

Girls On Key

How female spoken-word poetry is driving the participation of women in literature¹

Rejane Pivetta de Oliveira
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)
Tatiana Borges da Cruz
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/7466>

Abstract

This article examines the spoken-word poetry movement carried out by women in *saraus* (soirées) and slams, focusing, more specifically, on the Sarau Nosotras, which occurs in the Porto Alegre literary scene. The interest is in observing the event as a space of poetic performance (ZUMTHOR, 2001) closed to male participation, based on a critical perspective that contemplates the identitarian turn triggered by the feminist explosion (HOLLANDA, 2018) and the emergence of representations of peripheral subjects (SPIVAK, 2010; KILOMBA, 2019). In this context, the aim is to demonstrate that the intense participation of women in the spoken-word poetry scene, which is amplified by the digital universe (CASTELLS, 2013), places new agencies on the agenda, giving visibility to a production that challenges the canonical tradition of literature as a production of narrative and memory.

Keywords: *Sarau* (soirée); Slam; Poetic Performance; Memory; Female Protagonism.

Introduction

*Um livro de poesia na gaveta não adianta nada
Lugar de poesia é na calçada
Lugar de quadro é na exposição
Lugar de música é no rádio
Ator se vê no palco e na televisão
O peixe é no mar
Lugar de samba enredo é no asfalto
Lugar de samba enredo é no asfalto
(Sérgio Sampaio)*

*[A shelved poetry book is a load of talk
Poetry's place is on the sidewalk
A painting's place is in an exhibition
Music's place is on the radio
Actors are seen on stage and on television
Fish are in the ocean
Samba's place is on the street
Samba's place is on the street]*

Where is the literature produced by women? In Brazil, up to the end of the 20th century, despite women always having written and published, it was still difficult to be certain that these works would be found in bookstores and libraries. They simply did not appear as part of the collection of national literature, on account of the masculine cultural hegemony inherited through centuries of domination by the patriarchal colonial mentality that reduced women to an inferior position, relegating them to invisibility in the intellectual and artistic field. Memory was not told by women – at least not in books. Today, already at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, we still cannot say that

¹ Translated by Marco Alexandre de Oliveira and Cláudia Flores Pereira (Lectura Traduções)

the literature written by women is perfectly integrated into the publishing industry. Women's writing is not circulated equally, despite the growing number of literary movements and collectives or literary labels attentive to this audience that are beginning to be published in the country.

Research has shown that, in matters of gender representativeness, the contemporary Brazilian literature produced between the last decade of the 20th century and beginning of the 2000s is very homogenous. The researcher Regina Dalcastagné (2012), in her analysis of Brazilian novels in the period of 1990-2004 published by the biggest publishers in the country, verified that 120 in 165 authors are men, 72.7%, and that 93.9% of the authors are white, middle-class, and reside in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. Where would the production of women be, then, especially black, peripheral, LGTB women? The lack of visibility of this production in the important literary magazines and circles certainly does not occur because of its inexistence, since an effervescent scene is moving literature outside hegemonic spaces.

It is in the *saraus* (soirées), slams, and virtual communities that Brazilian women are “opening up,” a concept formulated here to illustrate the contemporary movement of vocalization of memory and narrative, whether ancestral, or collective, of an insurgent speaker who, at the same time in which she does not obey a literary canonical standard, forces the boundaries of this canon, demanding representativeness in narrative and in voice. The arrival of slam poetry in Brazil, the insurgence of peripheral identities, the feminist wave, and the expansion of social movements through the digital universe have strengthened literary collectives of women in the country, whose productions seem to converge in common themes such as violence, racism, and sexism. These are a few observations that come into view when we look at the scene of *saraus* and slams led by women, which this article will analyze. The focus is on the Sarau Nosotras, which was created in 2018 by Tatiana Cruz and Lau Patrón in the Porto Alegre cultural scene as a space of experimentation, production, exchange, and audition of original, 100% feminine poetic material, without the gaze – and the validation – of a man. In the context in which women's authorship appears historically as minoritarian, this study considers feminine literary experimentation at the cross-section of spoken word poetry, far from the domain of two traditionally consecrated agents: man and the book.

In this context, to reflect on the Nosotras experiment means to observe the entry of new voices, memories, narrative, experiences, and languages, in order to compose a broader mosaic of literary production, including women and black, trans, and peripheral women. To consider the Sarau Nosotras involves getting to know it based on its own dynamics, taking care not to incur the risk of interpreting it abstractly in light of theories that silence its voice, by transforming it into an object of imposition of knowledge. As Bourdieu (1996) reminds us, the value of the theory is not in its capacity to explain, but in its power to alter the way that we read and apprehend the world, extracting from the object the method by means of which it presents itself in its vivacity, not detached from practice. The inspiration is to follow the trail of Spivak (2010) in the work of constructing the means through which the oppressed subject can speak and make itself heard, by making visible the traps imposed by the structures of oppression, which are responsible for the production of subaltern subjects and for the silencing of their voice. Gradha Kilomba, referring to the situation of black women, says it is necessary to fight the absolute power of the dominant discourse of the white master without, however, falling

into the romanticization of resisting subjects. Reinforcing Spivak's position, Kilomba argues that the "goal is to challenge the simple assumption that we can recover the point of view of the subaltern" (2009, p. 49²).

The countless cultural manifestations led by peripheral subjects open new channels of expression, identification, and aesthetic sharing that potentializes the loci of enunciation of these subjects, agents of their own voice, in the struggle to break the normative order that silences them and keeps them from being heard. In this context, one of the aspects of contemporary literary production refers to the fact of being accompanied by a political-social project and to varied forms of activism. Such is the case, for example, of the entrance on the scene of marginal literary voices (Nascimento, 2009) and the feminist explosion (Hollanda, 2018), movements that question canonical aesthetic models and hermetic identities of European, bourgeois, masculine and cisgender origin. We furthermore consider the experience of the rise of the digital sphere, since social networks and connections at the global level expand the possibilities of cultural exchanges and the autonomy of social movements (Castells, 2013). The first part of this paper considers the literary scene that composes the movement of spoken word poetry, by incorporating aspects about origin and about the forces that act for its appearance, thus highlighting the arrival of slam in Brazil. It also deals with the identitarian turn of the feminist movement as of 2010, which carries with it the demands of black and peripheral women, as well as the arrival of groups marginal to literature and the rise of social networks as a way to mobilize memory and art promotion.

In the second part, the paper investigates the dynamics learned during the realization of the eight editions of the Sarau Nosotras, which serve as a corpus for this analysis by means of the observations by one of the authors of this article and cofounder of the event, focusing on the initiative as an unprecedented collective experience of hearing only women, who are especially local, especially peripheral, in her task of promoting poetry. Thus, the researcher focused on the scene by combining ethnographic tools in order to make observations about the experiment, which involved collecting audio recordings of spoken word poetry performed in the act, interviewing women poets, taking notes about the discussions of producers during meetings, and analyzing the changes in audience, topics, and invited poets in terms of race and diversity. This decision allowed the observer to view the scene as a stage of agents who are forcing, in the present moment, the limits of what can be considered literature, in an allusion to the pathways presented by Spivak, as previously mentioned. The idea of an ethnographic methodology from Spivak's inspirational point of view has put the researcher in a condition of someone who listens to the voices of the oppressed, collecting, thus, the material of their themes, audiences, languages, and needs in terms of poetic representativeness.

The consideration of this phenomenon seeks to analyze especially the concepts that structure the idea of poet in the context of an event of spoken word poetry, based on the axis centered on the construction of a "persona" connected to a "self" with awareness, whose speech, in a cross-section of gender, embraces a community of women, black women, trans women, and other related minorities. In these terms, literature is considered in its anthropological feature, as performance that takes place in the presence of bodies and voices (Zumthor, 2001), which are marked by differences in gender, class, and race.

² The original quote in Portuguese reads: "objetivo é desafiar a simples suposição de que podemos recuperar o ponto de vista da subalterna."

The attention is turned to the purpose of constructing an identity that confronts the places of hegemonic literary production and reveals memories. The attitude of challenging traditional systems of literary representation requires opening the circle to the new voices that arrive, breaking the silence and demanding to be heard.

Theoretical discussion

Many things have changed since 1976, when the Rio Grande do Norte singer recorded the song placed as an epigraph in this article, during the dictatorship. The cultural industry was still organized in an analogical sphere dependent on radios, TVs, a traditional book market, and the street had a fundamental importance for the committed artist. With respect to literature, this moment of advancement of the technologies of reproduction and mass media is echoed in the movement of marginal poetry in the 1970s, contributing to the desacralization of the book and traditional forms of circulation of poetic production, which comes to be distributed in homemade editions directly to an uninitiated public. These new so-called marginal expressions make use of a repertoire that incorporates communication strategies of mass media in unprecedented fashion, disturbing “the peace of literary criticism³”, as Teresa Cabañas (2005) affirms. The unsuitability of the 1970s marginal poets in relation to the canon, without, however, placing in check issues of race, gender, and class, represents a point of inflection in the standards of aesthetic sensibility, in the aura of erudition and transcendence that has always surrounded poetic language, echoing Sérgio Sampaio’s samba: “A shelved poetry book is a load of talk, poetry’s place is on the sidewalk.”

In the 21st century, the demand for a more democratic and representative art of different social voices gains not only the street but also the alleys of the peripheries of the large urban centers of Brazil, mostly in São Paulo. The movement of peripheral marginal literature was featured in three special numbers of the *Caros Amigos* magazine edited by Ferréz in 2001, 2002, and 2004, which include texts that give “voice to the social group of origin of the writers” (Nascimento, 2009, p. 105)⁴. The intense cultural activity of the periphery, in the wake of hip hop, grants literature a meaning indissociable from action, keeping in mind a politics of intervention in reality. It concerns a literary phenomenon constituted, at the same time, as a cultural, social, and identitarian affirmation of the periphery, challenging sacred places of literature, whatever they are, the “mansions, libraries inaccessible to the eye, shelves of bookstores that children cannot enter barefoot⁵”, as proclaimed by Sérgio Vaz, the creator of the Sarau da Cooperifa, which has been happening since 2001, one of the oldest and most visible poetry events in the peripheral culture scene. Ever since, poetry has been progressively taking over bars and alleys, gaining confidence and losing discretion, until becoming a show, a process marked, with the arrival of slam, by an intense participation of women.

This movement in Brazil begins with the intervention of the actress Roberta Estrela D’Alva. In 2008, she was in New York doing research about hip hop for a play, when she went to attend a very peculiar tournament, a poetry tournament called slam that was

³ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “o sossego da crítica literária.”

⁴ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “voz ao grupo social de origem dos escritores.”

⁵ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “casarões, bibliotecas inacessíveis a olho nu e prateleiras de livrarias que crianças não alcançam com os pés descalços.”

nothing less than a battle of original poetry, performed with the voice and the body, in which the competitors recite poems in front of an audience, during a previously established period of time, and the winners are chosen in accordance with the decision of a jury, which is generally assembled on the spot, including people from the audience. Created by Marc Kelly Smith, a construction worker passionate about poetry, slam was born in 1986 as a show, the Updown Poetry Slam, in a bar on the outskirts of Chicago, and it quickly spread to other cities, coming to earn the attention of Roberta Estrela D’Alva. Returning from the United States, the actress brought in her luggage a poetic movement to implant in the peripheral communities of São Paulo, where gender and racial diversity was an emerging topic, as she comments in an interview with the site HuffPost Brasil, in October of 2018: “What most called my attention was the diversity. Because there were all kinds of people, several topics, and everyone had a different way of expressing themselves.”⁶ Arriving in Brazil, Roberta Estrela D’Alva did not find anything similar and decided to create the ZAP Slam (Zona Autônoma da Palavra) [Autonomous Zone of the Word].

Although some important rules of slam are still the same as those determined by Marc Kelly, in 1986 — not to use of costumes, accessories, props, or musical accompaniment, only recite original texts while respecting the predetermined time for each tournament —, in Brazil, in contrast to the United States, Europe, and Australia, the poetry battle was not restricted to clubs and closed spaces. In the country of Sérgio Sampaio, of *Cada Lugar na sua Coisa* [Every Place in its Thing], the competition ended up on the streets, plazas, and even under bridges. Since the creation of ZAP, in 2008, until 2020, according to data from the collective, there have already been more than 200 slams happening periodically in Brazil. She associates this success with a character that she considers revolutionary in spoken word poetry:

What slam has is this non-conventional education, you learn with the others, languages, ideas, and you are not at school, but you are. People have a notion that they are educating themselves, otherwise the Roosevelt plaza would not be filled with 800 people on a Monday night to hear a poem. And they went to hear with their own money, there is no incentive, no propaganda, nothing. What is that? If that is not a revolution. I do not know what is. (Estrela D’Alva, 2008)⁷

⁶https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/2018/10/21/roberta-estrela-d-alva-a-voz-pioneira-nas-batalhas-de-slam-pelo-brasil_a_23566380/, accessed in October 2019.

⁷The original in Portuguese reads: “O que o *slam* tem é essa educação não-convencional, um aprende com os outros, as linguagens, as ideias e você não está na escola, mas você está. As pessoas têm uma noção de que estão se educando, senão a praça Roosevelt não bateria 800 pessoas em uma segunda à noite para ouvir poema. E foram para ouvir com seu próprio dinheiro, não tem incentivo, não tem propaganda, não tem nada. O que é isso? Se isso não for revolução eu não sei o que é.”

The spoken word poetry of slam⁸, in the Chicago-NYC-São Paulo connection, also arrived at the Viaduto do Brooklyn, in downtown Porto Alegre. The scene took place on the street, in the year of 2018, with many women on the microphone.

The writer, existentialist philosopher, and philosophy professor Atena Beauvoir “opened” her voice. She is a poet, one of the first transgender women to make a name for herself in the country’s slam scene. She recites aloud verses about the fetichization and violence to which the bodies of trans women are exposed.

In Porto Alegre, the slam movement led by women was organized soon after Roberta Estrela D’Alva’s arrival in Brazil and the creation of ZAP. When a slammer says that gathering so many people in one day of the week to listen to spoken word poetry is a revolutionary act, and emphasizes that no one gives voice to anyone because everyone has a voice, highlighting that the microphone is an instrument of power, it is easy to understand why women, including transgender women, sought a space in the movement immediately. In a country where the book market publishes mainly men, most of whom are white, cisgender, and from the central part of the country, as previously mentioned, it is fundamental to open spaces for the voice of women, which is not always printed in books.

At the margins of the book market, the *sarau* movement has grown all around Brazil. As the researcher Lucía Tennina reminds us in the book *Cuidado com os poetas! Literatura e periferia na cidade de São Paulo* (2017) [Beware of Poets! Literature and Periphery in the City of São Paulo], *saraus* are not a contemporary event, they have existed since the 19th century, when artists and intellectuals promoted dance, music, or literature events in their homes or art centers. More than an art encounter, it was a social event that exposed the status of a country under development, contrasting a rural Brazil, which we wanted to leave behind, with an urban and cosmopolitan Brazil, inspired by Europe.

In the 20th century, however, the *saraus* practically disappeared, returning strongly at the turn of the 21st century. In Porto Alegre alone, it is possible to count more than a dozen of them. The oldest one, the precursor, *Sarau Elétrico*, goes back to the year of 1999, and remains active on Thursdays at Ocidente Bar. Other poetry events started, some disappeared, and others remained with some regularity, including the *Sarau Voador*, *Sarau do Futebol*, *Sarau Erótico*, *Sarau Pelado*, *Sarau das Minas*, *Sarau da Clara Corleone*, *Sarau das Deusas Mundanas*, *Sarau Alice*, *Sopapo Poético* and *Sarau Nosotras*, about which we will discuss here in more detail.

Just as in slam, and maybe due to its influence, the poetry events performed by women in the city have become arenas for “opening voice.” Unlike the *Sarau Elétrico*, in which reading encompasses, in varied fashion, prose and poetry, in a reading tone, in a paused fashion, with a stage and an audience formally established and with no opening to the reading of original texts, the poetry events starred by women immediately took on the

⁸Although there is hybridization between slam poetry and rap – the social themes are similar and some artists perform in the same scenes –, there are important differences. As Price-Styles (2015) reminds us, rap is a poetic modality in which musical accompaniment is necessary. In the case of slam, musical accompaniment is not allowed, the performance being based on the body and the voice. Just as rap is to hip hop culture as artistic expression, slam is also to the culture of spoken word, with a focus on speaking and not singing. The cultures of both hip hop and spoken word share the same lineage: the rhythm and orality of black cultures.

character of oral narratives, spoken word poetry, memory and poetry circles, an opening for the exchange of experiences and the promotion of the production of local authors.

It is important to highlight, however, that this movement with female protagonism in poetry events starts a little later, almost 15 years after the debut of the *Sarau Elétrico* in Porto Alegre, which can be associated with two important phenomena: the rise of social networks and the most recent feminist wave known as “difference feminisms,” “which question the universality of the white heterosexual perspective” (Hollanda, 2018, p. 242)⁹, whose speeches reverberate in social media campaigns. What we see is a new universe of dissemination of literature made by women in the digital sphere, a phenomenon that generated the term – and the hashtag – #instapoets (artists that use Instagram posts to publicize their works). Simultaneously, around 2015, an affirmative feminist movement spread in society impacting the arts globally: women in cinema, literature, and music came to demand more representativeness in the art market, promoting hashtags that denounced situations of harassment, such as #metoo, or calling for greater attention to the reading of works written by their peers, such as the #leiamulheres (#readwomen) movement.

If, on the online platform, women started publicizing and following the profile of other women writers, creating virtual support communities, in the offline sphere, this demand ended up outlining the formation of literary collectives with this revindication. Therefore, important poetry events appeared in the Porto Alegre scene, such as the *Sarau das Minas*, in 2017, and the *Sarau das Deusas Mundanas*, in 2015, events that commonly feature the reading of women’s production only. In this movement, there is the configuration of a new poetic persona, a woman with an insurgent lyrical self, requiring representativity and contemplating individual narratives, which are amplified into collective issues. If, in the online environment, the format is visual, with all type cards or conceptual photos following manifesto poems, sometimes videos with poetry recitation, outside the virtual network, the body and voice in performance act as a way to fix this poetic persona and take poetry from its austere atmosphere to a performance setting, where the poet brings the intimate to the circle, establishing the idea that “the title of poet is a kind of community recognition that is self-attributed and imputed by the peers of the *sarau* in consideration of the link and assiduity of participation,” as Érica Peçanha do Nascimento (2011, p.76)¹⁰ explains, referring to the *saraus* on the outskirts of São Paulo.

This atmosphere of an identitarian turn, responding to the aspirations of a more complex feminist agenda in the arts and having the digital arena as a means of dissemination, is the registered trademark of the poetry events performed by women in 2017 in Porto Alegre, culminating in the birth of the *Sarau Nosotras*, in September of 2018. Concepts such as literary persona and space of belonging are fundamental to understand the unprecedented model that *Nosotras* founded in the city, reducing the importance of two canonical agents, the published book and the male gaze, in the validation of women’s poetic production. Just as in the poetry events on the outskirts of São Paulo, which were studied by Tennina (2017), the other events that emerge from peripheral areas bear the mark of encounters that link literature to the self-esteem of

⁹ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “feminismos da diferença”, “que interpelam a universalidade da perspectiva branca heterossexual.”

¹⁰ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “o título de poeta é uma espécie de reconhecimento comunitário, autoatribuído e imputado pelos pares do sarau em consideração ao vínculo e assiduidade da participação.”

socially excluded groups. Therefore, *Nosotras* is included in this category of literary event, which is not only a space to recite poetry, but also an agent for the promotion of poetic personas that take a position in the literary field and demand representativeness, as pointed out by Regina Dalcastagnè:

The key is to understand that it is not only the possibility of speaking, which is covered by the precept of freedom of expression and incorporated into the legal order of all western countries, but the possibility of “speaking with authority,” that is, the social recognition that the speech has value, and therefore deserves to be heard. (Dalcastagnè, 2012, p.17)¹¹

Thus, what would a poetry event in which no men were allowed be like? Furthermore: what would it be like to experience the sensation of writing and sharing poetic productions without a male gaze validating the authorial production of women? Also, how what would it be like to do this while contemplating the different implications of being a woman in the world, considering black women, those who live in peripheral areas, trans women, or women who love other women? Thus, in an attempt to respond to these concerns, the manifesto of the *sarau* was created and the definition of what it would come to be: “*Nosotras* is much more than a *sarau*. It is a collaborative event made by women, for other women, with the purpose of poetically opening voices. It is about leaving fear aside, sexuality, self-love, and being together, alive, strong, and powerful. It is about collectivity.”

In order to handle this space of belonging, the first pact established in *Nosotras* was regarding the safety of the regulars and the guarantee that it would be a 100% female encounter, including transgender women. Through a partnership with Nuwa, a 100% female business club and co-working space, in which the entrance of men is prohibited, it was possible to obtain an address without them.

The format of the event consisted of a circle, with no stage or audience, with two cicerones, the founders, and guests, not necessarily poets, but leaders of feminist movements, who opened the poetry reading circle about a specific theme previously advertised on the Facebook page of the event, which was linked to the Sympala sales ticket platform (it was necessary to charge R\$ 20 per ticket in order to pay for security, cleaning, transportation, and meals for the guest speakers). In addition to reading poems, this moment also provided the exchange of experiences on the theme proposed for the night, which could be sexuality, fear, violence, sorority, maternity, and self-esteem, among others. Next, the circle was opened for the reading of original works by the regulars, who were invited to share details regarding their production, related feelings, questions, and desires. Finally, there was a final attraction called “Abrir Voz” (Opening Voice), which was a continuous, 10-minute speech by a woman that could subvert any stereotype related to the theme.

Held on one Thursday every month, from 7:30 to 10 PM, *Nosotras* was always crowded with a waiting line, therefore proving that a safe poetry space to “open voice”

¹¹ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “O fundamental é perceber que não se trata apenas da possibilidade de falar – que é contemplada pelo preceito da liberdade de expressão, incorporada ao ordenamento legal de todos os países ocidentais -, mas da possibilidade de ‘falar com autoridade’, isto é, o reconhecimento social de que o discurso tem valor, portanto, merece ser ouvido.”

and exchange memories and literary experiences was really necessary among local women, gathering more than 50 of them in each edition, from 18 to 80 years old. Among the experiences and memories shared, some recurrent themes were freedom and autonomy over the body, sexuality, motherhood, beauty standards, *machismo*, and violence. It was possible to see the birth of a “speaker” with different perspectives of gender, with a highly biographical character, based on an ancestral poetic genealogy, in narratives highly charged with orality and memory.

Unlike a slam – which supposes a battle, a competitive character in which a good performance includes both the theme and the voice and body action while reading –, in these *saraus*, speaking loudly, moving the body, performing is not necessary. Many readings happen in a low voice and, even so, they capture the attention of the participants, who remain silent respecting the listening experience. It is precisely the sharing of the poet’s original production that is revered.

In any case, it was interesting to see that, among the audience, there was a group that was not used to going to *saraus* and slams in the city and another group that was part of this scene, only listening or eventually reading, also. In the former group, what called attention was the fact that the event was closed to men, but, little by little, and timidly, the members of this group said that they felt safe to take a notepad out of their purses or grab their cell phone to read texts that they had written and never shared with anyone. The integration of this novice group in the scene with the more experienced members who were used to performing poetry out loud in *saraus* and slams generated an interesting phenomenon, a modulation of the poetic voice, which became less inhibited, freer, and performative, in an “opening voice” that came to respond to a collective space of belonging and came to use the artifice of orality, which can be here understood in the formulation reviewed by Zumthor (2001): “I prefer the word *vocality* instead of *orality*. Vocality is the historicity of a voice: its use (...) is less about ‘oral poetry’ than the poetry of a voice universe. Or rather, we distinguish the communication *situation* (...) and the communication *environment*” (2001, p.127)¹². Lucía Tennina reinforces this concept, especially in the peripheral *saraus*, explaining that “The word, moreover, is understood, according to Deleuze (2003, p. 79), as a state of the body, is a type of idea that represents a thing and that corresponds to a knowledge that affects the body” and adds “The conception of the word, according to the language spoken by the people on the streets, is not only considered as a element of communication, but also and mainly of interpellation” (Tennina, 2017, p. 98)¹³. This review entails looking at the movement of “opening voice” in the *saraus* not so much from the point of view of an individual speaker, but from a persona composed from a whole.

Another important aspect of a *sarau*, with regard to the concept of vocality, is the awareness on the part of more frequent participants in the circuit, of the differentiation between the written text and the recited text, in form and style, and its impact on the

¹² The original passage in Portuguese reads: “à palavra *oralidade* prefiro *vocalidade*. Vocalidade é a historicidade de uma voz: seu uso (...), trata-se menos da ‘poesia oral’ que da poesia de um universo da voz. Ou melhor, distinguimos a *situação* da comunicação (...) e o *ambiente* de comunicação.”

¹³ The original passage in Portuguese reads: “A palavra, além disso, entende-se, segundo Deleuze (2003, p. 79), como um estado de corpo, trata-se de um tipo de ideia que representa uma coisa e que corresponde a um conhecimento que afeta o corpo” [...] “A concepção da palavra, de acordo com a língua que o povo fala nas ruas, não somente é pensada como um elemento de comunicação, mas principalmente de interpeleção.”

poetry circle. Gradually, at each edition of *Nosotras*, it was possible to notice that there was more care when choosing a poem to be read aloud and that could call the attention of the circle. Attributes connected with the oral tradition such as the content of a poem demanding something, encompassing a collective cause; reading as a recitation, with word repetition (sample); rhymes that create musicality; a repeated use of exclamation signs and onomatopoeias, seemed to get more applauses.

“for the memory of a thousand women
to remind you
that you shall not remain here
that even with your full breasts
of milk
of people
or of nothing
you still can do it
because the back that you carry
is made of resistance (...)”
Patròn 2018¹⁴¹⁵

In *Oração* (Prayer), the writer and poet Lau Patrón, one of the founders of *Nosotras*, uses resources that refer to an attribute of spoken word poetry: the conception of a poet persona that belongs to a space, from which she obtains protection, where she lives collectively and supplies this collectivity with a genealogy, with a wealth of other thematic references and poets that authorize a certain agenda, a manifesto.

In addition to the collective voice, the poem, as the main character of the *sarau*, also introduces a speaker that seeks to break stereotypes and seems to keep ever alight a flame of discomfort, of a conflict of positions. The great truths and homosocial speeches (whoever said that it should be this way?) are questioned – and this is also reinforced by the theme chosen itself at each edition of *Nosotras*, which calls for a listening to new voices from new perspectives. It is evident that the call of the female subject of the *sarau* is confronted with difference – there is no more room for denial –, in a collective effort to recreate the concept of woman within more complex paradigms. In this context, the condition of black women is one of the demands. As Lucía Tennina reminds us, “the particularity of this group resides in the fact that they not only suffer from class exclusion, but also gender exclusion. (...) It is from this double exclusion that writers articulate their speeches, so as to overcome the condition of being ‘subject to a position’ in order to also have a ‘subject position’” (Tennina, 2017)¹⁶.

¹⁴Poem read in many editions of *Sarau Nosotras*, published in <http://www.clandestina.com.br/conteudo/noticia/39>, viewed 14 September 2018.

¹⁵ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “que a memória de mil mulheres/ te lembre que aqui não ficas/ que mesmo com teus seios fartos/ de leite/ de gente/ ou de nada/ ainda podes/ porque é feita de resistência/ as costas que carregas (...)”

¹⁶ The original quote in Portuguese reads: “a particularidade desse grupo reside em que elas não somente sofrem exclusão de classe, como também a de gênero. (...) É a partir dessa dupla exclusão que as escritoras articulam seus discursos, a fim de superar a condição de estar ‘sujeitas a uma posição’ para virem a ocupar também elas uma ‘posição de sujeito.’”

The issue of crossing identities within the scope of feminism had already been discussed since at least the final two decades of the 20th century¹⁷; In the 2000s, intersectionality definitively became part of the feminist agenda and of daily activism, clearing the way for a theoretical production of great epistemological impact, with authors such as Gradha Kilomba, whose book *Plantation Memories*, from 2008, is a mixture of subjective and poetic account with reflections on racism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial theory, and gender studies. The discourse of black intellectuals often arises, according to the author, “as a lyrical and theoretical discourse that transgresses the language of classic scholarship (2019, p. 59).

Faced with a 90% white audience, discomfort and the demand for more diversity led to a change in the organization of the event. It was clear that it would be difficult to incorporate more black women in the space of the *sarau*, which takes place in an imposing house in a privileged neighborhood of the city, without black women participating actively not only of the poetry circle, as guests, but also formulating themes and points of view in debate. Thus, the researchers and activists Leticia Campos, a psychologist, and Marlete Oliveira, an occupational therapist, joined the second cycle of Nosotras, in 2019, and asserted new points of view on the topics covered, leading to a reflection on issues such as the loneliness of black women, the fetishization of their bodies, afro hair, fat-shaming in black bodies, motherhood, slavery, and ancestry. The number of black participants increased to 40% after their arrival.

Today Nosotras is awaiting a means to obtain extra income so that, besides paying its costs, it can also pay for the intellectual work of women. Nosotras has also set up a partnership with a local publisher, Editora Zouk, for the creation of a label for original women’s poetry that would be named after the *sarau*. In the event’s dynamics, it is evident that it works as a space for agency, in which literary issues are intertwined with identity construction and social intervention projects, which gives the event an inseparably aesthetic and political dimension.

Final considerations

Regularly or with a few breaks, poetry events and slams in women’s voices and bodies were quickly established in Porto Alegre, as an expression of a scene of original feminine production. Women’s poetry came off the shelves and out of the drawers, even if the drawers here are only scribbles in diaries or interdicted feelings. “Opening voice” in a slam or poetry event configures a form of uncontested validation so that women who composed poetry and did not make it public could occupy the literary territory, as well as allow for a self-representation of minorities, whose histories seemed not to interest anyone.

Despite all the obstacles related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which put the events on hold, the cultural agenda of spoken word poetry in Porto Alegre does not seem to be retreating. As this paper shows, the social media sphere is driving the production and featuring women poets, providing them a platform through which they can share their

¹⁷ The approach to issues such as class, race, and gender relations is present in the discourse of African-American feminists such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks, among others. In Brazil, we highlight the work of Lélia Gonzales, Maria Beatriz Nascimento, and Sueli Carneiro.

poems and also promote online *saraus* and workshops. Although the Sarau Nosotras has interrupted its editions because of the challenges related to how to monetize invited poets, especially in a social distancing scenario, other initiatives proceed. The Sarau das Minas, for instance, has started to promote online editions every Saturday night, with an average of 15 participants per night, and to introduce a workshop class via Zoom every Tuesday in order to help women gain more confidence in their writing.

As such, we seem to be faced with a phenomenon that interferes in the processes of the constitution of the literary system. In addition to an emerging production, that is, women authors who write and come to publish independently, by “opening voice” in poetry events and slams and promoting their production on the internet, there appears an audience thirsty to read its peers, which is organized both in the digital sphere and in poetry events such as slams. Why not make the most of such a segmented reading public and create labels that meet this demand?

In the local scene, despite the pause in the Sarau Nosotras, we can see that the outcomes of the event are alive. Editora Zouk, an important local publisher that has never published poetry before, has called attention to women’s production for the very first time in its history. Tatiana Cruz, the coauthor of this paper, for example, has been invited to be the first poet in the Editora Zouk catalog in 2021. Her book is being announced as the first step in the publication of women’s poetry next year by Zouk. Other participants of Nosotras are holding events online in order to promote slams via Zoom. This is the case, for example, of the Slam das Minas, an in-person initiative that has migrated forcefully to a Facebook platform during the quarantine.

In terms of local scenes, we can see other outcomes related to responses by younger readers and the educational system to a contemporary literature in transformation. This is the case, for example, of Santa Inês High School, located in Porto Alegre, which presented for the very first time two books written by slammers as recommended reading for their high school classes. The books are *Negra Nua Crua* [Black Nude Crude], which was released by the slammer Mel Duarte (2019), and *Querem nos calar – Poemas para serem lidos em voz alta* [They Want to Silence Us – Poems To Be Read Out Loud], which was published by Editora Planeta, gathering the power of the words of 15 women from different places and realities of Brazil — black women, white women, peripheral women, representatives of the LGBT movement, street artists, and feminists — with a preface written by the writer Conceição Evaristo.

In the national scene, for the first time, slammers had a role in the official program of the 2019 edition of the Paraty Literary Festival (FLIP), publishing books and further pushing the boundaries of what has conventionally been called Brazilian literature. Literary events, schools, universities, and publishers came to incorporate women writers in their repertoire of guests and studies, diversifying the mosaic of an otherwise monological, homogeneously male-centered tradition or production.

Experiments such as Nosotras allow the researcher to include a relevant note from subaltern voices, as inspired by Spivak’s theories: even though women decided to put other women’s voices together in order to promote more diversity in the literature scene, the Nosotras experiment can confirm the idea that some initiatives must be born in partnership with these voices since the beginning. The racial issues related to a point of view that considers the perspective of black women in the themes of Nosotras editions

has only made evident how cultural projects must arise from a consideration of intersectional feminist needs. The issues about monetizing the intellectual work of black and peripheral women poets put the whole organization of Nosotras in a dilemma. As white and privileged women, the cofounders were given a challenge to handle. This whole experience could elucidate research on how insightful and relevant the new theories about peripheral literature and intersectional feminism are for understanding the complexity of contemporary literature.

As these challenges come to the surface, the Sarau Nosotras, Sarau das Minas, Sarau das Deusas Mundanas, and Slam das Minas demonstrate that there is a new audience that is forcing a change in the literary canon. We can prove that women authors are successfully occupying literary territory, promoting representations of feminine identity in characters and narratives that, if they were not reaching the public en masse, now come to receive attention. In an interview with the *Revista Cult*¹⁸ in February of 2018, Regina Dalcastagnè recognizes this phenomenon as filling a void in what the canon represents as Brazilian literature and rejects any accusation of literary patrolling in these movements that grant visibility to women's authorship. "There is room for everybody," she says.

Today, it is impossible to think of a literature that leaves out the literary production of women, of black women, indigenous women, women of special needs, LGBT women, peripheral women. Not only literature loses, but also memory, the culture of a country, and ultimately, the community of readers, which ends up being interdicted as a character/theme of the literary production of its own country. Women "opening voice," opening spaces, forcing canonical boundaries are forces of the contemporary that open fissures and shed light on barriers of invisibility. To publish books or not, for many of the women who participate in poetry events, ends up becoming a secondary issue, considering the alternatives that they build, such as those revealed here. Nonetheless, for Academia, the issue has never been so pertinent: will so-called great literature be able to handle this mosaic claimed by this group of women and a new and growing audience? Literary studies have huge challenges ahead.

References

Agamben, G. (2009). "What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays. Meridian: Crossing Aesthetic. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Araújo Machado, B. (2014). Escrivivência: a trajetória de Conceição Evaristo. *História Oral*, v. 17, n. 1, p. 243-265.

Balbino, J. (2014, March 11). Frente Nacional de Mulheres no Hip Hop lança antologia feminina. *Jornal Vermelho*.
<https://vermelho.org.br/2014/03/11/frente-nacional-de-mulheres-no-hip-hop-lanca-antologia-feminina/>

¹⁸ Available at <https://revistacult.uol.com.br/home/quem-e-e-sobre-o-que-escreve-o-autor-brasileiro/>, accessed in August 2019.

Biroli, F. & Miguel, L.F. (2015). Gênero, raça e classe: opressões cruzadas e convergência na reprodução das desigualdades. *Mediações*, Londrina, v.20, n.2.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2006). *The Biographical Illusion*. In: Moraes Ferreira, M.; Amado, J. (Org.). *Usos & Abusos da História oral*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Editora FGV.

Butler, J. (2003). *Problemas de gênero. Feminismo e subversão de identidade*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Civilização Brasileira.

Cabañas, T. (2005). A poesia marginal brasileira: uma experiência da diferença. *Artifara: Revista de línguas y literaturas ibéricas y latinoamericanas*, N° 5.

Candido, A. (2000). *Formação da literatura brasileira: momentos decisivos*. 9th edition. Belo Horizonte, MG: Editora Itatiaia.

Castells, M. (2013) *Redes de indignação e esperança: movimentos sociais na era da internet*. Tradução Carlos Alberto Medeiros. 1st edition. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Zahar.

Dalcastagnè, R. (2005). A personagem do romance brasileiro contemporâneo: 1990-2004. *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, Brasília, n. 26, p. 13-71.

Dalcastagnè, R. (2012). *Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea: um território contestado*. 1st edition. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Horizonte.

Deleuze, G. (2003). *Em médio de Spinoza*. Buenos Aires: Cactus.

Duarte, C. (2003). Feminismo: uma história a ser contada. *Revista Estudos Avançados*, n° 48, vol. 17. São Paulo: USP.

Estrela D'alva, R. (2011). Um microfone na mão e uma ideia na cabeça – o poetry slam entra em cena. *Synergies Brésil*, São Paulo, n 9, p.119-126.

Estrela D'alva, R. (2018, October 22). Roberta Estrela D'Alva, a voz pioneira nas batalhas de slam pelo Brasil.

https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/2018/10/21/roberta-estrela-d-alva-a-voz-pioneira-nas-batalhas-de-slam-pelo-brasil_a_23566380/?guccounter=1

Evaristo, C. (2003). Gênero e etnia: uma escre (vivência) de dupla face. In: Moreira, N. Presented in *Women and Literature International Conference*. João Pessoa, PB

Evaristo, C. (2012). *Insubmissas lágrimas de mulheres*. Belo Horizonte, MG: Nanvala.

Ferréz (2005). Terrorismo literário. In Ferréz (Ed.). *Literatura marginal: talentos da escrita periférica*. São Paulo, SP: Global.

Hall S. (1990). *Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London UK: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hollanda, H. (2014, March 20). *As fronteiras móveis da literatura*. www.heloisabuarquedehollanda.com.br/literatura-marginal

Hollanda, H. (2018). *Explosão feminista: arte, cultura, política e universidade*. 1st edition. São Paulo, SP: Companhia das Letras.

Kilomba, G. (2019). *Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Cobogó.

Mauss, M. (2003). *Sociologia e antropologia*. São Paulo, SP: Cosac & Naify, p. 385-389.

Nascimento, E. (2011) *É tudo nosso! Produção Cultural na Periferia Paulistana*. 213 f. Thesis (PhD's in Social Anthropology) – School of Philosophy, Letters, and Humanities, University of São Paulo, São Paulo.

Nascimento, E. (2006). *Literatura marginal: os escritores da periferia entram em cena*. 203 f. Thesis (Master's in Social Anthropology) – School of Philosophy, Letters, and Humanities, University of São Paulo, São Paulo.

Nascimento, E. (2009). *Vozes marginais na literatura*. 1st edition. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Aeroplano.

Oliveira, R. & Pellizzaro, T. (2017). *Literatura e sarau: implicações políticas*. *Revista Abriu*, 6, p. 65-83.

Price-Styles, A. (2015). *MC origins: rap and spoken word poetry*. In: Price-Styles, A.; Willians, Justin A. *The Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rago, M. (1984). *Epistemologia feminista, gênero e história*. In: Rago, M., Pedro J. M. e Grossi, M. P.. *Masculino, Feminino, Plural: Gênero na Interdisciplinaridade*. Florianópolis, SC: Editora Mulheres.

Ribeiro, D. (2017). *O que é lugar de fala? Feminismos Plurais*. 1st edition. Belo Horizonte, MG: Letramento.

Spivak, G. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Belo Horizonte, MG: Editora UFMG.

Tennina, L. (2017). *Cuidado com os poetas! Literatura e periferia na cidade de São Paulo*. 1st edition. Porto Alegre, RS: Editora Zouk.

Vaz, S. (2011). *Literatura, pão e poesia*. 1st edition. São Paulo, SP: Global.

Zumthor, P. (2011). *A letra e a voz*. São Paulo, SP: Schwarcz.

About the authors

Rejane Pivetta de Oliveira is a PhD in Literary Theory, professor, and researcher at the Institute of Languages and Literature and the Graduate Program of the College of Languages and Literatures at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

Tatiana Borges da Cruz has a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the College of Librarian Sciences and Communication at UFRGS and a Specialization in Brazilian Literature from the Graduate Program of the College of Languages and Literatures at UFRGS. She is the creator of the global platform *abrir voz poético de mulheres* (poetic opening voice of women) on Instagram, the One-Minute Slam, and the co-founder of the Sarau Nosotras.