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Forbidden Music, Forbidden Jukeboxes: Listening Anxieties and the Hyper-amplification of Violence in Rio de Janeiro

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Listening is a mediating and mediated phenomenon; it produces and is produced by an interplay of haptic, affective, cultural, social, and political responses, engaged not only within the ear but with the whole body. Listening occurs both inside and outside, moving outwards and inwards in resonance with the world and its constitutive power relationships. That this mediation process is always an articulation of power demands an interrogation of its use as a means of exercising, sustaining, enforcing, and reproducing violence. Studies on sound and power and their violent articulations abound; from the instrumentalization of sonic media by the Nazi regime in Germany (Birdsall 2012) to discussions on the affective power of noise and its cultural implications (Thompson 2017). From the ubiquity of music (Kassabian 2013) to its use as a torture mechanism in US prisons (Cusick 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2011), to sound as "vibrational affect" (Goodman 2010). These studies expose the multifaceted ways in which sound is appropriated, manipulated, and deployed as a device for oppression and control. The aim of this paper is to expand on this notion by focusing not only on the act of listening to music in and of itself, but also on the creation of an entire ecology of listening devices and practices that make use of music—and its absence—to mediate social and political narratives.

The device I am particularly interested in here is a jukebox. In 2015, I was researching the political role of sound and listening in Brazil, particularly following the wave of demonstrations in 2013 and the increased political turmoil building up in the country. I wanted to speak with people whose listening practices are in constant negotiation, particularly when correlated with experiences of police violence. Helping mediate some of the contacts I wanted to chat with was Samara Tanaka, a designer and educator who lives in the *Complexo do Lins*, the militarized name for a group of 12 favelas whose borders seamlessly blend with the mostly residential neighborhood of *Lins de Vasconcelos*, in the northern suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. *Lins*, as this massive part of the city is commonly known, has more than 20000 residents, and in 2013 was the 36th region of the city to be occupied by the so-called "pacifying forces" of the Military Police (known as UPPs). Samara and I met there for a few beers. During the course of our conversation she casually mentioned how she would

often listen closely to a jukebox which sat in another bar, up the hill and very close to her house. My attention then shifted to this machine and the listening practices surrounding it.

This particular jukebox dwells on the fringes of legality, illegality, and a third state of "imposed" illegality defined by the Military Police and articulated via the listening practices it affords. It is embedded in a system of practices and policies which defy the scope of written—and in turn generate new forms of unwritten—laws. The cultural and political functions of this type of jukebox—illegally assembled and distributed over a network on the fringes of the economic system—subvert and extend well beyond its intended design, embracing the contingency of localized listening practices in order to become an ambiguous device. It is capable of encapsulating the tension between a long history of racial and class-based segregation in Brazil (and particularly in Rio), and the social, cultural, and political implications engendered by one of the most brutal police forces in the world. Because of the ways in which its presence and absence articulate a non-verbal language within the social configuration of Lins, this jukebox enables a temporary governance that might be specific to that place, but nevertheless reflects a larger sociopolitical scenario. The jukebox is an invisible nodal point for the social life around it—a social life narrated not only by the songs the jukebox plays, but also by the how, why, when, by whom and for whom it plays.

A (very) brief history of Jukeboxes in Brazil

The presence of jukeboxes at the margins of urban life in Brazil mirrors their social and cultural origins within racial segregation in the United States. Kerry Segrave argues that the emergence of music machines for collective listening in the US was a response to the absence of, in his words, "race records" (i.e., music made by African-American artists) in radio programming (2002, 45–6). With Jim Crow laws forcefully preventing African-Americans from freedom of movement and dwelling, jukeboxes emerged as markers of African-American leisure and entertainment (ibid.)—a marker that is also reflected in the name it was given. Coffee houses and bars frequented by African-Americans were largely perceived by racist, white, US Americans as being "inadequate places", or "jook joints" (ibid., 17). Segrave

argues that the term “juke” is believed to have its origins in the word “jook,” “an old Southern word of African origins” that means “dancing” (ibid.). Nevertheless, jukeboxes were a promising enough business to be whitewashed into a symbol of US American popular culture. With the advent of World War II, jukeboxes functioned as a way to keep up patriotic morale by listening to music that could speak directly to the “good spirits” of (white) US Americans, precisely by focusing on the so-called “masses […] who frequented the taverns, restaurants, and so on from which the armed forces were drawn.” (ibid., 129) Thus, to trace the origins of the name “jukebox” and its placement within an imperialist and racialized consumer culture is to trace back a history of racialized listening.

As the cultural branch of US imperialism expanded after World War II, so did the jukebox business. US companies began exporting music machines to places fueled by and flooded with US American media, music, and lifestyle. The largest of these markets was South America: according to Segrave, while in 1939 only 16 jukeboxes were exported from the US to Brazil, that number had skyrocketed to over 650 machines ten years later (ibid., 327–330). Until the late 1990s all jukeboxes in the country were imported, and foreign investment policies in Brazil at the time prevented the emergence of a local manufacturing market (Aprova 2013, 1). Nonetheless, digital jukeboxes, easily assembled with a desktop computer set and fed with digital music and video files, supplied that demand quite easily, and popularized the device all around Brazil. Digital jukeboxes experience high demand for purchase and rent online, with video tutorials for setting up and downloading unlicensed content for jukebox software easily found with a quick YouTube search.

Jukeboxes in Brazil are a profitable commodity, albeit they do not always conform to a traditional top-down distribution and copyright model. In 2013 it was estimated that there were more than 27,000 jukeboxes in operation in Brazil (Aprova 2013); such machines are commonly found in dive bars, mostly in underprivileged neighborhoods, on the outskirts of big cities, and in the countryside (Feltrin 2016). In Rio, precise information about jukeboxes is scarce—mostly because the vast majority of these music machines are considered

to be illegal. In 2015, 98 percent of the more than 20,000 machines installed in bars and restaurants in the state of Rio were outside the scope of those controlled by ABLF (Brazilian Association for Phonographic Licensing).[1] Having the proper license to install these machines means a way to ensure royalties are paid back to the artists whose music is stored in the hard drive of these jukeboxes. For 2 Brazilian Reais (approximately €0.40) a listener can choose two songs to be played from a fairly comprehensive catalog – more often than not downloaded from torrent websites or added directly using USB sticks by unlicensed distributors or bar owners. Media reports affirm that unregistered machines are mostly controlled by either drug lords or *milicianos* (factions within the Military Police that carry out illegal activities in most of Rio’s favelas),[2] who collect around 30 to 40 percent of the total money spent on playing music, deposited in the machines (Barreto Filho, 2012; O Dia 2015). This means that by licensing the jukebox, a substantial amount of the profit from each machine would immediately be removed from the distributor’s hands—a narrative that supports the selling and using of these machines outside the scope of the law. Indeed, according to the reports mentioned above, this “fee,” is used by the factions in money laundering schemes, as well as to finance the illegal drugs and firearms trade.

The ubiquity of jukeboxes in Rio shows that, apart from being a profitable source of revenue for these activities, the machines also func-

1 *O Dia* estimates that only three hundred machines are properly licensed (O Dia, 2015); the report from *Band*, however, claims the number of registered and licensed machines might be over five hundred (Band, 2015).

2 The relationship between the Military Police and the drug factions is complex and marked by disputes over territory. The *milícias* are factions that evolved from death squads and vigilante groups in the late 1980s in Rio. Composed mostly of policemen, ex-policemen, firefighters or ex-military officers, these factions took power in many *favelas* in Rio in the early 2000s, and function as a parallel power, extorting business owners and taking control of services and infrastructure in these communities. With the ascension of Bolsonaro to power in 2018, the *milícias* in Rio have become stronger than ever, and their ties with politicians in Rio more evident. Comprehensive discussions on the emergence and actions of the *milícias* can be found in Zaluar and Conceição (2007).

tion as a marker of control and influence over territory. Every faction designs its own jukebox label or 'seal'—some use images of cute little animals, others pictures of beautiful landscapes (Anonymous cited in Band, 2015); such a visual marker ensures that no other service provider, legally authorised or otherwise, may profit from the jukebox business in that neighborhood. Knowing how to "read" these labels provides clues as to the true ownership of each jukebox; it is a subtle mechanism for communicating which faction controls the area. Jukeboxes are a contentious piece of technology, often forbidden, removed, or destroyed by dominant factions. Business owners then either resort to licensed devices, i.e., operated with police approval, or avoid dealing with music machines altogether (Barreto Filho 2012).

Understanding *Proibidão*

Another reason for keeping unlicensed jukeboxes is the potential these machines offer for adding music that falls outside mainstream distribution channels. One key example is *proibidão,* also known as "*funk proibido* (forbidden funk), *rap de contexto* (context rap) or *funk de facção* (faction funk)" (Palombini 2011, 103, original emphasis). One of the most controversial subgenres of *funk carioca*, *proibidão* is often acknowledged as a direct response from the favelas to the ongoing criminalization of funk and its MCs and DJs by the Brazilian media (Lopes 2009; Palombini 2014). *Proibidão* usually re-appropriates melodies from well-known songs, adapting them to the ubiquitous beat of *tamborzão* and replacing the original texts with lyrics celebrating violence, or extolling the activities of a particular faction (Sneed 2008, 71). These lyrics often serve as a direct provocation or gesture of confrontation towards the Military Police, the *milícias*, or rival factions. According to the historiography of *proibidão* offered by Brazilian scholar Carlos Palombini, the term can be traced back to 1995 and a series of homemade CD-Rs containing live recordings of songs praising the leaders of *Comando Vermelho* (one of the biggest and oldest factions in Brazil). Indeed, *Proibidão* is seldom circulated via the usual means, relying instead on bootleg recordings from live performances or informal file sharing via USB-drives, bluetooth exchange, Facebook, or WhatsApp.[3]

3 Despite its constant portrayal in the media as a "threat" to the middle class, one of the most famous examples of *proibidão* has made international news in a different way—as the soundtrack and main theme of the movie *Tropa de Elite*. While the version used in the movie presents different lyrics, the original "Rap das Armas" by MC Junior and Leonardo describes a broad range of firearms; indeed, the beat is built around sampled gunshots, and the chorus is an onomatopoeic rendition of the sounds of an automatic rifle. Listen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEn5gPQr0-Y (access August 25, 2020).

In Lins, *proibidão* is everywhere; much as in any other neighborhood in Rio, Lins has its own roster of MCs, producers, and studios creating music specific to that community. This is another reason why jukeboxes are a reliable business activity; expanding and reaching beyond peer-to-peer distribution models, they allow for music specific to that area, and in turn specific to the controlling faction to be not only played but also permanently stored, functioning as a sonic marker in that specific location as part of a specific wider territory. Indeed, playing a *proibidão* song celebrating the leaders and events from one faction in a favela controlled by another might lead to a rather violent backlash.

The Jukebox of Lins

When Samara described the jukebox sitting outside a bar near her house in Lins to me, she immediately remarked on how the machine was a key element of everyday life in her part of the neighborhood. She noted especially that, because the machine was located outside the bar, it could be used at any time of the day or night, often running non-stop until the wee hours of the morning. Listening is essential to understanding the flow of everyday life and the hidden cultural codes of Lins. Samara used the jukebox as a "thermometer"—paying attention to the specific music being played in the jukebox near her house was a fundamental tool for sensing the general mood of the street, and, more importantly, whether it was safe to go out and walk around.

Samara also noticed that this particular machine was repeatedly confiscated by the Police whenever there was a raid in her area, to the point at which the machine was eventually replaced by another, smaller, wall-mounted device that now remains inside the bar. When

I asked her if she knew, or could at least guess, the reasons behind the constant removal of the first machine, she said that she did not know for sure but had a strong feeling it was not necessarily because the machine was unregistered, but rather that the "problem" was its content - in other words, the *proibidão* songs on its hard drive:

> Whenever the Police noticed they were playing these illegal songs, I'm not sure, but I think they confiscated the machine, or only confiscated the songs […] The bar owner pays a monthly fee for the machine to be there, and also for maintenance. She told me this new, smaller machine they have now is a 'legal' one, because it does not come with proibidão songs in it, so people had to sort of 'hack' the machine […] while the older one, which stayed outside, had proibidão songs in it by default. So, this new one, which in theory does not have proibidão, is not a problem [for the Police]. But I am still not sure the machine itself is legal.

Playing and listening to *proibidão* is not forbidden by law, although it lies in a blurry legal zone between freedom of speech and inciting crime (*apologia ao crime*), a felony under Brazilian law. Samara was right: according to *O Dia*, the police do not have the legal authority to confiscate and remove jukeboxes even if the machines are not licensed. In an official note to the newspaper, a spokesperson stated that pay-for-music-playing "is not characterized as gambling, and as such these machines are outside the scope of action by the Police." (O Dia, 2015) Nevertheless, for the Military Police at the UPPs, *proibidão* poses a threat to the alleged peace of "pacification"; its very presence on the hard drive of any given jukebox yields a tense and anxious environment of conflict, governed by a micro-universe of sonic possibility. Listening to *proibidão* is a sonic manifestation that takes up auditory space, suspending the fabricated 'state of normalcy' created by the police presence, and replacing it with the realities of everyday life in the favelas. It creates a permanent state of listening anxiety, which affords and prepares for direct confrontation.

Paying attention to the choice of playlists also offered Samara hints as to who was around the bar; certain songs were indicative of specific persons, while a predominance of *proibidão* made the atmosphere around the bar tenser. Samara commented that, in her experience, longer sessions of *proibidão* played in the jukebox carried different codes. She described them as "teasing playlists": while such playlists might mean that key figures of the faction or its local branch were around the bar; they might also celebrate the success of an operation or raid by the faction; finally, such a playlist might be a code to indicate that something bad is about to happen soon. The latter served as both a warning sign for the people from Lins to stay in, shut the windows and remain quiet at their homes, and a 'warm-up' for the listeners themselves. Conversely, silence is another auditory code for orientation; Samara also remarked that a sudden absence of music from the jukebox might mean that conflict has already arisen, with silence allowing the neighborhood to identify the source and location of the gunfire. It is clear, then, that the idea of the jukebox as a "thermometer" was not a practice confined only to Samara.

Michael Bull (2007) argues for music's potential for "syncing of mood to place" (2007, 126), and the use of long, repetitive playlists to "maintain a specific cognitive state in contrast to the ebb and flow of time" (2007, 125) For Tia deNora, this represents an "attempt to 'orchestrate' social activity" (2000, 111); her research illustrates how listeners rely on music to regulate mood or to manage social agency, using it as a way "to move out of dispreferred states (such as stress or fatigue) [... Music's] specific properties—its rhythms, gestures, harmonies, styles and so on—are used as referents or representations of where they wish to be or go, emotionally, physically, and so on." (ibid., 53) The *proibidão* playlists crafted in the jukebox in Lins are not necessarily meant solely for personal consumption, but rather for shared, public mood enhancement, due to both the music's sonic character and lyrical content. These playlists perform a slightly different activity that resembles more closely what J. Martin Daughtry describes in his study on the use of personal listening devices by US troops during the invasion of Iraq, as "technologies of self-regulation in combat" (Daughtry 2014, 230). For Daughtry, the often-unau-

thorized use of personal stereos by deployed soldiers in Iraq, either through earbuds or connected to PA systems, was a device for "attain[ing] the mildly altered state of heightened awareness and aggression that is necessary in order to be an effective warrior." (ibid., 231)

The hyper-amplification of listening anxieties

The auditory space of Lins is governed by the anxiety of militarization, of wartime as normalcy. The presence of the jukebox blurs the distinction between the auditory space of civilian and military life, negotiating the permanent imminence of combat through situations of perceived quietness amidst everyday life in the neighborhood. The soundscape of Lins, through the act of listening to long *proibidão* playlists, exists simultaneously in neither and both states: conflict is always lurking ahead, whether because the faction is ready to take action, or because listening to these songs may attract the police to the area, to check on the alleged 'illegality' of the jukebox, which in turn poses the risk of engaging in direct confrontation with its listeners. For this reason, among others, Samara advised me not to photograph the jukebox, as doing so could potentially attract suspicion.

Whether or not listening to *proibidão* actually leads to conflict is irrelevant; the connection between the jukebox and violence is not one of correlation-causation. Rather, the sonic affordances of the jukebox trigger anxieties which shift the auditory codes of that community. The possibility of criminalizing certain listening practices creates an auditory state of exception, which justifies actions falling outside the scope of written law. This in turn creates what Stuart Hall et al. have described as the "amplification" character of the police (1978, 38): by engaging in performative acts such as raiding bars full of local residents to remove "illegal jukeboxes", the act of policing creates and foments the conditions for more violent acts to happen. Hall et al. claim that this "translation of fantasy into reality […] can elicit from a group under suspicion the behaviour of which they are already suspected." (ibid., 42) It is a self-fulfilling prophecy of creating conflict by violently silencing the (possibility of) sounds that are perceived to generate conflict in the first place.

The listening practices made possible and fostered by this specific

jukebox extends the notion of legality from the perspective of copyright law to the notion of legality of the auditory space in and of itself. The way the jukebox occupies the auditory space of Lins allegedly 'allows' the Military Police to bend the rules, exaggerating and overstating their already strong authoritarian position in the favelas, in such a way as to turn these machines into "illegal" devices. Because the machines are perceived to be menacing to the comfortable fiction of the pacification project, the police abuse the apparatus of the State with the excuse of protecting private interests. It is not, therefore, by being unregistered, but rather by creating tension and anxiety in both the bar's neighbors and in the police forces of the UPP, that the jukebox becomes illegal.

This jukebox is, then, a designed installment of Rio's Drug Wars in the neighborhood. It dictates the overall spirit of that part of Lins, while at the same time reasserting a faction's hegemony. It is a form of shared listening that expands the original sonic affordances of the device—casual listening, background listening, or simple musical entertainment—to become an instrument for the non-verbal communication of the threat of violence. Listening to *proibidão* on the jukebox re-frames the original design of the machine in order to subvert its functionality: sharing music amongst its immediate listeners as a code and mood enhancer for mutual recognition of one another as members of a community; inwards listening, used by the community as a warning sign for their own safety; and lastly, broadcasting music outwards to the targeted enemy—be they a rival faction or the police—as a direct affront and provocation.

The jukebox of Lins demonstrates an insidious and subtle relationship with the perception of criminality, as well as with the very agents responsible for enforcing this notion. In fact, within Lins, the machine functions in itself—and most importantly, in the ears of the Military Police of the UPPs—as a provisional vector not only for criminality but also for the threat of violence. The tense environment afforded by the jukeboxes' *proibidão* songs becomes an excuse for an auditory authoritarianism enacted by the police; their actions, conversely, sustain and reinforce the very existence of this listening anxiety. A temporary set of unwritten laws, enforced by the armed wing

of the State in order to render the machine's sonic affordances—and consequently, the populations who are subject to or make use of these—silent.

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