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## The Female Rap in Rise in the Art of Rhymes

*Women challenge invisibility in hip hop culture with forceful rhymes and inspiring lyrics, becoming a driving force of social and cultural changes*



By Regina Lemmi

Female rap emerged in Brazil at the end of the 1980s, in the city of São Paulo, with the pioneering work of Negra Li, Sharylaine, Dina Di and Rubia. These women acted together with the effervescence of the musical genre. Today, many important rappers compose the Brazilian musical scene, such as Flora Matos, MC Carol, N.I.N.A., Slipmami, Júlia Mac, Bivolt, Abronca, Laura Sette, Karol Conká, Lourena, Budah, Afreekassia, Monna Brutal, Drik Barbosa, Kmila CDD, MC Soffia, Cris SNJ, Cristal, Tássia Reis and Brisa Flow.

With lyrics that address themes like female empowerment, self-esteem and social criticism, these artists have conquered a faithful audience and are opening a path for other women who wish to pursue a musical career. By mixing different genres like rap, trap and R&B, they show the versatility of hip hop and its ability to adapt to new market trends.

This week, the *Mosaicos Culturais* program brings to **Rádio USP** a series of episodes that honor female rap. The *Mosaicos* specials go on air until the 25th, at 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., playing songs that are in the headphones of the USP community. This semester, 17 USP students requested rap songs to play on the program. Of that total, six people mentioned national female singers of the genre and spoke about their rhymes. The interest of the

students is testimony of the growing female protagonism in rap, breaking barriers and redefining the limits of the musical genre.

*“Female rap is often subjugated”*  
**Giovana Tomaz, student**

Giovana Tomaz, a student with a degree in Portuguese at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences (FFLCH) of USP, has been listening to *Set AJC 2*, a song that is the result of a project made by women rappers who criticize the invisibility of their work in the musical field and celebrate the success of female rap in recent years. Giovana participated in the *Mosaicos Culturais* survey that gave rise to the specials about female rap. She comments on female empowerment. The song, which denounces male domination in the rap industry, has lyrics by Ajuliacosta, Duquesa, LAI\$ROSA and MC Luanna. They portray female empowerment in the face of sexist criticisms made by other artists and male rap consumers.

*“I keep making my rhyme  
And I keep gaining my share  
And it is not because you are afraid  
That I will stop existing”*

Despite there being many women in rap, the genre continues to be dominated by men. According to the research *Funk and rap in numbers*, only 8% of rappers on the ONErpm platform are women. The platform is one of the leaders in the segment of digital music distribution in Brazil. The study, authored by Leonardo Morel and Vitor Gonzaga dos Santos, was published in 2022 in the *Revista Observatório 32*, edited by *Itaú Cultural*.

## **Women of rap: female protagonism**

Rap is one of the five pillars of the hip hop movement, which celebrated 50 years of existence in 2023. Born in Afro-descendant communities in New York, with roots that go back to Jamaican street dances in the 1960s, the movement arrived in São Paulo in the 1980s as a manifestation of the periphery inspired by the style from the United States. The first artistic expressions of hip hop appeared in the center of the capital of São Paulo, at the São Bento subway station, which today is still a reference point for festivals and championships of breaking, rap, DJs, and graffiti artists.

Hip hop culture became one of the main forms of denunciation, manifestation, and ideological identity among the many fans and artists. Rap, in particular, addresses themes such as violence, social inequality, and the difficulties of peripheral life. It is one of the four most popular musical genres among Brazilians. According to a *Spotify* survey in 2023, Brazil is the third country that consumes rap the most.

The actress, MC, slammer, spoken-word artist, and poet Roberta Estrela D’Alva was the host of the program *Manos e Minas*, from TV Cultura, focused on hip hop culture and urban music. Graduated in Performing Arts from the School of Communications and Arts (ECA) at

USP, Roberta spoke with **Jornal da USP** about the use of rap as a tool of resistance and struggle for social justice.

“We always have to remember that MCs and rappers are poets of orality. These people of the word, of the voice, not only in the world we live in, but in several historical moments, have a vital social function, because they are able to translate the time they live in through spoken or sung poetry, elaborating the demands of that time. In this sense, they end up becoming spokespersons for realities and experiences that gain listening and visibility, which, in a country like ours, with such a long history of silencing women, Black people, Indigenous people, and peripheral people, is a remarkable achievement,” she states.

If rap is a tool for the struggle for social justice, why are women still a minority on the scene? Janaina Fernandes, from the website *Kondzilla.com*, believes that what is lacking “is a careful curation that can provide female artists with the same visibility that men have in the market.”

The channel *Mulheres de Palavra: um retrato das mulheres no rap de São Paulo* (*Women of the Word: a portrait of women in rap in São Paulo*) has ten episodes of interviews with women rappers and was also published in book format, written by Renata Allucci, Ketty Valencio, and Fernanda Allucci, with the objective of giving visibility to women in rap.

In the first episode of the channel, the rhymer Dory de Oliveira states that the female presence in rap is “a constant struggle. [...] Someone will always want to make a ‘little joke’ [about the working woman].” Even with 15 years of career, she still faces comments that underestimate her ability to write rhymes and sing.

In an interview with the *Itaú Cultural* website in 2016, the researcher of female rap Renata Allucci explains that “hip hop made by women faces a double prejudice — including within the movement itself. It is very visible how machismo still operates: in rap lyrics, in offensive behavior in battles, in the devaluation of women’s work, in the asymmetry of opportunities,” said Renata, today a PhD in urbanism from PUC/Campinas.

## **Get to know the pioneers of national rap**

### **Negra Li**

Negra Li is a singer, rapper, songwriter, and actress. Liliane de Carvalho has a degree in music from Coralusp. According to researcher Luíza Gancho de Almeida, Negra Li is one of the forerunners of the rap movement in Brazil.

Her interest in music began in childhood, singing hymns of the Evangelical Church Congregação Cristã no Brasil. At the age of 16, she began to like rap. She started her career with the rap group RZO (*Rapaziada da Zona Oeste*), in which she remained until 2004, when she pursued a solo career.

Negra Li was the first female rapper to sign a contract with a major record label, Universal Music, in 2004. The following year, she released her first solo album in partnership with the rapper Helião. In 2006, she starred in the film *Antônia*, directed by Tata Amaral. The musical drama tells the story of four friends who face poverty, machismo, and violence in order to fulfill the dream of forming a female rap group.

With a discography of four albums, Negra Li won three trophies in the categories of Female Group or Solo Artist and Best Female Solo Artist of the Decade at the Hutúz Awards, one Troféu Raça Negra as Rapper, and one Video Music Brasil for Best Rap Music Video.

## **Sharylaine**

Sharylaine is a singer, rapper, producer, researcher, documentarian, activist, and educator. Ildslaine Mônica da Silva has a 37-year career and entered hip hop through dance.

In a predominantly male musical genre, Sharylaine became a reference in the fight against machismo and racism. In 1986, she created the group Rap Girl's. Sharylaine also founded the National Forum of Women in Hip Hop, organized by the National Front of Women in Hip Hop. She helped create the collective Minas da Rima.

The *National Front of Women in Hip Hop*, created in 2010, aims to increase female participation in the movement and to connect hip hop with social issues.

## **Dina Di**

Viviane Lopes Matias, better known as Dina Di, was a rapper and the lead vocalist of the group *Visão de Rua*. She is considered by specialized critics to be the greatest Brazilian female rapper of all time and left an undeniable legacy for female rap.

With a discography that includes the posthumous album *Mente Engatilhada*, her rhymes addressed urban violence, sexism, and racism. In 2009, she received the Hutúz Award in the category of Best Female Groups or Solo Artists of the Decade.

Dina Di passed away in 2010, at the age of 34, as a victim of a hospital infection contracted in the maternity ward. On the day of her death, Negra Li declared that rap “fell silent.”

## **Rubia**

Rubia Fraga is a rapper, activist, teacher, and social scientist. The singer stood out in rap as a member of the group RPW, alongside DJ Paul and W-Yo. The group was one of the first national rap groups to have a music video broadcast on MTV Brasil. The group was active for 25 years, between 1991 and 2016. Their songs were major influences and references for other artists, such as Emicida and Criolo.

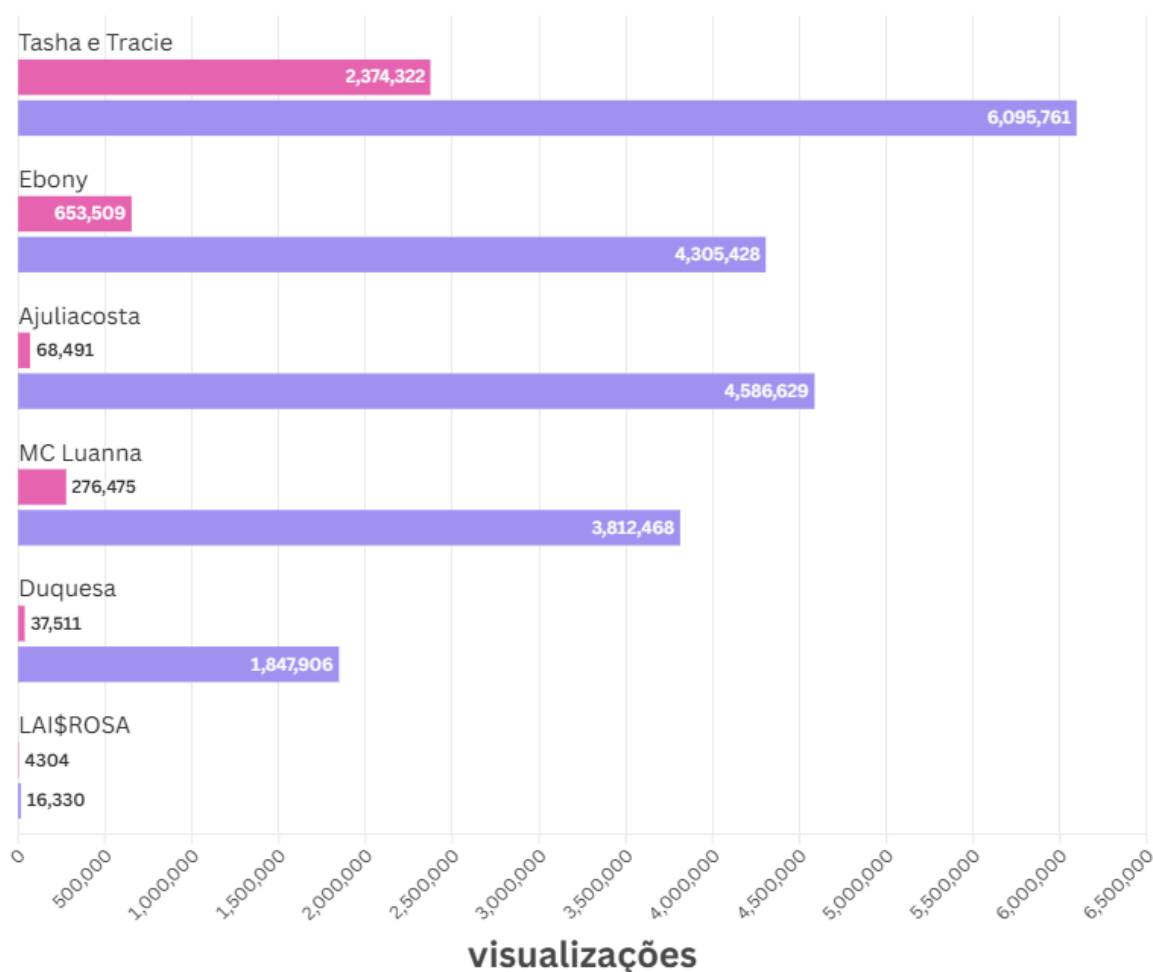
## Audiences in numbers

The main names of national rap, considering the number of monthly listeners on Spotify and Billboard Brasil, are Racionais MCs, Emicida, Matuê, Orochi, L7nnon, Filipe Ret, and Veigh. When comparing, for example, the number of monthly listeners of Matuê, considered by the media to be the most famous Brazilian rapper today, with 4,188,174 listeners, it is noted that female rap artists have, on average, about one quarter of this audience. Duquesa has 1,400,219 listeners, Tasha and Tracie accumulate 1,303,149 monthly listeners, and Ajuliacosta has 768,942 monthly listeners.

In a survey of views on the YouTube channels of the most well-known female rappers today, a significant growth can be observed in the recognition of their songs, regardless of whether they were released one or five years ago. The graph below presents the contrast between the views of the launch music videos and those that stand out for their popularity.

### Rappers femininas e suas visualizações no Youtube

■ Primeira canção lançada ■ A canção mais famosa lançada



The first two songs analyzed were the productions by Tasha and Tracie, *Cachorra kmikze* (2019), released in partnership with Ashira, and *Willy* (2022), which is the duo's most viewed video. Ebony, in turn, released her first song, *Bratz* (2019), and stands out by rescuing the aesthetics of *Bratz* dolls in her most popular music video, 100 mili.

Ajuliacosta released her first song, *Tão gostoso* (2016), and, six years later, achieved quadrupled views with the music video *Homens como você* (2022). From Duquesa, the first video, *Futurista* (2019), and the hit *99 Problemas* (2023), featuring MC Luanna, were analyzed.

Four years ago, MC Luanna released her song *Kit rosa* (2020), which contrasts with the current theme of her album *Sexto Sentido*, which is predominantly in black and white. Her most viewed song is the production in collaboration with Marquinho no beat, *Larga essa vida* (2023).

LAI\$ROSA, in turn, began her career in 2022 with the song *Jet com as pretinhas*, composed by her and the rapper BJAY. Her most popular song is *BASIC BITCH* (2024), her second partnership with the singer.

## The favorites of USP students

Below are the profiles of the rappers chosen by USP students for the radio program *Mosaicos Culturais*, which demonstrate how the presence of women in rap has influenced the music industry, both in terms of production and consumption.

### Tasha and Tracie

Tasha and Tracie are a duo of rappers formed by twin sisters Tasha Okereke and Tracie Okereke. By combining rap with funk in their songs, they address themes such as Black culture, peripheral life experiences, sex, fashion, self-esteem, and empowerment. The duo's success began with the release of the EP *Rouff* (2019) and the EP *Diretoria* (2021).

In addition to being MCs, the sisters work as DJs, columnists, art directors, fashion designers, graphic designers, and speakers. They are the creators of the *it favela* movement, the blog *Expensive \$hit*, and the collective Mulheres Pretas Independentes de Favela (MPIF). Read more about Tasha and Tracie and listen to *Arrume-se comigo*, a composition by the duo.

**Isabel Alfieri**, a student with a degree in Portuguese and Armenian at USP says that the EP *Diretoria* is very good and that its aesthetics are very beautiful. Tasha and Tracie use common Brazilian streetwear, popularized in the peripheries, along with carnival accessories.

## Duquesa

Jeysa Ribeiro, better known as Duquesa, is a singer, songwriter, and advertising professional. She began her musical career in 2015, participating in the song *Só guardei para mim*, by the group Sincronia Primordial. With a discography that includes two albums, *Taurus* and *Taurus vol. 2*, Duquesa stands out in the genres of hip hop, pop, and R&B.

To fix her mother's car, Duquesa even composed advertising jingles and also worked as a sports radio announcer. Her debut album, *Taurus*, accumulated more than 2 million plays on Spotify.

Duquesa has collaborated with Tasha & Tracie, Ajuliacosta, MC Luanna, and pop singer Urias. In an interview with reporter Maria Guimarães, from the newspaper *O Globo*, she stated: "The turning point of 2023 was revolutionary and the tendency is only to grow. The guys only made music together, it was a very macho environment. So, we started doing the same."

## Ajuliacosta

Julia Costa, better known as Ajuliacosta, is a singer and songwriter. Her interest in music began at the age of 12, when she was already attending rhyme battles in downtown Mogi das Cruzes (SP).

Since childhood, Ajuliacosta also made her own clothes, which contributed to her becoming an entrepreneur and designer of her store, Ajuliacostashop. The artist was nominated in four categories in the first edition of the Prêmio Rap Brasil, in 2023. With a discography of one album and several singles, Ajuliacosta has become a major rising phenomenon in national rap, according to Eduarda Hutter, from *G1*.

Jhenifer da Silva, a Mathematics student at the Institute of Mathematics and Statistics (IME) of USP, says that she listens to many Brazilian female empowerment songs, which helped her leave an abusive relationship.

## MC Luanna

Luana Santos de Oliveira, better known as MC Luanna, is a singer and songwriter. She stands out for her rap, trap, and funk songs that exalt the confidence and sharpness of Black women from the favela. Although she has always been in contact with songwriting, she never considered a musical career, as she did not like her own voice. Currently, the artist has two albums, *44* and *Maldita*, and blends the genres of conscious funk and rap.

"I've always written a lot of poetry, since school days. That influenced me a lot. Some friends had friends or boyfriends who were imprisoned, and I started writing things based on the stories they lived. But it wasn't music, they were poems," MC Luanna said in an interview with the portal *MonkeyBuzz*.

## Ebony

Ebony is the artistic name of Milena Martins. As a rapper, she began her career with the single *Cash Cash*, in 2019. With two albums released, *Visão Periférica* and *Terapia*, the singer has more than 728 thousand monthly listeners on streaming platforms. She was elected Rap Revelation at the Prêmio Genius Brasil 2019. However, she defines her style as “pop-rap” and aims to become a pop diva.

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, Ebony commented: “Sometimes it bothers me a little to be reduced to a trapper, just as much as to a rapper, singer, or songwriter. Over time, I detached myself from this idea of ‘everyone said I make trap, so I need to make trap’.”

Larissa Kemile, a Letters student at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences of USP, participated in the Mosaicos Culturais poll on **Rádio USP**. Larissa says that she enjoys songs by female figures who impact listeners, as happens with Ebony’s lyrics.

## **LAI\$ROSA**

Isabela Lais Rosa, known as LAI\$ROSA, is a singer, songwriter, and actress. With the release of an EP, *Por que os homens amam as vadias?*, and some singles, such as *BAD BITCH*, the singer stands out for assertively exalting women’s strength and autonomy.