

Original Article



10.1590/1809-58442026115en



Open access

SERTANEJO¹ MUSIC AT UNIVERSITY: identity translations in students' cultural consumption

A música sertaneja na universidade: traduções identitárias no consumo cultural de estudantes

La Música Sertaneja en la Universidad: Traducciones identitarias en el consumo cultural de estudiantes

Ricardo Pavan

Federal University of Goiás, Goiânia (GO), Brazil.

José Licínio Backes

Dom Bosco Catholic University, Campo Grande (MS), Brazil.

Editorial Details

Double blind review system

Article History:

Received: 07/10/2025

Accepted: 02/08/2026

Available online: 03/30/2026

Article ID: e2026115

Editor in Chief:

Dr. Marialva Barbosa

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)

Dr. Sonia Virginia Moreira

Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ)

Editors Responsible for Reception, Desk Review, and Evaluation:

Ana Paula Goulart de Andrade (UFRRJ) and Jorge

Carlos Felz Ferreira (UFJF)

Executive Editors:

Dr. Jorge C. Felz Ferreira

Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF)

Dr. Ana Paula Goulart de Andrade

Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ)

Associate Editor:

Dr. Sandro Torres de Azevedo

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)

Reviewers:

Cristine Gerk (Portuguese)

Felicity Clarke (English)

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)

XML Editing and Markup:

IR Publicações

Funding:

CNPq

How to cite:

PAVAN, R. and BACKES, J. L. Sertanejo music at the university: Identity translations in students' cultural consumption. São Paulo: INTERCOM - Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação, v. 49 (2026), e2026115. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442026115en>

Corresponding Author:

Ricardo Pavan

rpavan@ufg.br

Abstract

This article aims to contextualize *sertanejo* music and reflect on it as a mass popular phenomenon embedded in Brazilian national culture, from the perspective of a group of university students in Goiânia, in the state of Goiás, and Campo Grande, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. The analysis suggests diachronic connections in the re-significations of the “*caipira/sertanejo*” genre by the media industry, as well as hegemonic structural changes in the country over the past one hundred years. In order to contribute to this problematization, the article draws on studies of cultural identities by Hall (2003), Martín-Barbero (2001), García Canclini (2013), and Oliven (2006); socio-historical frameworks by Candido (1964), Ribeiro (1995), and Yatsuda (1987); and the identity translations expressed in the narratives of the group of interviewees in the research.

Keywords: *Sertanejo* music; *sertanejo* music in the media; cultural identifications; music consumption.

Resumo

Neste artigo, a intenção é contextualizar a música sertaneja e refletir sobre ela como fenômeno popular massivo impregnado na cultura nacional, a partir da perspectiva de um grupo de estudantes universitários de Goiânia, estado de Goiás, e Campo Grande, estado do Mato Grosso do Sul. A análise permitiu sugerir conexões diacrônicas nas ressignificações do gênero “*caipira/sertanejo*” pela indústria midiática e mudanças estruturais hegemônicas nestes últimos cem anos no país. Para contribuir nesta problematização, costuram-se estudos no âmbito das identidades culturais de Hall (2003), Martín-Barbero (2001), García-Canclini (2013) e Oliven (2006); referenciais sócio-históricos de Cândido (1964), Ribeiro (1995) e Yatsuda (1987); e as traduções identitárias que se explicitam nos relatos do grupo de entrevistados da pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Música sertaneja; sertanejo midiático; identificações culturais; consumo musical.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo contextualizar la música *sertaneja* y reflexionar sobre ella como un fenómeno popular masivo arraigado en la cultura nacional brasileña, desde la perspectiva de un grupo de estudiantes

¹ *Sertanejo* is a popular Brazilian music genre, often compared to country music in the U.S. It originally came from Brazilian hinterland/backcountry (*sertão*) and traditionally features themes like love, heartbreak, rural life, nature, and everyday struggles.



CRediT

- Conflict of Interest: The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interests that represent a conflict of interest regarding the manuscript.
- Authors' Contribution: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing, Review and Editing: PAVAN, R.; BACKES, J. L.

Data Availability:

All data supporting this article are contained within the body of the text.

INTERCOM encourages data sharing; however, in compliance with ethical guidelines, it does not require the disclosure of any means of identifying research participants, thereby preserving their privacy. The practice of open data aims to enable the reproducibility of results and ensure full transparency of published research outcomes, without requiring the identification of research subjects.

Inclusive Language:

The authors employ inclusive language that acknowledges diversity, demonstrates respect for all individuals, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Plagiarism Check:

Intercom Journal submits all documents approved for publication to plagiarism verification using a dedicated tool.

universitarios de Goiânia, en el estado de Goiás, y de Campo Grande, en el estado de Mato Grosso do Sul. El análisis permitió sugerir conexiones diacrónicas en las resignificaciones del género “caipira/sertanejo” por parte de la industria mediática, así como cambios estructurales hegemónicos ocurridos en el país durante los últimos cien años. Para contribuir a esta problematización, se articulan estudios sobre identidades culturales de Hall (2003), Martín-Barbero (2001), García Canclini (2013) y Oliven (2006); referentes sociohistóricos de Candido (1964), Ribeiro (1995) y Yatsuda (1987); y las traducciones identitarias que se explicitan en los relatos del grupo de entrevistados de la investigación.

Palabras clave: Música *sertaneja*; *sertanejo* mediático; identificaciones culturales; consumo musical.

This article is published in open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license. The authors retain all copyright, granting Intercom: Brazilian Journal of Communication Sciences the right to carry out the original publication and to keep it permanently updated.



Introduction

The century-long incorporation of *sertanejo* music into Brazil's national culture is a phenomenon that lends itself to fruitful comparative analyses, involving artistic production and structural transformations in Brazilian society—changes that profoundly affected sociodemographic everyday life through a continuous migratory process toward urban areas, ultimately reversing the country's human geographic map.² This condition brought a unique re-signification to *sertanejo* music: although its symbolism refers to the rural universe, its trajectory revealed a semiotic openness that, in a certain way, came to meet the standards established by Brazil's hegemonic artistic-musical industry.

In this article, the aim is to contextualize *sertanejo* music within the country's media landscape and to examine patterns of consumption among a qualitative group of university students from Goiânia—capital of Goiás state (GO)—and Campo Grande—capital of Mato Grosso do Sul state (MS)—two territories in Brazil where the genre is predominant and serves as a marker of cultural identification. These were also two settings that, in a particularly privileged way, witnessed the emergence and popularization, at the beginning of this century, of what the media industry came to call “*sertanejo universitário*.”³ The intention is to understand the ties that sustain this phenomenon as one of the main expressions of Brazilian popular culture—something that has enabled it to gain spaces and audiences that would have been unimaginable in earlier times, as is the case of the university.

Sertanejo music as a Brazilian artistic and cultural expression

Wisnik (1980) argued that the instances of artistic production in Brazil are synthesis-products of informational crossovers among countless cultures that actively relate to one another throughout the diachrony of history. Among such instances would be *sertanejo* music, toward which Brazil's specialized/intellectual criticism has shown aversion. A multifaceted product with a shallow symbolic repertoire, *sertanejo* music would be positioned below the aesthetic-artistic values attributed to the erudite tradition of Brazilian Popular Music (*Música Popular Brasileira – MPB*). This perspective was made explicit in selective lists such as that of Rolling Stone magazine, in which—just as in the case of songs within the genre—not a single *sertanejo* artist appeared among the country's top 100 musicians of the twentieth century.⁴

Without any intention of challenging the criteria of such qualified selections, the phenomenon recalls an observation made by Morin (1967) nearly sixty years ago regarding the intellectual elite's inability to understand popular expressiveness as it is re-signified within mass culture. “The cultured live by an aristocratic, differentiated, value-laden conception of culture” (Morin, 1967, p. 18-19). The author further added that mass content did not depend on intellectuals for its realization, highlighting a context in which art increasingly came to be constituted more as a process of production and less as one of creation.

Martín-Barbero (2001) also engaged with this analytical concern, arguing that it is mistaken to equate mass culture with the vulgarization and aging of culture. In his research in the field of communication, the author proposed understanding popular readings of mass culture, “[...] in which both pleasure and resistance speak [...], a terrain in which market logic and popular demand sometimes clash and sometimes negotiate” (Martín-Barbero, 2001, p. 291).

This is not an attempt to establish value judgments about *sertanejo* music in its metamorphosis to remain within the mainstream circuit of music production in Brazil. The purpose is to understand the logics of media culture in this process of appropriation and transformation of popular art into a mass phenomenon, as well as — in another field of communication — to identify the re-significations of an audience increasingly susceptible to the vast and incessant supply of symbolic goods.

As if the complexity involved in analyzing this communicative “patchwork quilt,” to borrow Sarlo's (1997) expression, were not enough, one also observes a semantic confusion in the understanding and use of the term “*sertanejo*”. Sociologist Antônio Cândido (1964) and anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro (1995) used the word “*caipira*” to identify the world of small landowners, sharecroppers, and dependents who, since the seventeenth century, inhabited remote regions of Brazil's Center-South, especially in the states of São Paulo,

² The 2022 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) shows that only 12.6% of Brazil's population lives in rural areas, compared to 87.4% living in urban areas — reversing the figures from a century ago (Siqueira; Britto, 2024).

³ *Sertanejo universitário* is a modern, more pop-oriented style of *sertanejo* music that became popular in Brazil at the beginning of the century, especially among college/university students (that's why it's called *universitário*).

⁴ Available at: <https://rollingstone.com.br/artigo/os-100-maiores-artistas-da-musica-brasileira>. Accessed on: Mar. 6, 2025.



Minas Gerais, Goiás, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Paraná. On the other hand, historian Nepomuceno (1999) noted that the term “*sertanejo*” refers to the small farmer and cattle rancher of Brazil’s Northeastern backlands, but it came to be used indiscriminately to refer to the country’s inland musical rhythms.

Another scholar in the field, José Roberto Zan (2008), introduces—within the artistic domain—the concept of *sertanejo raiz*, commonly associated with music produced in Brazil in the early twentieth century:

Around the 1910s, at a time when the record industry was beginning to take root in Brazil, the term *canção sertaneja* [*sertanejo* song] was already used to designate compositions resulting from stylizations of rhythms and musical genres of rural origin—such as *modas*, *toadas*, *cateretês*, *emboladas*,⁵ and others—featuring lyrics that expressed the bucolic, romantic, and idyllic sense that urban poets attributed to the countryside. The famous *toada* written by Catulo da Paixão Cearense and João Pernambuco, entitled “*Luar do Sertão*,” is perhaps the most emblematic example of this kind of production (Zan, 2008, p. 2).

The perspectives point to essential contradictions surrounding the *sertanejo* social subject and *sertanejo* music. The first concerns geographic ambiguity, since the term today characterizes the inhabitant of Brazil’s Northeastern *sertão*⁶, while the music’s origins and cultural identifications are tied to the Center-South. Another observation is that some of the songs that marked the style’s entry into the media sphere—temporally identified as *sertanejo raiz* or *caipira*—were already authored by urban composers. The term *raiz* [root] proves to be as imprecise as the attempt to establish a singular and immutable semiotic/aesthetic standard for an artistic-cultural product, without considering its circular and hybrid nature.

The labels *caipira* and *sertanejo* are treated here interchangeably, as regional linguistic variations, taking into account that the Center-South appropriated the classification originally associated with Northeasterners. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, the term “*caipira*” acquired a negative symbolic charge, driven by its social condition: poor, backward, illiterate, and rustic (Yatsuda, 1987). These derogatory representations, however, did not prevent the emergence of a certain ambiguity in the meanings attributed to the *caipira* within Brazilian society and within the media field.⁷ From the sociological perspective of Além (2023, p. 51), “[...] regional designations and related labels for the *caipira* pointed to traits of a credulous subject, easy to deceive, but also shrewd, crafty [...], a craftiness applied to various situations that involved negotiating things and social values”.

These characterizations and indeterminacies served as the impetus for the construction of a series of stereotypes about this social type, particularly from the 1930s onward, through the popularization of radio (both state-run and private), leaving marks on the attempt to build a national cultural identity. In parallel, marginalized by public policies, it was during this period that an accelerated process of population migration toward urban areas began. In the Latin American context, Martín-Barbero (2001) argues that, by the mid-twentieth century, early signs of hybridization among the popular classes were already becoming perceptible, enabling the migrant *caipira* to recognize him/herself as a social subject within a nation.

The cultural project of Getúlio Vargas’s government was oriented toward safeguarding national values. At the height of populism as an ideology and as a political force in the country, during the 1940s, the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda – DIP* [Department of Press and Propaganda] sought—albeit with reservations—to establish samba as a kind of “official musical genre” in Brazil (Paranhos, 2011). The rural migrant, in turn, was frequently considered by the ideological current as politically alienated, easily manipulated by the bourgeois elites (Allonso, 2013). Moreover, unlike the expectation of an art oriented toward rescuing roots and preserving identities, defended by populist nationalism (Martín-Barbero, 2001), the production of *caipira/sertanejo* music showed openness to hybrid rhythms and narratives, reaching cultural universes that were being formed and transformed within Brazilian social life.

Even so, during the 1950s and 1960s, on the margins of the prominence of Brazilian Popular Music, Bossa Nova, and *Jovem Guarda* [Brazil’s 1960s pop-rock youth movement], *sertanejo* music continued its trajectory of hybridization with other styles, with an emphasis on rural experience and family life, in accounts

⁵ Styles of traditional Brazilian folk songs and rhythms.

⁶ *Sertão*, the semi-arid hinterland of Northeastern Brazil, historically associated with rural life and drought.

⁷ With regard to cinema, for example, Cattani and Souza (1983) point out that, long before Mazaropi’s success, the first character in Brazilian cinema to amuse audiences on screen portrayed a *caipira*. “In *Nhô Anastácio Chegou de Viagem* (1908), the circus actor and singer José Gonçalves Leonardo played a *caipira* character lost in the big city who, after getting caught up in a series of mix-ups, is ultimately rewarded with a happy ending” (Cattani; Souza, 1983, p. 18).

of personal/emotional dramas, and on portrayals of popular settings. This period registered the consolidation of the iconic duo of brothers from São Paulo, Tonico and Tinoco, and the emergence of the virtuosity of the Minas Gerais musician Tião Carreiro, creator of what came to be known as *pagode de viola*.⁸ These were the main references of a phase that preceded the incorporation of electronic equipment into *sertanejo* music productions.

Openness and syncretism with sound currents from everyday popular life, however, ran counter to the reactionary ideological tendency historically attributed to *sertanejo* music. By 1970, the urban population was beginning to surpass the rural population.⁹ Authoritarianism under the military dictatorship was reaching its peak in Brazil. If the sociopolitical situation might suggest a popular art more engaged in forms of resistance, the musical genre proved harmless in the face of censorship and the abuses of the political regime, continuing along its conservative vein. At the same time, *sertanejo* music began a profound thematic and rhythmic shift. Spaces of socialization and entertainment in the urban peripheries became significant arenas for popular cultural consumption, functioning as a laboratory for music producers.

For Allonso (2013), factors such as these intensified the repulsion felt by left- and right-wing intellectuals toward *sertanejo* music:

Sertanejo duos thus became despicable figures in the eyes of these intellectuals, whether right-wing or left-wing. For the authoritarian right, *sertanejo* success gave rise to disgust at the “rabble.” For the left, *sertanejo* artists were seen as “deception,” “lies,” manipulated products of the cultural industry—the “falsification of popular culture” that would corrupt the worker’s revolutionary purity (Allonso, 2013, p. 21).

A leading duo of the 1970s and 1980s, Milionário and José Rico became central figures in a curious clash between elitist thinking and the mass popular culture of that era through the film *Estrada da Vida* (1980), directed by filmmaker Nelson Pereira dos Santos. The work, in a comedic tone, portrayed the duo’s epic journey—from their humble inland/rural origins to their transformation into “golden throats,” with songs that were among the most played in the genre at the time and among the greatest sales successes (an estimated 32 million records) in the history of Brazil’s national recording industry (Nepomuceno, 1999). The filmmaker faced harsh criticism from specialized reviewers, who could not come to terms with Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s foray into a work of a popular-mass nature, seen as incompatible with the significant productions he had previously directed in Brazilian cinema.

Sertanejo music in the techno-digital context

The first frequency modulation (FM) radio stations, created in Brazil in the late 1970s, prioritized in their programming the then-emerging national pop rock scene and international hits, both linked to major foreign record labels. Initially, the urban origins of FM stations were a crucial factor in the genre’s reduced presence in the media space. In the early years of the following decade, the few television programs devoted to *sertanejo*—most of them broadcast on Saturday and Sunday mornings—were still largely characterized by attractions associated with the rural/inland universe (formats that are still reproduced today on regional stations), such as *Viola, Minha Viola* on TV Cultura and *Som Brasil* on TV Globo.

In 1983, however, the song *Fio de Cabelo*¹⁰, recorded by the duo Chitãozinho and Xororó, ushered in—albeit in the rhythm of the old *guarânia*¹¹—a new phase in *sertanejo* music, which became known in the mainstream market as the genre’s “chic turning point,” adopting a deliberately romantic narrative and aesthetic approach. This new identification met the demands of television formats aligned with the recording industry, which began to grant *sertanejo* music a leading role in Brazil’s national media landscape.

⁸ *Pagode de viola* is a style of Brazilian *sertanejo* music, marked by a syncopated rhythm and strong instrumental emphasis and played on the *viola caipira*, a traditional Brazilian 10-string acoustic instrument, similar to a small guitar but with five pairs of strings (double courses).

⁹ A study reveals 60 years of social transformations in the country (IBGE, 2007).

¹⁰ Composed by Marciano and Darci Rossi, in 1981.

¹¹ Interestingly, much to the dismay of specialized critics, this rhythm originating in Paraguay fueled major hits at different moments in Brazilian *sertanejo* music: in 1951, with *Índia* (by Paraguayans José Asunción Flores and Manuel Ortiz Guerrero, with a version in Portuguese by José Fortuna), performed by Cascatinha & Inhana; with the already mentioned *Estrada da Vida* (José Rico), from 1977, recorded by Milionário & José Rico; and also with *A Flor e o Beija-Flor* (Juliano Soares and Marília Mendonça), recorded by Marília Mendonça and Henrique & Juliano in 2016.



Occupying this space required a visual and performative adaptation on the part of established duos; in parallel, record labels and production companies intensified the release of young artists within the genre. This so-called “romantic phase,” as it came to be defined, further heightened the aversion of critical intellectuals toward the style, who accused *sertanejo* music of losing its defining features and of artistic submission to media-driven aesthetic standards aimed at mass consumption.

Information technologies and neoliberal globalization prevailed within the conflict-ridden scenario of socioeconomic and cultural changes in the early 1990s. The compact disc replaced vinyl and foreshadowed a future of ongoing innovations in the fields of music recording and production. The selective investment of major labels in *sertanejo* artists led the genre into the turn of the century as the most played and best-selling in Brazil, within a business model that showed signs of obsolescence in the face of the digitization process, which was also affecting audio and video production.

During this period, *sertanejo* music was emblematic in the symbolic reworking of rural life constructed within the media circuit. In sociologist João Marcos Além's (2023) analysis, the *caipira/sertanejo* figure emerged redefined and revalued, without the pejorative characterizations that had previously marked it; on another level, media significations evoked a materially wealthy rurality. Economic neoliberalism highlighted agribusiness as a model of development in Brazil's agricultural and livestock production. Ideologically, however, the terms “*rural*” and “*agrarian*” already carried distinct connotations: the former linked to the interests of large producers, and the latter associated with small-scale rural producers.

Trade union movements applied pressure, and in 1995 the federal government created—and the following year regulated, through Decree no. 1,946, of June 28, 1996—the *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar* (PRONAF) [National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture] (Brasil, 1996). A decade later, Law no. 11,326, of July 24, 2006, known as the Family Agriculture Law, was enacted, recognizing small agrarian producers as a professional category in Brazil (Brasil, 2006). The family farmer thus institutionally replaced designations such as *caipira* [rural folk], *sertanejo* [backwoodsman/countryside person], *colono* [farm settler], *matuto* [rustic person], *roceiro* [rural worker], among others. This legitimate distinction, however, did not alter the hegemony of *sertanejo* music within the media sphere and within national cultural consumption.

In the first half of the twenty-first century, the release of the film *2 Filhos de Francisco* (2005), directed by Breno Silveira, presented the biographical story of another *sertanejo* duo that became a sales phenomenon: the Goiás-born brothers Zezé Di Camargo & Luciano. The moment also marked the entry into a phase defined as “university” *sertanejo*, a label that had already been used for the restylized *fórró pé-de-serra*¹², which was highly popular at the time at university parties in Brazil's Southeast region (Dias; Dupan, 2022).

Within the context of digitization, the mp3 format and streaming platforms transformed the processes of production and consumption of audio content. From the perspective of music, this scenario involved aspects that went beyond technologies, significantly affecting the modes of “creation” and “fruition” of the artistic product. The possibilities of selecting and playing a list of songs gave prominence and autonomy to the listener. A new cycle in *sertanejo* music emerged in the mid-2000s to “update” it.

Communicative matrices in the cultural “translations” of university students

Oliven (2006) argues that national culture undergoes processes similar to those of other nations in a globalized context. On the one hand, this is due to the cultural mosaic that constitutes the country; on the other, to the standardizations of “Brazilian identity.” The author notes that “[...] in Brazil, there is a very strong tendency to appropriate cultural manifestations originally restricted to a specific social group, rework them, and transform them into symbols of national identity” (Oliven, 2006, p. 202).

This perspective, although directed toward contemporary and globalized society, brings into tension elements that are explicit in the artistic-cultural-media trajectory of *sertanejo* music over nearly a century in Brazilian territory. It is as if, even in the face of a network of symbols continuously re-signified by contextual transformations, the country's 450 years of rural/agrarian past remained alive in the collective memory of an entire nation. An emblematic reference in Brazil's mass popular culture, *sertanejo* music overcame stigmas not only to sustain its successive generations, but also to expand its space among social subjects such as university students.

¹² *Fórró pé-de-serra* is the traditional, roots style of *fórró*, usually played with the classic trio: accordion, *zabumba* (a Brazilian percussion instrument), and triangle. It is strongly associated with Northeastern Brazilian culture.

At the same time, mainstream *sertanejo* music—deliberately partnering with prominent rhythms and styles such as *piseiro* [a modern, danceable rhythm from Northeast Brazil, with electronic beats and *forró* influences], *forró* [a traditional Northeastern Brazilian music and dance style, usually featuring accordion, *zabumba*, and triangle], trap, and funk—experienced a 136% increase in consumption. Far beyond this recurrent adaptation to media culture, however, the period was marked by what came to receive the label *feminejo* [a wave of *sertanejo* music led by female artists, highlighting women’s perspectives and voices in the genre], with Marília Mendonça standing out as the leading figure of a generation of female songwriters and performers who brought women to the forefront of the *sertanejo* genre and of Brazil’s national music scene (Pacilio, 2024). If, on the one hand, the unprecedented rise of women disrupted the historical male hegemony of *sertanejo* within the media landscape, on the other, it produced few changes in the prevailing characteristics of the musical style. Even so, the synchronicity between *sertanejo* music production processes and Brazilian social life was reinforced, in a context in which many women have been fighting for and occupying spaces traditionally held only by men.¹³

The analytical universe comprises a qualitative sample of ten higher education students from both public and private institutions in the cities of Goiânia¹⁴ (4) and Campo Grande¹⁵ (6), interviewed about the cultural ties present in their consumption of *sertanejo* music. The selected capitals constitute spaces closely identified with this artistic-cultural production and played a significant role in the emergence of what—by analogy with *forró*—came to be called “*sertanejo universitário*.” The term may allude to the number of duos with higher education backgrounds or attending university who began to rise in Brazil’s national mass-media scene, but it also indicated the popularization of *sertanejo* music among undergraduate students. This acceptance of the musical genre particularly affected the private education sector, which experienced exponential growth in Brazil during the first decade of the century.¹⁶ Such institutions proved more open to the cultural consumption of the student community, which shortly thereafter came to be shaped by the so-called Generation Z.¹⁷

The selection of the university student group (Table 1) followed criteria that included a preference for *sertanejo* music, as well as aspects related to diversity: gender, age group, course/institution, ethnic-racial background, beliefs, and contexts of origin. The intention was to give the investigation a multidimensional scope, encompassing the sociocultural intersections that permeate these processes of identification, which are referred to as *communicative matrices of culture*, a category drawn from Martín-Barbero (2009).

Table 1 - Interviewees

COURSE/GENDER	CITY	AGE	BACKGROUND	SELF-IDENTIFICATION
Journalism/Male	Goiânia (GO)	22	rural	brown
Law/Female	Goiânia (GO)	20	urban	white
Forestry/Male	Goiânia (GO)	26	rural	black
Agronomy/Male	Goiânia (GO)	26	rural	brown
Nursing/ Male	Campo Grande (MS)	24	urban	brown
Pedagogy/Female	Campo Grande (MS)	25	rural	brown
Education/Male	Campo Grande (MS)	30	urban	white
Architecture 1/Female	Campo Grande (MS)	24	urban	white
Architecture 2/Female	Campo Grande (MS)	22	urban	brown
Psychology/Female	Campo Grande (MS)	43	rural	white

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2025)

¹³ The year 2023 also marked, in the political sphere, the return of the left to power in Brazil—once again, however, without the support of most mainstream *sertanejo* artists.

¹⁴ The capital of the state of Goiás, founded in 1933, with a population of 1,437,366 inhabitants according to the 2022 IBGE census. Available at: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/go/goiania.html>. Accessed on: May 6, 2025.

¹⁵ The capital of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, emancipated in 1899, with a population of 898,100 inhabitants according to the 2022 IBGE census. Available at: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/ms/campo-grande.html>. Accessed on: May 6, 2025.

¹⁶ Although it showed signs of decline at the beginning of the last decade, the private sector accounted for nearly 90% of higher education institutions in Brazil in 2023 (Sordi, 2022).

¹⁷ A term referring to people born between 1994 and 2012, also defined as the “super-digital” generation, since they grew up already immersed in the advances of the internet (El Tiempo, 2025).



A qualitative analysis of the oral accounts made it possible to condense the re-significations into four communicative matrices recurrent in the symbolic constructions underlying this cultural consumption: *traditional, territorial, temporal, and multicultural*.

For Oliven (2006), in contemporary society, *tradition* constitutes one of the main foundations of movements linked to the construction of identities. The author argues, however, that “[...] the fact that traditions no longer have a relationship with the present situation is irrelevant, because the criterion for analyzing them cannot be their anachronism, but rather what they represent in the imaginary of the groups that cultivate them” (Oliven, 2006, p. 209). García-Canclini (2013) maintains that, for contemporary media, traditions are only of interest as a reference to reinforce simultaneous contact between senders and receivers; what matters is not historical improvement, but the possibility of full and fleeting participation in what is happening.

The authors' ideas are taken here as a basis for problematizing the social practices that permeate the meanings produced through the consumption of *sertanejo* music. The testimonies of the university students, as expected, point to both consensuses and diversities in symbolic constructions. Identification with *sertanejo* music, however, proves inseparable from family time and space, from the inaugural sharing of cultural repertoires with the ancestors:

I grew up with *sertanejo*, mainly because of my father, who always listened to *sertanejo raiz* at home. Ever since I was a child, I've been used to it. By the time I was 10, I was already playing the songs I liked. When it comes to *sertanejo universitário*, I've been to a few shows with friends and stuff, shows that were really aimed at my age group. This taste has been with me my whole life (Law, female, 20).

I clearly remember that when I went to school, my father would take me on horseback and would always sing a song by Milionário and José Rico, “*Estrada da Vida*,” and I would sing along [laughs]. So I think that identification comes from the way I was raised—a more rustic way of life. I was born and raised on a farm, and that had a strong influence on my preferences (Pedagogy, female, 25).

My first connection with *sertanejo* comes from family lunches at my maternal grandmother's house. My mother's family is Paraguayan, and everyone likes *sertanejo* music (Architecture 1, female, 24).

Here, tradition is sustained through affective bonds rather than through aspects analogous to the ritualization of behavior. This notion echoes the perspective introduced nearly a century ago by Holanda (1936), for whom Brazilian cordiality was a reflection of a personalist and patrimonialist culture, grounded in simpler and more direct human relationships. Decades later, DaMatta (1986) offered a more controversial anthropological take on this supposed national subject: the *jeitinho brasileiro*¹⁸, which revealed the convention of privileging private interests over public ones as a practice deeply ingrained in the country's social imaginary. Over the course of its media trajectory, the popular-mass dimension of *sertanejo* music appropriated these traits in the reproduction of clichés and identity-based stereotypes.

In the spatiotemporal identifications with *sertanejo* music, aspects of the territorial origins of Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul states represent a tacit convention to legitimize both the appreciation and the consumption of this musical style:

In my region, *sertanejo* was played a lot. The city I come from is in the Center-South of Goiás state, and we're heavily influenced by Goiânia. It's also close to Caldas Novas, where Caldas Country [a Country/*sertanejo* music festival held in Caldas Novas, in Goiás state] takes place. There are many things I identify with here in the state, but what most identifies me as *goiano* [a person from the state of Goiás] is *sertanejo* music (Journalism, male, 22).

Even living here, we still miss the countryside. Most people had parents and grandparents who moved from rural areas to the city, so there's that connection (Nursing, male, 24).

¹⁸ *Jeitinho brasileiro* literally means “the Brazilian way” and refers to a cultural practice of finding creative, informal, or flexible solutions to problems, often bending rules or norms to achieve a goal.

In Mato Grosso do Sul state, the taste for *sertanejo* music comes from the cradle. It's from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep. It's really part of the region—the people are very connected to *sertanejo*, and there are many artists from here (Architecture 2, female, 22).

Private higher education institutions in Goiânia and Campo Grande make room for *sertanejo* singers to perform at periodic cultural events; in the case of public universities, bars in the surrounding areas also offer live performances of the genre. With regard to the temporal cycles that brought about significant changes in *sertanejo* music, it is understood that there has been no historical erasure of its popular character and its role as an expression of national culture:

Old-school *sertanejo* used to tell stories. Nowadays it talks more about parties and drinking, but it still fits. It's what people today are consuming. In this world of the internet and globalization, it's a content that appeals to young people (Forestry, male, 26).

Sertanejo is a cultural heritage, it keeps up with the changes in life. It will always be the first or second most played genre in the country. It keeps evolving, and I can see that evolution, the technological changes. Nowadays there aren't as many people living out in the countryside anymore. So *sertanejo* evolved, moved to the city, and adapted so it wouldn't fall behind (Agronomy, male, 26).

This criticism is grounded in the idea that “real *sertanejo* music was the kind that spoke about the countryside, rural life, and so on.” Yet, from the very beginning, in songs such as *Saudades da Minha Terra*, the story is about someone in the city longing for the countryside. Duos such as Milionário & José Rico and Chitãozinho & Xororó were also accused of not singing *sertanejo* music (Journalism, male, 22).

At the same time, there is a temporal mismatch in the interviewees' perspective when classifying *sertanejo raiz*, notably associated with the 1970s and 1980s and tied to the musical references of their parents and relatives. There is agreement among the undergraduates that there has been a weakening of narrative depth in contemporary *sertanejo* compositions, but little resistance to the restylizations articulated by media production. The inland origins of half of the student group lead us to reflect on García-Canclini's (2013) argument that conditions such as these gave rise to a hybrid genre that accompanies the migrant in the modern city, where individual and collective experience produces dynamic and complex meanings between the rural and the urban—and, more recently, also permeated by the university context.

Multiculturalism is the hallmark of a generation born amid the effervescence of communication technologies, which witnessed digital audio and video distribution bring about the disappearance of physical media and expand the supply of cultural products across streaming platforms. It is also a generation that grew up alongside the proliferation of devices granting access to music production. The result is a symbolic plurality that, in the case of university students, enables an expanded horizon of recognitions in the consumption of the genre:

Sertanejo comes from the *sertão* [hinterland]—it kind of brings that to mind—but even if they don't really carry that *root* idea anymore, that backlands, countryside vibe, it still has the acoustic guitar and those basic instruments that point back to *sertanejo*. And *sertanejo universitário* brings more of this idea of urban life. That connection makes sense. This mix is good, with funk, rap, electronic. It takes away a bit of the identity, but since I'm an eclectic person, I like all kinds of Brazilian music (Law, female, 20).

Besides *sertanejo*, *fórró* also became really big in Tocantins state. I started liking rap as a teenager in Brasília, but *sertanejo* is still predominant. If you think about it, you can make that connection: *sertanejo raiz* is, like rap, music that tells what's going on, what happened, the story of a journey. It's also a story being told, even if in rap it's almost always a form of protest. *Fórró* is partying (Agronomy, male, 26).

My family and I lived a lot in the countryside of Tocantins. There, *sertanejo* preference competed with *forró* (Forestry, male, 26).

On the border, there's this mix with *chamamé* [a traditional folk music and dance from Southern Brazil and Northeastern Argentina]. I noticed that in Ponta Porã (Psychology, female, 43).

Since I was a child, I used to listen at home to *sertanejo*, *chamamé*, and some songs in Guarani [Language spoken by the Guarani, an indigenous people of South America, primarily in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia]. As I grew up, I got to know new stuff, and I was really influenced by the *sertanejo* artists who emerged here in Mato Grosso do Sul state (Physical Education, male, 30).

For García-Canclini (2013), the affirmation of the regional or the national should be understood as the capacity to interact with multiple symbolic offerings. The author argues that the hybrid sociability of contemporary cities induces intermittent participation in heterogeneous groups. This produces a multicultural everyday life capable of generating identity-related estrangements and oblique readings of recent formats of *sertanejo* music—especially the niche that came to be called *agronejo*, a style that embraces the electronic rhythms currently prominent in the cultural circuit as well as the economic strength of Brazil's agribusiness sector.

The materially rich rurality characterized by *agronejo* has been questioned, as already noted here, since the reinsertion of *sertanejo* music into the media circuit in the 1980s (Além, 2023). Not by chance, it accompanies the rise of economic neoliberalism and agribusiness in Brazil, as well as the striking advances of communication technologies. At the same time, it reveals the symbolic disputes that have been active within the genre since its emergence, consolidating it as one of the most popular artistic expressions in national culture.

Final considerations

The historical suspicion surrounding the hybrid and circular nature of *sertanejo* music within the mainstream circuit—deliberately subjected to the updated aesthetics of the media industry—is grounded in the idea that it is, by essence, a form of artistic production of questionable quality, mainly due to its commercial aims. In its contemporary signification, the *sertanejo* genre is able to reveal symbolic antagonisms between the *caipira*/small agrarian producer and the landowner/large rural producer. Yet, even in the face of this incongruence in both form and content, and despite the disdain of intellectual criticism, the musical style continues to represent the rhythm, the soundscape, and the syntax that are constructed and reconstructed within Brazil's popular-mass cultural everyday life.

In another dimension, the speed enabled by technological mutations in the field of communication reveals ephemeral and superficial forms of reception, more recently triggered by phenomena such as virality. This perspective of media propagation aligns with the definition of a “culture of connection” proposed by Jenkins, Green e Ford (2014). The daily supply/invasion of symbolic goods through digital accessibility arrived long after the populist and Enlightenment-inspired lament over processes of cultural deformation and de-elitization (Martín-Barbero, 2001), commonly attributed to the media field in its methods of re-signifying popular art.

Cultural identifications permeate the production of meanings among a qualitative group of university students from Goiânia (GO) and Campo Grande (MS), two emblematic “*sertanejo* cities” in Brazil's Central-West region, marked by an abundant diversity of social groups. Their mixed-race composition turns these spaces into laboratories of cultural consumption, both in the translation and hybridization of identities (Hall, 2003) and in their semiotic intersections. Reflecting a “longing for the wild hinterlands,” for a rural/agrarian past imagined as gentler than the present instability and uncertainty of the future in urban and university settings —*sertanejo* music, as the results of the student research show, finds its strength and vitality in umbilical bonds, in playful moments with family, and in everyday socialization and interactions.

References

ALÉM, J. M. *Caipira/sertanejo/country: a nova ruralidade brasileira*. São Paulo: Dialética, 2023.

ALLONSO, G. Oposição no Sertão: a construção da distinção entre música caipira e música sertaneja. *Outros Tempos*, São Luís, v. 10, n. 15, p. 122-145, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18817/ot.v10i15.258>

- BRASIL. **Decreto nº 1.946, de 28 de junho de 1996.** Cria o Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar - PRONAF, e dá outras providências. Brasília: Presidência da República, Subchefia para Assuntos Jurídicos, [1996]. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/decreto/d1946.htm. Accessed on: Apr. 6, 2025.
- BRASIL. **Lei nº 11.326, de 24 de julho de 2006.** Estabelece as diretrizes para a formulação da Política Nacional da Agricultura Familiar e Empreendimentos Familiares Rurais. Brasília: Presidência da República, Subchefia para Assuntos Jurídicos, [2006]. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2006/lei/l11326.htm. Accessed on: Apr. 6, 2025.
- CÂNDIDO, A. **Parceiros do Rio Bonito.** Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio, 1964.
- CATTANI, A. M.; SOUZA, J. I. de M. **A chanchada no cinema brasileiro.** São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983.
- DAMATTA, R. **O que faz o brasil, Brasil?.** Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986.
- DIAS, I.; DUPAN, S. **O que é o Forró: um pequeno apanhado da história do Forró.** Campina Grande: Meroveu, 2022.
- EL TIEMPO. Gen Z, Millennial ou Baby Boomer? Descubra a qual geração você pertence. **O Globo**, Rio de Janeiro, 7 jan. 2025. Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/saude/noticia/2025/01/07/gen-z-millennial-ou-baby-boomer-descubra-a-qual-geracao-voce-pertence.ghtml>. Accessed on: Apr. 24, 2025.
- GARCÍA-CANCLINI, N. **Culturas híbridas: estratégias para entrar e sair da modernidade.** São Paulo: Edusp, 2013.
- HALL, S. **Da diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais.** Belo Horizonte/Brasília: Editora UFMG/Unesco, 2003.
- HOLANDA, S. B. **Raízes do Brasil.** 1. ed. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1936.
- INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA. Estudo revela 60 anos de transformações sociais no país. **Agência IBGE Notícias**, [s. l.], 25 maio 2007. Available at: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/13300-asi-estudo-revela-60-anos-de-transformacoes-sociais-no-pais>. Accessed on: Mar. 30, 2025.
- JENKINS, H.; GREEN, J.; FORD, S. **Cultura da conexão: criando valor e significado por meio da mídia propagável.** São Paulo: Aleph, 2014.
- MARTÍN-BARBERO, J. **Dos meios as mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia.** Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2001.
- MARTÍN-BARBERO, J. As formas mestiças da mídia. [Entrevista cedida a] Mariluce Moura. **Revista Pesquisa Fapesp**, São Paulo, n. 163, set. 2009. Available at: <http://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/2009/09/01/as-formas-mesticas-da-midia/>. Accessed on: May 12, 2025.
- MORIN, E. **Cultura de massas no século XX: o espírito do tempo (Neurose).** Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 1967.
- NEPOMUCENO, V. **Música caipira: da roça ao rodeio.** São Paulo: Editora 34, 1999.
- OLIVEN, R. **A parte e o todo: a diversidade cultural no Brasil-nação.** Petrópolis: Vozes, 2006.
- PACILIO, I. Como Marília Mendonça e mistura de gêneros alavancou mercado sertanejo. **Billboard Brasil**, São Paulo, 2 ago. 2024. Available at: <https://billboard.com.br/como-marilia-mendonca-e-mistura-de-generos-alavancou-mercado-sertanejo/>. Accessed on: May 11, 2025.
- PARANHOS, A. de P. Espelhos partidos: samba e trabalho no tempo do “Estado Novo”. **Projeto História**, São Paulo, v. 43, p. 1-21, jul./dec. 2011.
- RIBEIRO, D. **O povo brasileiro: a formação e o sentido do Brasil.** São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995.
- SARLO, B. **Cenas da vida pós-moderna: intelectuais, arte e vídeo-cultura na Argentina.** Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1997.



SIQUEIRA, B.; BRITTO, V. Censo 2022: 87% da população brasileira vive em áreas urbanas. **Agência IBGE Notícias**, [s. l.], 14 nov. 2024. Available at: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-noticias/2012-agencia-de-noticias/noticias/41901-censo-2022-87-da-populacao-brasileira-vive-em-areas-urbanas>. Accessed on: Mar. 6, 2025.

SORDI, J. Da expansão à evasão: um panorama da educação superior privada do Brasil no século XXI. **IQC – Observatório de Políticas Científicas**, São Paulo, 10 out. 2022. Available at: <https://iqc.org.br/observatorio/artigos/educacao/da-expansao-a-evasao-um-panorama-da-educacao-superior-privada-do-brasil-no-seculo-xxi/>. Accessed on: May 7, 2025.

WISNIK, J. M. O minuto e o milênio ou por favor, professor, uma década de cada vez. In: BAHIANA, A. M.; WISNIK, J. M.; AUTRAN, M. (org.). **Anos 70: música popular**. Volume 7. Rio de Janeiro: Europa, 1980. p. 7-23.

YATSUDA, E. O caipira e os outros. In: Bosi, A. (org.). **Cultura Brasileira: temas e situações**. 1. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1987. p. 103-113.

ZAN, J. R. **Tradição e assimilação na música sertaneja**. Campinas: Unicamp, 2008.