


**“I HAVE ALWAYS BELONGED TO THE THEATER,
I HAVE ALWAYS BELONGED TO ANOTHER PLACE”:**

INTERVIEW WITH CIDA FALABELLA

“EU SEMPRE FUI DO TEATRO, EU SEMPRE FUI DE UM OUTRO LUGAR”:

entrevista com Cida Falabella


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 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i15.8193

**"I have always belonged to the theater, I have always belonged to another place":
interview with Cida Falabella**

Abstract: This interview with Cida Falabella - actress, director, and city councilor - is motivated by the desire to engage in a direct discussion with a citizen whose path articulates artistic practices and political action, in dialogue with collective theater, social struggles, and the conception of public cultural policies. Drawing upon her extensive involvement with the theater groups *Sonho & Drama* and ZAP 18, Cida Falabella first discusses the means of collaborative creation and the legacy of Brechtian epic theater as a form of critical engagement with social reality. She then highlights political performativity as a central operator in her public actions, both in theater scenes and in the municipal parliament of Belo Horizonte, where her body, voice, and stage presence challenge institutional codes and establish other forms of listening and dissent. By articulating memory, education, and activism, the interview reveals the micro-political impacts of an artistic praxis committed to social transformation and the production of new cultural territorialities in peripheral contexts.

Keywords: performativity; politics; epic theater; collective creation; Gabinetona; ZAP 18.

**"Eu sempre fui do teatro, eu sempre fui de um outro lugar":
entrevista com Cida Falabella**

Resumo: A presente entrevista com a atriz, diretora e vereadora Cida Falabella parte do desejo de propor uma interlocução direta com uma cidadã cuja trajetória articula práticas artísticas e ação política, em diálogo com o teatro coletivo, as lutas sociais e a formulação de políticas públicas de cultura. A partir de sua experiência nos grupos *Sonho & Drama* e ZAP 18, Cida Falabella discute, em primeiro momento, os modos de criação colaborativa e o legado do teatro épico brechtiano como forma de engajamento crítico com a realidade social. Em seguida, destaca a performatividade política como operador central de sua atuação pública, tanto nas cenas teatrais quanto no parlamento municipal de Belo Horizonte, onde seu corpo, voz e presença cênica tensionam os códigos institucionais e instauram outras formas de escuta e dissenso. Ao articular memória, formação e militância, a entrevista evidencia os efeitos micropolíticos de uma práxis artística comprometida com a transformação social e com a produção de novas territorialidades culturais em contextos periféricos.

Palavras-chave: performatividade; política; teatro épico; criação coletiva; Gabinetona; ZAP 18.



In December 2024, we spoke with Maria Aparecida Vilhena Falabella, an actress, theater director, teacher, and politician affiliated with the PSOL party in Belo Horizonte, where she serves as a city councilor. Her experience with institutional politics began in 2017, sharing the first collective mandate of the *Gabinete*. Cida - as the city knows her - began her theater career in 1976, performing as an actress in plays such as *O Processo* (1981) and *Grande Sertão Veredas* (1985), and directing works such as *A casa do girassol vermelho* (1990), *Caminhos da Roça* (1992), *Bodas de Sangue* (1994), *A Bonequinha Preta* (1996), *Não desperdice sua única vida* (2005), and *Esta Noite Mãe Coragem* (2006). In Serrano, her home neighborhood located in a peripheral area of Belo Horizonte, Cida Falabella founded the ZAP 18 in 2001. This theater group and education space has since become a reference for avowed political theater, with social and aesthetic impulses geared towards understanding the common and the territory. In her most recent and intimate work, she staged and performed in the play *Domingo* (2015), a monologue based on autobiographical texts, with her own home in the Serrano neighborhood as its stage.

For us, Cida Falabella is an essential citizen to include in the debate proposed by this thematic dossier. On her website¹, her self-descriptions are multiple: 60+, feminist, actress and theater director, teacher, mother and grandmother, art-educator, lives in the periphery, SUS user, and rides the bus. These terms reveal an in-depth understanding that politics conceived in the feminine is holistic and permeated by flows between the micro and the macro, profoundly inclusive, and permanently creative. As a woman of the theater, her praxis encompasses strictly "theatrical" aspects - in the sense of understanding the heuristic capacity of representational forms - circumscribed both to the field of the so-called "artistic" stage and to the ritual of official legislative ceremonies. And she also apprehends the "performativity" - as the capacity for agency in the world - of these same representations and rites in these different fields. For those who think nothing can change, **she** (and here, "she" represents Many, in the collective, as the pronominal declension is both singular and plural in Portuguese, transcending gender limitations) teaches us, among many other things, about the creation, construction, and transformation of the world and of life within it: perhaps precisely because she comes from the theater and understands the ephemeral character of this existence of ours, full of "dream" and fury.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta: Cida, beyond our topic, you are very special to us. For some time now, we have been devoting ourselves to reflecting on the intersections between theatricality, performativity, and politics; you are that person both inside and outside the system, within the Left-wing sphere. You are effectively a social, political, and theatrical actress.

We would like to hear about the long path you have traveled between theater and the institutions you engage with, paths that run from ZAP 18 and intersect with institutional politics. We have identified some very recent milestones in which this engagement - which was more closely

1 More information about Cida Falabella is also available on: <https://cidafalabella.com.br/>.



tied to theater in the city, theater with the community - at a certain point expanded. What is taking shape is theater as a political vehicle effectively instrumentalized within the official political structure. Because theater as a vehicle was already understood as a means of political transformation since the birth of Left-wing ideology. And from another perspective, theater has also maintained its political character by acting on behalf of the *status quo* for centuries.

More recently, we identified a first moment - the occupation of Funarte in 2016 - as a moment of agglutination, when this group understood itself as a strength, finding itself in the struggle against the dismantling of culture in Brazil. *Muitas*², the creation of the *Gabinetona*³ and its collective mandate⁴ would be a second moment. And as a third moment, the election of Áurea Carolina, already at another level - working in federal macro-politics - and you, together with Bella Gonçalves, working at the municipal level, maintaining the dialogue between these political spheres. In 2020, we had a fourth moment, in which neither you nor Áurea Carolina were elected, with the country already being governed by the far right. From the Funarte Occupation in 2016 up to the present moment, *bolsonarismo* [political ideology that supports former president Jair Bolsonaro] has taken hold with great force, as a phenomenon beyond Bolsonaro himself, and we have also seen the rise of the far right worldwide.

From this point onwards, we would like to hear about your professional trajectory to date, and how your career has changed in relation to the power of theatre in political life at both the macro and micro levels.

Cida Falabella - Let's go. Yeah, I think it's really great hearing you bringing up this initial moment that precedes institutional politics. So, as you said, I was making choices in my theatrical history that already directed to a political path, in the broadest sense. This started in my youth, fighting against censorship and choosing theater group which, I think, is a way of doing things.

2 The movement "*Muitas pela cidade que queremos*" - or simply *Muitas* (Many) - was founded in 2015, bringing together members of various movements and social collectives with the aim of building collective candidacies for the 2016 electoral campaign. Twelve shared mandates were launched, and two councilwomen - Áurea Carolina and Cida Falabella - were elected. An analysis of this experience can be read in the following article: BRASIL, F. de P. D.; ANELLI, F. R.; BECHTLUFFT, R. P. Da "movimentação" ao mandato: as inovações democráticas das "*Muitas*" e da "*Gabinetona*". *Cadernos Gestão Pública e Cidadania*, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 85, 2021. Available from: <https://periodicos.fgv.br/cgpc/article/view/81772> . Accessed on: May 21, 2025

3 *Gabinetona* is a collective mandate that began in 2016, following the election of Áurea Carolina and Cida Falabella as city councilors for PSOL/Belo Horizonte Socialist Left Front. In its initial configuration, the experience incorporated Bella Gonçalves - initially a substitute - as a co-councilor forming part of the base, operating via a unified platform for mandate-sharing. In 2018, *Gabinetona* expanded into all three spheres of the legislative branch (municipal, state, and federal) with the election of Andréia de Jesus to the Legislative Assembly of the state of Minas Gerais and Áurea Carolina to the Chamber of Deputies. During this period, *Gabinetona* brought together approximately 90 people, including activists, workers, and researchers, in cooperation with grassroots movements. In 2020, it returned to its municipalist foundations and is currently composed of councilors Iza Lourença and Cida Falabella, both re-elected for another term in 2024, along with Dário de Moura (Dário 4e20). (Information verbally confirmed by Cida Falabella)

4 *Gabinetona* and the *Alto Paraíso de Goiás* initiative (2017 - 2020) are, to our knowledge, among the first collective mandate experiences in the country.



In the 90s, we insisted a lot on that point. A theater group (*troupe*) was a way of doing things that was different, as Aderbal Freire Filho used to say, from the one-product factory approach, in which you build an entire structure and put on a single play. A theater group is the opposite of that: it is a structure that organizes itself to think, to create, to educate.

So I think, especially since my beginnings in *Sonho & Drama* [theater company] with Carlão (Carlos Rocha), we already had a sort of political-pedagogical project of staging the great classics. Later, when I became the director, I made the choice to focus on Minas Gerais' culture. From that point on, in all my works, I turned to the roots of Minas Gerais, first with the play *Caminho da Roça*, then with works by Aníbal Machado. He is a writer with a very diverse and somewhat discontinuous body of work, but he holds some importance, a kind of unifier in Rio de Janeiro, where he lived. So, we produced a work about him as well; it was not a conventional work. Then *A Bonequinha Preta*, by Alaíde Lisboa, which is a classic that we kind of renewed and made our own. And the same happened in the transition to ZAP 18⁵. The choice to be at ZAP, to build a space on the outskirts that would work with three strands: education, an open cultural space for other collectives, and a theater ensemble. In that educational part, it was Elisa Santana, Chico Aníbal and I who shared the doing and thinking of the group. We also deepened the political perspective by working with Brecht. I think the prime example of that is *Esta Noite Mãe Coragem*, together with Hilde (Antônio Hildebrando).

The Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) deeply influenced my work. During my time at UFMG, Hilde handed me the Epic Theatre course to teach: "Oh, you can handle it, go ahead with this, it suits you perfectly." And that challenge ended up reverberating at ZAP 18 as well. My master's studies went along these lines too. In it, I went to study theater groups between the 1980s and 2000s, and the role they had in formulating public policies for the city. The emergence of FIT⁶ itself ran parallel to this; we even signed it together with the city hall, and the *Movimento Teatro de Grupo*, which was a very political campaign to defend theater groups, their venues, and ongoing work. This led to my involvement in the City Culture Council in 2011, where I fought for the rights of public policy for theater and the arts, but specifically for theater. At that time, we were also heavily involved in dance. This is bearing fruit now: dance got the Dance Reference Center at Teatro Marília, the Dance Forum is drafting the Sectoral Plan. In that sense, dance has advanced more than theater. But it started back there, in the organization and representation we achieved on the City Council. Back then the council was concerned with "culture," today it is with "cultural policies." This was around 2011–2012.

Of these three areas of work, one sometimes stands out more than the others, while another sometimes takes a retreat. Today, perhaps the education activities and the space for housing the collective are a bit more structured. In terms of artistic production, seven years have passed since

5 ZAP 18: Zona de Arte da Periferia [Zone of Periphery Art].

6 FIT - BH: Festival Internacional de Teatro de Belo Horizonte [Belo Horizonte International Theater Festival]



we produced a new piece. We have our solo works... My solo⁷ (a new one that I made), and some other experiments I created, which I can talk about later; this is the opportunity I have now to create something while being a councilor. I am trying to create with you here a thread that makes sense, without being too linear. Anyway, we have been at ZAP 18 since 2002, so we have completed 22 years of activity.

When we started working back then, it became clear that we needed a methodological, theoretical framework beyond a realistic, naturalistic theater, which was neither the orientation of *Sonho & Drama* nor of ZAP. We needed to refine some tools so that we could read social reality and have almost an answer to the issues that came to us through the workshops. In the first workshops, we had a wider range of age groups: children (in two workshops for different childhood age groups), adolescents, and people who had never done theater, and actors who already had some experience, which we called "training." So we felt that a milestone was missing, a way to frame how we were going to approach the themes, as there was a lot of domestic violence, racism, *machismo* [macho behavior] showing up when we worked with the boys in improvisations, from the very first improv exercises. When the first theatrical exercises happened, space-appropriation games, improvs, very dramatic, realistic scenes would appear, in an attempt to reproduce the violent reality they lived. We would say: "My God, we can't compete with the violence of their reality." And since I was studying Brecht again, we went back to him. We already had a history with Brecht at *Sonho & Drama*.

We staged *Antigone*, his version. And that was a political choice too, because he radicalizes the issue of imperialism, showing an initial scene in World War II, locating the tragedy with the sisters in a WWII scene, and then he goes on to show how Creon was actually like Trump. *Antigone* is about the power of women, of civil disobedience, claiming a law prior to the State, the right to bury one's dead, in this case her brother, who was a war dissident. I was completely immersed in Brecht, studying, reading, and working with the students on this.

Then I also started working in the workshops. We began doing an Epic Theater workshop, continuing in that vein, until in 2006 we chose to stage a version of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which Hilde - we had grown very close - called *Esta Noite Mãe Coragem*. It was almost an outpouring of those first reflections we were having in the group, after four years of experience, workshops, and previous productions. It is interesting: whenever we had a production with more open writing, based on texts or literature, at moments when we felt more uncertain about where we were headed, we turned to the classics. In 2001, before officially founding ZAP, we did *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, already credited as ZAP. It was a desire to do Shakespeare and to test popular Shakespearean theater. And it worked really well, because we charged R\$1.99 once a week and had 600 people watching the play, it became very popular. And then you might say, "Wow, this guy really made theater that speaks to people," and it is because there was no problem understanding it. Of course, we made cuts and abridged it, as the original play lasts four hours. And it went very

7 *Outono* is about a woman and her aging process, directed by Cristina Tolentino.



well, it was great, a season on a proscenium stage, but with this popular appeal. Then we did *A Menina e o Vento* by Maria Clara Machado, which was something that Chico Aníbal, Maria Clara's nephew, wanted.

So it was indeed a transitional period, as we had been doing productions based on Professor Vera Lúcia Felício's master's thesis about storytellers from the Jequitinhonha Valley, the work of Aníbal Machado, and *A Bonequinha Preta* (also an adaptation of a successful children's book, but updated and with new elements). And then in this interval, you might call the transition period, we put on those two classics. Of course, we're always trying to think from a contemporary perspective. In the Maria Clara Machado piece, we had a prologue that updated the play a little, and we used circus techniques for *A Menina e o Vento*, even involving Tereza Gontijo, who is a clown. I believe you know her; she wrote a book that was a huge success, about her work in hospitals. She is part of the *Doutores da Alegria* [Brazilian clown troupe that visits hospitalized people, mostly children].

Then the time came to stage a new piece, so we brought Hilde in to work on *Mãe Coragem*, prompted by a provocation. At that time, there was a TV Cultura campaign that said: "When reality seems like fiction, it is time to make documentaries." That really echoed in my head, as it related to what we were seeing: the boys bringing the violence they endured. We lost a student who was involved in drug trafficking in the region, which remains very strong to this day. Anyway, this kept echoing in my head. I would say: "I do theater," because the comment was about cinema, right? This point of making documentaries and so on. And at the same time, I also read *Cabeça de Porco* by MV Bill, Celso Athayde, and Luiz Eduardo Soares, a former Secretary of Public Security and is an anthropologist studying Public Security. That book is a gut punch; it maps out the "pig heads," representing the Brazilian *favelas*. It discusses many *favelas* and presents a lot of testimony. And that is something we incorporated into *Mãe Coragem*: the personal testimonies. And the second part of the book is more reflective. But the first part is all hard-hitting, you know, it's very heavy. Mothers losing their children, drugs that create ever more addictive, cheaper, and more lethal byproducts... It's very intense. So, I read that book and thought of *Mãe Coragem*, and then we called Hilde and said to him: "Let's bring this together," and he agreed.

So, we took *Mãe Coragem*, used excerpts from it, but worked extensively with the *Cabeça de Porco* book. We then created a version set in a sort of nondescript Brazilian *favela* - a kind of universal *favela*, you could say - that was very linked to Rio de Janeiro. There was that occupation in Rocinha, which was extremely violent, and we used some images of that occupation: policemen with rifles and a girl and her mother looking at the camera. It is a photo that highlighted the mother and daughter's bewildered expressions and the whole *favela* occupied. It matched very well together. It was also a really rewarding experience: it was the first professional play by the ZAP group. It wasn't the first production we ever did, as we had done workshops before, but it was the group's first fully staged play.

We used the space in a totally different way: Hilde had the idea of using the upstairs area. We actually had to build an extension to make the scene fit upstairs. So that really mobilized our



structure. We wondered: would people come all the way to ZAP? And those were seasons with a huge audience and great success. Social movements came really close. We also worked with a project called *Fica Vivo*⁸, which focused on young people under protective court orders. Young people who have not yet turned 18 stay in the socio-educational system, which allows them to study. However, they can only leave with a police escort. So they came here to watch the play. After that came to us the idea of *1961–2009*, which was about the history of Brazil – the idea was to make a “Brazil Trilogy”. Well, the third play never happened. So, we continued to update what we had.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta: What was it going to be? What was the idea?

Cida Falabella - We had a lot of ideas. One of them was working with a text by João das Neves, going back to the Indigenous themes. That was years ago. We already wanted to stage *Yuraidá: O Rio do Nosso Corpo*, which is a play about a struggle of prospectors and Indigenous people who then unite to confront the miners, the predators, the advancing exploitation. It is a very beautiful, unpublished text by João. He received a grant at the time to write it. He spent some time on the Jordão River in Acre, living in the Kaxinawá village of the Huni Kuin people. He had a friend there who was an Indigenous man and who had lived in Rio Branco for a while, where I also worked for a time.

ZAP's history has this return to political theater - a desire to do theater that did not lose its aesthetic dimension; on the contrary, allowing aesthetics to engage with the political moment. So I think on those two examples were the most striking ones. In 2017, Gustavo Falabella directed another play called *Homem Vazio na Selva da Cidade*, which had some dialogue with Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities*, a play that already spoke a lot about post-truth and political manipulation. It is about a bloodthirsty politician who rises to power by creating an absurd narrative. That was also pre-Bolsonaro. It was a really cool dystopia to bring to the stage. Gustavo directed it, and I participated very little. So, that's ZAP's characteristic. Aside from that, the workshops have expanded increasingly toward youth, especially Black youth. Today ZAP has a core called ZEC: *Zona de Experimentação Cênica, Teatro Negro*, and *Roda de Mulheres*, a group of older women. We actually said age 45 or 50 up, but most are over 60. Cristina Tolentino is the one running it, and it has become almost a creative core in itself, and it is doing really well. There's also Raysner de Paula, and the workshop *As Juventudes Fazem Teatro*, in which they work with many perspectives of theater and make the young people reflect on their own lives, on youth, etc. I think ZAP is a great support, a foundation, a root for our political action.

8 A national and international reference for addressing violence against adolescents and youth, *Fica Vivo* [Stay alive] was a pilot project developed by CRISP at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and served as a model for similar initiatives and the development of public security policies in Brazil.



Then, in 2016, interestingly, because we had been doing *1961* until 2015, at some point we decided to update the play. It had a more farcical thread, and we had personal testimonies as well, like those in *Mãe Coragem*. The actors were making connections to the political moment and their own personal lives. "What was happening in the country when I was 15? What was the famous 'historic moment'?" I can't stand "historic moments" anymore. Everyday there is a historic moment (*laughs*). Since 2013, moments never stop: every day is a historic moment. Because that's how it is: all the time, we are part of history, but at some moments you realize you are actually helping to build history together with the country. So, the actors were making that bridge, it was really cool, creating that connection with historic moments. But then I said, "Guys, let's stop doing this play, because I do not want to speak ill of Dilma," as everyone was criticizing her, saying her government was bad. I think it was wrong to treat Dilma that way. If she were a man, nobody would have done that. A few months later, she was deposed; it really turned out to be a very dramatic historic moment.

And then came the end of the Ministry of Culture, the occupation of Funarte. Indeed, there was that *Roda Viva*, Chico Buarque's play, the circle of history passing, that whole lot of events, the artists uniting. That feminist, Black occupation of Funarte, together with street pop events. My God, so many things were going on! It was a cauldron of ideas fermenting. I became one of the oldest women who took a leadership role; I was there every day, holding assemblies with Bruna Toledo⁹. I remember days when we would say, "Bruna, how are we going to organize this assembly today?" Then we would sit down, make an agenda, and go: "Let's do it." There was almost an assembly every day - I remember Guilherme Boulos was there. Anyway, some days there were lectures, people going in, there was a play every day. It was also the time when I became closer to Cristina Tolentino. We already knew each other, but we're just theater colleagues; we'd never had a closer relationship. We became great friends, and we still are. It really was a formative experience. I think art and culture understood its role: that was indeed an emblematic moment in which culture saw itself as part of the resistance to the coup and then to the far right. You can't isolate yourself, especially art, you can't just stay in your box, you know? It is not enough to just create a play - which is already a lot - or to just make plays. Look, I am already thinking about going back to those earlier stages... So, I will create great plays that make people think. And you understand then that you ought to do more. You do that, but then maybe you also need to mobilize the people you care about, so that they can see the play or maybe give a workshop or have a discussion or present this play in places that are not so closed to the public, or even maybe you have to go out and bring those people from the outskirts, from the social movements, etc.

It was a powerful reflection that I had already started to follow. I had participated in a debate with Marcia Tiburi and Chico Alencar in Parque Municipal, which was really great. In the *Muitas* group there were Léo Lessa, Gustavo Bones, Rafa Barros. I say they're the ones who led me into official politics, as we're already friends. Gustavo had already done theater with me;

9 Bruna Toledo is an activist, producer, and mother, one of the creators of the MAM Project, *Mães na Maternidade*.



I had already directed *Teatro Invertido*. Rafa, we had been friends since the Culture Council, we got very close there. We were a voice of resistance there. We knew each other already, but we grew closer then. They had invited me before, but I had initially declined. My mother had Alzheimer's and it was difficult to care for her. And I - as a daughter who lives far away, only my sisters lived nearby - I could only come on weekends. And those happened to be the days when those meetings and so on took place. I first said no, but they insisted a bit. When the Funarte occupation ended, I decided to get on board with personal affiliation. Something I had never wanted in my whole life: to join a party. I was not a member of the Workers Party (PT); I was not in any party. **I have always belonged to the theater, I have always belonged to another place.** Even during my time in the student activism, I would stay there in the theater doing my own things; contributing, but contributing with art, with culture, with thought, in short.

So I ran, without much expectation of election. We ran the campaign with almost no money, like the kind of campaign *Muitas* used to run. And because of Áurea (Carolina)'s strong performance at the polls, we came in second, with Bella (Gonçalves) close to us. That led us to invite her to join us in a *coverança* (shared mandate)¹⁰. And that is when the whole innovation, and madness, of creating a shared mandate and *Gabinetona* from scratch, began. Everything was brand new: the institutional framework, having to study bylaws, learning how the City Council functions, securing an office, taking down a wall, building integrated teams. A great and wonderful utopia, which then had to be adapted, and eventually moved into a more municipalist phase. Then in 2018, it expanded to all three levels of government. We rented a house, created the megaphone zone, and hosted Jean Wyllys, Marcelo Freixo - it was an explosive moment. But at the same time, a moment of confrontation, as Bolsonaro had already won the election. And then, well, the real deal...

Later, in 2020, I lost and returned as a co-councilor to continue our work within *Gabinetona*. I was welcomed by Bella and Iza, in a kind of return to what I had helped build. It was important, but it was during the pandemic. Very tough times, but we held on. A historic moment. My goodness, it was Bolsonaro and the pandemic. I do not even know what to say. We went through a very tough period, trying to stay upright and uphold our agenda, and to do so as a co-councilor, which is quite different. We maintained a very lean team. Then in 2022, when Bella moved up, we entered again and completed a four-year term in two, and that was really... well, we went full throttle. We passed everything we had to pass: we wrote a ton of legislation, and we are still approving laws - this week and next week, for example, the *Lei Geral do Carnaval* (General Carnival Law). We have been in dialogue with the *capoeira* community, with the *Pontos de Cultura*; it was another micropolitical revolution. Since I'm also from that sort of collective model, but it is a slower process. I was able to work with a bit more autonomy. In the mandate with Iza (Lourença), *Gabinetona* adjusted its approach of doing absolutely everything together. There is now a little more autonomy, as well as

10 *Coverança* (shared mandate) is a term that *Gabinetona* coined in 2016 to recognize, in the structure of the mandate, the role of political figures who were not elected, but who compose, from the elections and previous agreements, the decision-making processes and articulation with the city, that is, the body of representation. Therefore, the *coverança* is an instrument that gives vent to the potential of collective candidacies.



a continued dialogue. That fusion of mandates - gluing one to the other - worked really well, but it also created a lot of tension. At times, it was just exhausting, trying to build everything with everyone all the time. Anyway, it's a full-package experience.

The most important thing is that we were able to carry that experience into our first term, and in this one, we have continued it in a reduced manner. And there was theater inside the mandate - theater as politics itself: Augusto Boal and the techniques of popular and political theater. We held training sessions with Gabriela (Chiari), who is a specialist in the Theater of the Oppressed. We created a working group focused on political theater and activism, now led by Joviano (Maia) and Gabi (Gabriela Chiari). We held sessions at the Luiz Estrela Space and later wrapped them up at Casa Circo Gamarra - always involving activists from across the city, who have gone on to apply those experiences. And it is not about delivering a set of techniques, but rather encouraging reflection on modes of engagement that go beyond a fixed format - thinking about how one can act in the community, the power of the images itself, how to convey more images, more possibilities for understanding all these issues we are dealing with - through theater, art, activism, and performance - and how people might be moved by that. And also, how it might move youth and women, as everyone has their own area of expertise. So, there are feminist movements, youth movements, people working with agroecology: the groups that form are quite diverse, you know? We intend to continue this work in our next term as well. That is pretty cool.

At one point, we even had a theater group that carried out interventions at public hearings and performances at larger community gatherings. We do not have that group anymore because it depends on each mandate being able to allocate people for it. Unfortunately, today, with the 20 people I have, I can't spare five to create a group dedicated exclusively to that. I need people in legal counsel, communications, management, political advising, cultural advising, and care advising. So I can't maintain the group consistently, but from time to time, with partners and collaborators from outside the mandate, we continue the work of integrating theater and art.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta - All of this work was an explosion of creativity - it truly blew open the imagination of how politics could be organized collectively. A whole new way of thinking emerged at that time. Many people did not even imagine it was possible - not even you all, perhaps. But knowing it was not impossible, you went and did it. So how do you evaluate the ripple effects of that within the City Council? There is a kind of brilliance you all established in there. We know that many people there are functioning in a kind of stasis. How has that impact evolved from the beginning until now? Has it settled down? Have they gotten used to it? Or have they adopted your strategies and started using them themselves?

Cida Falabella - I think the initial impact was huge, mostly because of the diversity of bodies present there. These were very different people: many Black women, many women of Afro-



Brazilian religions, many LGBTQIAPN+ and nonbinary people. I mean, there was Ed Marte at the ceremony wearing a swimsuit, Cristal Lopes, briefly, activists. So right from the start, it caused quite a stir. The issue of bathroom access based on biological sex resurfaced in the Chamber. One of our team members went to the bathroom one day and someone said they were not supposed to be there. So yes, the beginning was definitely intense. People were demanding ID badges constantly and wanted to know exactly where someone was going. When someone was identified as part of the *Gabinetona* aesthetic, others would say, "Ah, you're here for the *Gabinetona* - over there." We wisely made a lot of friends with folks on the lower floors. We organized training sessions. Early on, Áurea proposed an incredible antiracist training with Cidinha da Silva. We even trained the security staff - you know, and had them play games, dance. Not long before that, we had taken part in the occupation of the Chamber, and some of the security guards had been there during that time, like Dú Pente¹¹. They would say, "Oh, you were here back then, right?"

So yes, there was a big initial impact, and we innovated a lot. Everything became a procession - we were staging events in the main chamber with palm leaves, with people from Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Sometimes we bumped up against bureaucratic obstacles, but we always had a foot in the door - what we called "love and foot in the door." We also had ideas such as lowering council members' salaries, not using official vehicles. Later on, we realized that some things had to be negotiated and that others were not even within our jurisdiction. You can't just lower a councilmember's salary like that, even if we were making donations and so on. So yes, there was that initial impact. Then, as a result of that impact, a lot of people started working in the *Gabinetona* office. The number of people occupying that space in the Chamber gradually decreased. It all became a bit more settled, and we were also heavily copied and appropriated, you know? For example, Gabriel¹² - right at the beginning - created a "*Gabinetão*" with three other men. It's hard to explain to people that *Gabinetona* wasn't a brand you could just recreate by removing the walls. It was a feminist, antiracist construction - one with gender and racial balance, with LGBTQIAPN+ inclusion, built with a more horizontal structure.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta - Was that more of a provocation than a copy? Or was it an actual desire to imitate?

Cida Falabella - More imitation, really. There was a sense of bewitchment around that kind of political innovation. I think the "spell" lasted for the first two years, more or less. That first term was very impactful. Then everything changed: Áurea leaves the Chamber and Bella enters. And Bella has always been very combative. They even tried to remove her from office because she pointed her finger at someone. We had some very intense moments... We carried out a long obstruction during

¹¹ Dú Pente is a young leader and activist for democracy.

¹² Gabriel Azevedo, councilman elected by the *Patriota* party.



the *Escola Sem Partido* debate - more than ten days of obstruction - and it was extremely dramatic, very violent. One teacher was even put in a chokehold. So we found ourselves in very difficult and legally complicated situations. We were always afraid of that. We took a lot of hits, but we kept resisting. We also tried to do a lot of things outside of *Gabinete*. We used to avoid occupying the main plenary too much, avoided giving out awards or medals or the grand collar award - we thought that was outdated, we did not want to do that... But now we award people with grand collar every year. This year I awarded Ione de Medeiros. People are happy, and we believe we should occupy that space too. Otherwise, it is only White men handing out collars to their wives. With all due respect to those women - they probably deserve a collar just for being married to those guys - but still, we can't keep doing that. No Black person, none from another religion, no artist was receiving the grand collar. We said, "No, we are going to award the grand collar too." The ceremony is super boring, but oh well. We host a little coffee beforehand, welcome everyone, and then go in and bestow our grand collar on one of our chosen honorees. It is a performance too, right? It is a form of appropriation. I love rituals, I love that stuff, and I really enjoyed Ione's ceremony. She truly appreciated it.

I think now, after the pandemic and Bolsonaro's election, the atmosphere became much more intense. We were heavily attacked. But we also started to understand what tools we had. We realized we could not respond with the same level of aggression that was being directed at us, as they might try to expel us. So we tried to calibrate our responses, to avoid fueling *bolsonarismo*. For example, we took court projects to the plenary session that we knew we would not win in advance. Instead of spending too much energy on them, we took them to court. And we had some victories that way.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta - Could you talk more about these strategies?

Cida Falabella - For example, bills such as the one on gender-neutral language, the one on bathroom access by biological sex, and now a new one on sports - people by biological sex and sports - all of these are unconstitutional, you see? So what happens is this: the bill typically passes. Sometimes the mayor vetoes a specific article, depending on political negotiations, and then we take legal action. We file a direct action of unconstitutionality - the well-known ADIN. The party initiates the process, and when the court rules, the law is struck down. Or we propose another bill that challenges the existing one. In short, it becomes a legal battle that unfolds outside the legislative arena. We have learned that sometimes the path forward is to appeal directly to the Constitution. They propose these laws because they want to grow their social media following and build public support. Every time they submit one of these bills, the pattern is the same: people who begin with five thousand followers soon have one hundred thousand. It is a political strategy. The more they align themselves with Bolsonaro, the more they embrace this moral and cultural agenda, the more



they grow. There is no actual effectiveness. The so-called pro-life agenda is, in reality, about policing legal abortion. We know that, ultimately, what they want is to eliminate legal abortion through the Chamber of Deputies. They want to declare Belo Horizonte a pro-life capital.

I believe there is something real here, and it isn't very favorable to us. Every performative intervention we wanted to lead, we did for quite a long time in the beginning. I believe Erika Hilton succeeds in this now, already placing herself in that domain of fashion, drawing on a different model - that of the diva, the pop figure on social media. She talks about this. Here, we try to pursue that through theater and performance. But much has been captured. Not within our specific vocabulary, but performance itself has been captured by the Right. They are skilled in performance and in digital platforms. We studied and discussed this with you¹³. They force us to reconsider our mode of engagement. In this sense, we have become more strategic. Perhaps we have reduced our artistic and performative potential in order to become more cerebral. That's an analysis I still need to examine more closely. Even within our own group, sometimes we sense this shift. I believe I still try to perform. For example, my most recent campaign was entirely performative, playing with the image of a woman artist who appears on magazine covers, for instance. Iza said, "My God, how did you manage to take that photo? Only an actress could do that!" I replied, "Friend, it was the effort." But it was inspired by the *Mulheres Velhas Podem* [Old Women Can] campaign.

We developed a political campaign and debated *Mulheres Velhas Podem* within the Chamber, including with right-wing women. It may sound a little bit odd, but that's what happened. Some women from the Right joined us in supporting that agenda. We proposed a bill against political violence targeting gender. It didn't use the word "gender," but rather the expression "against women," and it ultimately addressed the LGBTQIA+ population as well because every feminist agenda, obviously, intersects with LGBTQIA+ issues. So yes, women on the Right supported it, and everyone voted in favor, because they too had experienced political violence within that institution. These are the contradictions we face.

Let's say that now we are beginning to better understand these contradictions and trying to engage with them more directly. We are not abandoning our performative practice, but I believe we are trying to understand how to use performance more strategically. The Left-wing is larger now, but in truth, the ones who consistently innovate in this area are the women of PSOL. That is a distinguishing feature of the party, which elected three women: two Black women, one trans woman, and one older woman artist. It is a very distinct profile, even within the Left itself.

I feel that we are going through a transformation in this regard - a reevaluation of what it means to spend our performative brilliance strategically. For example, I used to go to the microphone frequently and give many speeches. I prepared them extensively. Now, I have reduced that a bit

13 Cida Falabella participated alongside Alexandre dal Farra and Maria Marighella in the panel "*A cena na política e a política na cena*" part of the "*Teatralidade e performance na política*" debate series, organized by the CRIA Research Group - Arts and Transdisciplinarity / UFMG, with the support of NELAP/UFMG. Available on: <https://www.youtube.com/live/c1zrRq1ihy?si=DUQtgL8LnU3nDZS>



because exhausts. They also changed bylaws. After our major obstruction, they rewrote the rules in a way that significantly limits political debate within the Chamber. One essentially votes on the bill first, and only afterward is there time for debate - by which point the place is nearly empty. That is another factor. The speaker's time, which we used for symbolic moments, as th March 8th, the anniversary of Marielle's death, is now placed at the very end of the session. Almost no one uses it anymore. So there is that too, they also acted upon our ability to perform, to intervene, and to speak up. Not just in relation to us, but they made a significant structural shift, and it has greatly altered the way we relate to that time and space now.

Juliana Coelho and Thálita Motta - If you could also share a look forward, what are you envisioning for the future?

Cida Falabella - We have been trying, more and more, to deepen the mandate through what we call "the livable life," the small, everyday matters. This kind of work does not get much visibility. It is long-term construction. We've made significant advances with women, especially older women in the Serrano neighborhood, via the *Café da Cida* gatherings, with women acting as guardians of the neighborhood, caretakers of the common good, of our shared home. I believe we need to deepen this territorial work, which is not only in the place where I live; it also involves the *Irmandade Os Carolinos*. We are helping care for that territory, which faces numerous environmental challenges. We are also working with the space led by Pai Ricardo¹⁴ in Buraco Quente, dealing with waste management and other possibilities. They have been reaching out to us to build a longer plan. We have also undergone changes: the cultural agenda has expanded to include care. I don't know if you saw, but we helped bring that agenda to national prominence in Brazil, and we were invited to speak about it throughout Latin America. It is a fundamental issue for women and for feminism. Belo Horizonte has approved an executive law establishing a Municipal Policy of Care. Of course, there is much progress still to be made, but we have been very active in relation to Pontos de Cultura, which was the high point of this term. We passed the Cultura Viva Law and encouraged the creation and official registration of the Pontos de Cultura, so the Cultura Viva policy is now very strong. We want to continue strengthening that policy. We also debated a law, which I consider antiracist and very important, the *Capoeira nas Escolas* (Capoeira in Schools). Not

14 Mestre Ricardo de Moura coordinates the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Resistance Association Casa de Caridade Pai Jacob do Oriente (CCPJO), which has been operating since 1966 in the Pedreira Prado Lopes [*favela*] complex, in Belo Horizonte (MG). The House was built by his father, Joaquim Camilo, and his mother, Maria das Dôres de Moura, both initiated in the Bantu-root Afro-Brazilian traditions. Pai Ricardo, as he is known in the community, inherited from his parents the knowledge of herbs, the rhythms and care of the drums, the songs, the blessings, the prayers, and the consultation of the cowrie shell oracle based on the Angola matrix, knowledge that he seeks to preserve and disseminate in Belo Horizonte. Pai Ricardo is also the *Rei Congo of the Guarda de São Jorge de Nossa Senhora do Rosário* in the Concórdia neighborhood. According to the UFMG Traditional Knowledge page: PAI Ricardo de Moura, *Saberes Tradicionais UFMG*, Belo Horizonte, 2018. Available from: <https://www.saberestradicionais.org/pai-ricardo-de-moura/>. Accessed on: June 5, 2025.



only in extracurricular hours, but as an opportunity for philosophy, culture, and community within public schools. It has already been passed and signed into law.

In these next four years, we also want to invest in a dedicated policy for the arts and to engage in a deeper debate. I believe we have focused a great deal on culture, in the broader sense, but we need to return to the discussion of an arts policy: arts forums and sector-specific policies for each area. We are investing significantly and following the process of the theater community, which created a Theater Safety Committee. That was initiated a few years ago by Grupo Galpão, and it will now continue. We are working closely with them, truly envisioning a long-term policy for the arts. The work has deepened, you know? It feels like it has matured. We now have greater autonomy and are passing important legislation in dialogue with the executive branch. These are measures that will remain as part of the city's legacy - not just of the current mandate. We passed and signed the General Carnival Law. It required a solid theoretical framework to support such a law. We passed legislation supporting *Blocos Caricatos* (carnival satire groups). We accomplished many meaningful things in the areas of art and mental health as well, with the *Arte da Saúde* initiative. We are currently in dialogue with the city about turning the *Arena da Cultura*¹⁵ program into a formal bill. Next year, we will be working on that. And I believe that's it. But do stay tuned for performances too - as soon as we find the right moment. In any case, this is quite a performance.

15 Created in 1998, the *Arena da Cultura* was the great cultural decentralization program of Belo Horizonte, becoming the *Escola Livre de Artes Arena da Cultura*, in 2014.



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Funding

Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

No declared research context

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Not applicable

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Submission date: 05 June 2025

Approval date: 05 June 2025