Hip-Hop — which remained unaffected and served as a center for donations and distributions — they lost microphones and other recording equipment. Jesse had just gotten married and lost almost everything in his house.

Even so, in November 2024, they were there, vibrating their energy on stage, as I reported at the beginning of this section. “The show must go on,” they would say.

FROM SONIC NARRATIVES TO RAP TO COMMUNITY

Now we can return to this article's opening scene: entering the street, listening to children playing, reuniting with Curumi. Although we entered a house that was different from the one from years ago, it was still in Cohab. For Curumi, as for many *cohabeiros* — though not all of them, as in the case of Jonathan Teilor and Jesse — living in another place is impossible.

Curumi's home, which is in front of the soccer field/park, was more than a family house. Nowadays, it aims to be a community space focused on hip-hop — the “Galpão do Hip-Hop.” Curumi's trajectory as a worker in the metallurgical sector was interrupted shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic, when he decided to live as a cultural agent. This rupture, among Mesclã's crew members, is understood as the pursuit of the “dream of making a living from art.” In Curumi's case, he found his path as a *worker* for the *community*.

That day we got to know the Galpão do Hip-Hop. As the sun went down, the temperature dropped very quickly. What might seem like an improvised structure to untrained eyes began to reveal, in each detail, the careful thought behind the marks of Mesclã there. On the front wall was a graffiti painting made by an artist from the neighborhood who had already passed away; inside, the walls were filled with records and pictures of Mesclã with people who had legitimized their work in some way. Curumi had left a laptop playing hip-hop through a speaker. Although it had been a long time since he had last seen my husband and me together — he had asked Fabrício to come along — our conversation continued from there, recalling the pizzas Fabrício had made for us one day when I asked them to come to my place to talk about the thesis. After that, I attended several of their shows, including the one in November 2024, but I remained more closely connected to Jesse and Jonathan Teilor. Bianca was there as well, a woman I first met in November 2024, and I must say there was a comfortable gendered presence, since we were able to share some dialogues about (white) motherhood, which in a way helped establish the boundaries of my relationship as a researcher.

The presentation of the place was a narrative of the trajectory — struggles and advances — toward making it a cultural center. As “*Não Confio*” rhymes, “Rat, tat, tat, tat, shots from here, shots from there” — they face several challenges. From 2020 to 2024, according to what Curumi told me, his place was seen by the community as a base for the reception and distribution of donations of foodstuff, mattresses and other provisions needed for people from the neighborhood during the pandemics and the 2024 flood, which heavily impacted Feitoria.

As time passed by, I came to understand that my role is to connect people, people from here, and show them that they matter and that it matters to be together — “everybody in the production” [recalling the song], right? So, this place started as a donation point, then we came up with the idea of celebrating birthdays, Christmas, New Year’s Eve and the crew’s rehearsals. It became a venue, a meeting point, our place. Then the idea of *Galpão do Hip-Hop* emerged. (Interview with Curumi, 2025)

The *Galpão do Hip-Hop* also emerged because of Curumi’s first experience as a cultural agent, working as a “cultural educator” linked to the Hip-Hop Museum in Porto Alegre, which was inaugurated in 2023. Through that experience, he had the opportunity to mediate hip-hop knowledges in schools in Porto Alegre and across the metropolitan region. It led Curumi to guide his ideas toward a more educational purpose than Jesse and Jonathan Teilor, who are more connected to musical production and studio arts, with whom I interacted more frequently from 2020 to 2024.

Jesse and Jonathan Teilor, as well as Curumi’s younger brother, Dedi, who is also part of Mescã, look up to Curumi’s path both as a brave pioneer and as an inspiration, since he is considered the one who began the hip-hop movement in the town of São Leopoldo. Nowadays, however, Curumi embodies some disruptions. He breaks the narrative of a working-class kid who would probably maintain or try to maintain a working-class job;²³ he also did not follow the path of acting in [criminal] factions, understood by most of Mescã’s members as an alternative created by the highly organized social groups in the *vila* for existing in a capitalist world. At the same time, the “dream” of making a living from art is full of uncertainties,²⁴ as it has always been — and, as has been pointed out, working-class jobs are certainly not full of guarantees nowadays (D’Andrea 2022).

Curumi and Bianca, along with Curumi’s brother and his partner, have sometimes submitted proposals to public funds,²⁵ but they find it difficult to deal with the rules and public notices [*editais*] for public funds and see themselves in a peripheral position in comparison to the hip-hop movement of Porto Alegre. Furthermore, given the current political conjuncture — marked by the advance of the extreme right and an uncertain political future in Brazil, as they see it — they prefer to remain distant from party politics. In a place where a person has so much to worry about, according to Curumi, aligning oneself with a political candidate can be dangerous and represent too much exposure, since, for example, they could lose opportunities in the future or feel ashamed if that candidate becomes involved in a corruption

23 This disruption would have the potential of breaking the regeneration of a working-class culture, and, as such, the whole class system, recalling the Paul Willis (1977), already a classic.

24 Curumi’s condition as a cultural agent, for example, placed him in the position of constantly seeking and performing informal jobs, such as working as a bricklayer on construction sites, among similar activities. At the same time, many of the reflections on career shared by Curumi and other Mescã members evoke the social dilemmas discussed by Howard Becker (1963) in his analysis of nightclub musicians in the chapter “Dance Musicians,” although those musicians were themselves positioned as *outsiders*.

25 Around 2016, I also acted as a mediator, drafting an artistic project to secure cultural funding for Mescã’s concerts; our proposal was not approved, however.

scheme: “Some say we are on the fence, but we are actually trying to survive” (Talk with Curumi in 2025). At the same time, while this stance functions as a survival tactic in the cultural arena, it also limits their access to public funding and demands a certain fluency in the language of cultural policies, considering the political dynamics in contemporary Brazil.

When Fabrício and I were there, we were talking about submitting a project to a cultural fund. I opened my laptop to take notes and check the rules of the financial support we were considering applying for. Curumi immediately said that this was the hard part for them: writing — explaining themselves by filling out forms, reading documents, and dealing with the formal writing and requirements usually demanded in these contexts. Even in the face of so many sonic narratives performed through rap, the positionalities of those from the periphery — even when cultural policies are thought to address the margins — are both a potential and a boundary in these social dynamics. There, even though we had emerged from the same place, the whiteness that crosses Fabrício and me positioned us in a place to mediate knowledge on cultural policy and social fields. I expect that this positionality as a researcher can be helpful for them.

This narrative has no clear ending or a final point. However, sonic narrators from the periphery — Curumi, Dedi, Jonathan Teilor, Jesse, myself, Fabrício, and perhaps many other *cohabeiros* — share at this point a certain sense of preparation and resilience, as well as hope. Just as the *cohabeiro*’s sonic dimension activates sonic entities through its acoustic architecture and produces narratives that give meaning to everyday life and belonging, the rappers’ sonic narratives reverberate this movement on an expanded scale. Through performances, they reshape these narratives and share them with the world, at the same time recognizing themselves and enabling *cohabeiros* to experience a renewed sense of belonging and community. This hope emerges as a possibility of work for the community, recovering what came before while reconfiguring the meanings of work and community and imagining new futures, knowing that in the urban periphery “shots come from there and here” anyway.

ONE LAST BEAT

Cohab’s sonic architecture likely resembles that of many other urban peripheries, reinforcing the idea that something greater connects them — something stronger than social labels. By walking through its streets and listening to its sonic narratives, one can understand how the sonic dimension dynamizes everyday life while rendering the diversity of the place perceptible through the emergence of sonic entities and its territories. It certainly brings local conflicts to the forefront, disclosing how the historical lack of state support has led residents to create their own narratives for life there. Among these narratives, sound structures daily activities, which frequently leads outsiders to perceive Cohab as a “noisy” place. *Cohabeiros* seem to activate sonic entities to recognize themselves and their existence in the world. Their lived experiences allow them to conceptualize space through sonic narratives, which provide them social intelligibility, making this space a fertile context for the emergence of rappers, such as the Mescã crew.

The rappers of Mesclã seem to assume the role of narrators of the urban periphery, moving through musical phases — from the need for legitimacy to making their positionalities explicit in their songs. The sonic narratives they create and continuously perform maintain a narrative identity through the combination of instrumental beats, lyrics, and vocal inflections. They prophesize climate disaster, tell stories of struggle and the desire for better lives — conveying a message of hope — and these stories also become narratives of belonging.

At the same time, cultural productions like those of Mesclã grapple with dilemmas rooted in capitalism. Therefore, the notion of sonic narratives here, as for my interlocutors, positions cultural productions as integral parts of broader cultural processes — those of being seen, felt, and deeply heard. Cultural policies can be developed with an attentive perspective toward urban peripheries more broadly — looking beyond capitals and Brazil’s Southeast and recognizing the diversity in peripheries. Especially in the face of the alarming rise of the far right, groups like Mesclã are significant — not because they overtly position themselves politically or not, but because they understand that, regardless of who is in power, they must continue looking after their community. “Shots from here and there” — they will be the ones still there, regardless.

Meanwhile: thwack... thwack! The *taco* played by children reminds *cohabeiros* of the pulse of solidarity — of families looking out for each other — at the same as the conflicts continue in a sonic architecture designed for continuous social negotiation. The density and intensity of Cohab’s sonic dimension allow us to understand its sonic narratives as a way of living in the periphery without forgetting the past and preparing for the future. Ultimately:

*A ideia é compartilhar, eu vim aqui para
acompanhar
Se quiser, pode chamar, estou aqui se precisar
Conte comigo para lutar e evitar as tretas
Ponho as palavras no papel, empunho minha
caneta
Projeto minha mente com os olhos no futuro
[...]
Na construção narrativa
Disseminando a doutrina, batida toca e avisa
Vam'bora, agora é a hora, louco, acorda pra vida*

The idea is to share, I came here to be near
If you want, just call, I’m right here
Count on me to fight and dodge the beef
I put words on paper, my pen is my blade
I project my mind with my eyes on what’s ahead
[...]
In the narrative construction
Spreading the doctrine, the beat strikes and warns
Let’s go, now is the time, wake up

“Todos na Produção” [Everyone in Production] (Mesclã, 2014, different stanzas)

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The dataset supporting the findings of this study is not publicly available due to ethical and privacy considerations related to the ethnographic material.

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