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# Red Hot Hips and Undulating Dreadlocks: Urban Music Groups, Scenes and Cultures in Santiago de Cuba

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## Abstract

This paper aims to present groups, cultures and scenes next to or emerged from the private creations handed by the urban music producers in the city of Santiago de Cuba. This is an ambitious objective, due to the several manifestations entailed to the polyhedral sphere of producers and consumers of urban music, for instance, the rap-reggae scene, the Rastafari culture or the “reggaetonera” music culture. Despite of the protagonists of these expressions are alike in the point that their practices are relatively independent of the state management, their different tastes, objectives and cultural capitals allow them to take distance of each other.

## Keywords

producers – urban music scene – dancers – Rastafari – youth street groups – Cuba

In his recent film, “Ya no estoy aquí” [I’m no longer here], Fernando Frías tells the story of a young member of the gang “Los Terkos”, from Monterrey. On the edge of the drug cartel and violence, these young people define their collective identities through cultural and aesthetic expressions, including listening to cumbia music and styling their hair with long sideburns. In Cuba there are also groups of young people who are part of the music scenes and cultures dedicated to consolidated musical and dance expressions with distinctive and binding aesthetic characteristics. However, in Cuba, unlike in the Monterrey

that Frías narrates to us, these groups are not linked to the world of street violence. This article looks at some of the informal groups that make up the rap-reggae and reggaeton music scenes in Santiago de Cuba.

Unlike other geo-cultural spaces, such as the one of the film mentioned in the introduction of this text, gang activity in the Cuban archipelago is not a phenomenon recognized by academia, the media or governing bodies. Therefore, gang and street violence are not the axes of the informal groups that are analysed here, but rather artistic practices. We study essentially the musical practices, extroverted aestheticization and other unifying elements in three of the groups associated with the Santiago urban music scene. The research is based on the post-subcultural field in which the concept of the music scene, its critical interstices, and other associated concepts operate.

### On Music Scenes and Cultures

Gangs, subcultures, tribes, neo-tribes, youth cultures, club cultures, and scenes, are all terms that have been used to describe collectives throughout almost one hundred years of research into the field of subcultures, if we consider the starting point to be the works of urban anthropology of the Chicago School in the 1920s. Post-subcultural research emerged in the last decade of the 20th century as an alternative to the classist, essentialist approach of the subcultural theory of the Birmingham School. It includes conceptual contributions such as the translocal neo-tribes of Bennett (1999, 2004) and the club cultures of Thornton (1995).

Another of the recent concepts used in this same framework is that of the music scene. Its genesis is located in music journalism (Bennett, 2004: 223; Bennet and Peterson, 2004: 1) but it has been adapted to the sociological perspective from the late twentieth century. The research works of Barry Shank (1994) and Will Straw (1991) are the two most recognized theoretical platforms on scenes. The most popular and, in fact, the guideline of this work is that of Will Straw.

For the Canadian sociologist, the music scene constitutes a vague community, with elastic and flexible limits, formed by social actors with the same rhythmic preferences, who socialize through:

- (1) the congregation of those who share similar preferences, (2) the transfer from one space to another, (3) the streets and areas where this movement takes place, (4) all the spaces and preferences that surround and nurture a particular preference, (5) the broadest and geographically

dispersed phenomenon that has local expression in these particular preferences and movements, and (6) finally the micro-networks of economic activity that nurture sociability and link it with the continuous self-reproduction of the city (STRAW, 2006: 6)

In short, the music scene is the area of confluence and socialization of those who produce and consume music, whose expression in the urban space ensures a dynamic based on the action of commercial and economic structures. However, the real centralization of physical urban space may currently need to be reconceived, as socialization through the Internet since the global pandemic is proving to be effective, even in countries with difficult connectivity like Cuba. In addition, the rural space has also become the protagonist of exchanges between music producers and consumers. This leads to a rethinking of how its inhabitants participate in the scenes born there or extended to these areas. Pedro, Piquer and del Val (2018: 74) make a similar proposal when they reflect on the immersion of rurality in the formation of music scenes.

Whether in urban or rural, physical or virtual spaces, W. Straw uses the music scene as an umbrella concept, because, for the author, this analytical tool encompasses and replaces previous notions such as subcultures, art worlds or movements (2006: 2). It is precisely in this amplitude that the concept is transgressed, since by proposing to replace all previous conceptions by this one concept, the differentiated social processes that take place within the music scene are included and homogenized. For these reasons we can understand why D. Hesmondhalgh provocatively calls the music scene a *fruitfully muddled concept* (2007: 41).

With these characteristics, the music scene can be assumed to be a flexible and porous community of taste centred on socializing practices of producers and consumers of certain musical genres, but in which there is also a degree of identified homogeneity among its participants. Other communities of related taste may converge in the scene (say, for example, the Rastafari community in relation to the rap-reggae scene), or the community can be divided according to differentiated practices within it, although the exchange networks ensure communication between its members.

The breadth of the relations between producers and consumers guarantees that at the edges of the scenes there are social actors who appropriate, in different forms and intensities, the scene's cultural production. Therefore, inward distinctions can be observed that reach a peak in musical cultures that originate a community. In fact, W. Straw contradicting to some extent his own postulates, did not oppose the confluence of these two collective phenomena, the "*concept [music scene] may be opposed to those of "community" or*

“subculture”; but the phenomenon itself has no enemies” (2006: 16). The presence of producers and consumers who appropriate to different degrees the characteristic symbolic universe of the scene, suggests that it is necessary to have analytical tools for dissecting these different forms of appropriation. The post-subculturalist approaches of the anthropologist Thorton are a possibility in this regard.

### On Capitals and Subcultural Competencies

In 1995 Sarah Thorton published *Club cultures: Music, media and subcultural capital*. It was the result of ethnographic work on the community participating in rave parties and frequenting techno music clubs. One of her contributions lies in the concept of *subcultural capital* (Thorton, 1995: 26–28), in an obvious reference to the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu (1998) in relation to what the French sociologist called economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.

With subcultural capital the anthropologist refers to the knowledge and flow of meanings gradually incorporated by young people who interact in raves and clubs, and by extension, in any other form of youth culture. Said knowledge not only informs about specific musical genres, but also about spaces, dances, aesthetics, language and jargons, and even value judgments and categorical hierarchies. The acquired meanings contribute to the construction of status between subjects who share a common taste, which is musical in this case.

The concept has its roots in Bourdieu’s (1998) social theory of taste, but this time within the same community of taste. The distinction of subjectivity and incorporated knowledge about some type of musical-based cultural production enables its young participants to evaluate and relate to their “congeners” without the need for social labels of belonging. Therefore, subcultural capital functions as a useful tool for obtaining empirical data to discern the degree of involvement of those who structure the scene (producers, musicians, audiovisual producers, consumers, etc.), to determine when the participants in the scene are an active or passive part of it and when the scene is a culture. However, there is another concept of Bourdieu’s theory of distinction that can accommodate subculturalist foundations in the same way as cultural capital and that the author of *Club Cultures* did not take into account: cultural competencies.

If the capitals point towards the flow of meanings, the competencies point towards the skills and degree of preparation or aesthetic disposition of social actors with respect to certain genres and music scenes. Therefore, the capitals

and competencies of the universe of the community of taste are intertwined. The first corresponds to the knowledge and ways of making and understanding music; for example, knowing about the past and present of its artists, the characteristics of its most recurrent spaces, and the use of concepts that acquire meaning in the community, among other things. The second corresponds to the abilities, the disposition and the axiological judgments based on the previous capitals; for example, knowing when an artist is good, bad or *cool*, and recognizing differences in sound and musical style.

In this work, we will not use subculture as an adjective of these two conceptions, rather they will be treated as capitals and competencies in relation to the aforementioned musical genres. However, these concepts do not only address the purely sound event. Today, the collective experiences of musical tastes have the hallmark of visual universes due to the power that the moving image has gained in relation to music. Thus, the unification of listeners and dancers under the common seal of specific rhythms is not only influenced by sound, but also by audio-visual elements.

### On the Emotional in Music Scenes

The community factor in the framework of post-subculturalism, expressed in the practices within music scenes, coincides with the thinking of another French sociologist, Michel Maffesoli. Although the most common “Maffesolian” subcultural conception has been the use of his concept of “tribe”, there are other ideas in this same theoretical platform that help us to understand the study object. This is the case of emotional communities.

When Maffesoli (1996), (1998) elaborated his conceptual framework in “The time of the tribes”, he supported it with studies on postmodernity to reflect on the new sensibilities, of which the tribe is only one expression. The emotional community is another edge on the analysis of informal collectives, and on bringing together identities that are metaphorized with the term “tribe”. These communal forms focus on empathy and nomadism, that is, they point towards instability and an idea of the emotional, the affective and the charismatic that goes back to Max Weber’s (1971: 20) principles of comprehensive sociology.

One of the foundations of the socialization dynamics of the groups that make up music scenes is emotional and collective empathy. This type of relationship marks the space used for socio-musical practices. Maffesoli (1996: 123–151) contributes a valuable element to this: the assessment of proxemics as an indicator of the social dynamics having greater or lesser intensity in spaces.

This element is also considered in the analysis of the different enclaves that make up the Santiago urban music scene.

### The Proposed Music Scene Concept

The empirical work, carried out between 2013 and 2019, showed that music scenes are constituted as a dense network of social and commercial relationships around certain sound genres, structured based on a range of musical production and consumption practices, and mediated by the circulation and socialization of sound.

They become spontaneous communities due to their fluid and flexible character, and therefore their members can move from one scene to another as their tastes change. The music scene is also structured in physical and virtual spaces that ultimately become symbolic spaces of communication between those who are a part of it, and which can be marked by labels of class or social strata. The main nuclei of the physical spaces inherent to music scenes are found in cities because the main institutions that shape and develop them are located there. However, this does not rule out that branches of these scenes are located in the areas considered rural.

Given the extensive and encompassing nature of music scenes, it is implied that there are spontaneous communities within them, as well as some more stable communities. The latter are more suited to the sphere of creation and production than to that of consumption. In these more stable communities we find social actors who share time and space for common purposes. Their practices and affinities range from creating music, consuming it, or simply enjoying being together in a group. Such communities often correspond to the notion proposed by Maffesoli (1996: 11–20) of emotional communities.

Within the music scene there are differentiations and distinctions between its members based on the degree of musical appropriation, the sensitivities associated with these rhythms, competencies and cultural capital regarding the music and its stylistic and media universe. Such differentiations make it possible to assert that the music scene is not homogeneous in its interior, and therefore it should not be used as a terminological or conceptual substitute for the music cultures that make it up and represent its core.

A music scene can be structured in its matrix by one or more cultures, especially but not exclusively musical ones. These cultures are in the first instance what Thorton (1995) refers to as “cultures of taste”, whose main uniting and common factor is based precisely on people having similar musical preferences. These cultures have a particular symbolic universe created and remixed

based on musical production and consumption practices that function as common communication links between the members, giving them a certain stability and symmetry. Despite this, they constantly demonstrate an eminently fluid and flexible character. The members can enter and leave, move towards related scenes and cultures without ceasing to belong, as an identifying factor, to the culture of taste. As identities are continually constructed, these actors can and do take on other musical cultures in practice. This mobility can lead to the abandonment of cultures of taste or their correlation and symbiosis.

Hitzel and Niederbacher (2010: 15 in Mendivil and Spencer, 2016: 6), in a work on music scenes, reveal the different internal hierarchies of the scenes, in a way that resembles the construction of the concept that is carried out here. One of the most tangible differences that separates this reflection from that of the cited authors lies in the fact that the differentiations and consequent hierarchies referred to in this work only function as a way of approaching the symbolic universes of the studied scenes. Therefore, they do not constitute true hierarchies of status, as they can be shaped according to attendance at places, which is a semi-otic connotation of social status based on the distinction of purchasing power.

In Latin America, the conception of the scene is relatively new and falls within the framework of youth studies and popular music. It is interesting to reach conclusions about what the Latin American context contributes to research in this area. First, let's look at the music. Indeed, the original works on the subject were based on shared experiences of genres born in Europe or the United States, such as rock, punk or rap, which, despite having a global nature on the continent, fundamentally rap, coincide here with other rhythmic structures. This leads us to wonder, What effect could collective socialization have on genres indigenous to the region in the conceptual nucleus of the scenes?

It could be thought that music constitutes an external factor, with little or no influence on the community relationship between producers and consumers. However, other types of music involve other types of musical socialization practices and other conflicts. The sexualization of rhythms (such as salsa or reggaeton) influences the characteristics of its scenes as well as the biopolitics associated with the music, the way the body is experienced, the individual or collective senses and even the conceptions that give sense to these communities. A good example is the historical senses of joy and disinhibition linked to the dancers' memories of the Bogotá salsa scene of the eighties described by Delgado-Ordóñez (2018).

Although the types of musical genres give the research into the scenes a dose of regional sound distinction, they do not necessarily penetrate the conceptual nucleus of these scenes, similarly to the case of militant political activism; an articulating axis of the Latin American scenes. It is commonly observed that

the political conflicts in the area converge with the interests of the communities of taste in such a way that they re-functionalize them. So that they operate, on the one hand, as leisure spaces-times, and on the other hand, as platforms for youth political resistance. Although “dissident” and countercultural songs are common in the formation of these communities, such as that of English punk, what is involved here is the participation of young members of the community as political activists, managers or participants of the constant strikes and protests of the continent. These collective practices leave the studios and the dance floors to reach the Internet or other public spaces. An example is the Peruvian hip hop scene narrated by Alvarado (2018).

The socioeconomic reality and the enormous social inequalities in Latin American also determine the characteristics of its scenes. In a country like Cuba, for example, the acute economic crisis and the unique socio-political system in the region give a particular character to the scenes. First, almost all public spaces are managed by the State, leading to regulations of the dominant cultural policy to the extreme determinism of the opening and closing of spaces, and with this, marking the futility of some scenes. Secondly, the economic situation configures another significant vector of the formation of these communities: the movement from one space to another, due to the lack of public and private transport. Thirdly, the realization of leisure activities with accessible prices (especially for adolescents and young students dependent on their parents or without work) or the limited supply of such proposals, consequently affected by the economic crises, condition the existence of a particular kind of participant of Cuban music scenes: the circumstantial participant. This person is part of the community and enters in its worlds of meaning due to resignation, that is, due to the lack of offers closer to their liking and the mediating influence of the peer group.

Although the case of Cuba constitutes a peculiar example, a more general look at the socioeconomic factor allows us to discern that Latin American inequalities open up maps of the sense of social distinction of the essentially urban enclaves of the scenes. The fourth element of this analysis also incorporates senses of differentiation close to class. This element is the diverse Latin American ethnicity and raciality in the scene studies of the region, and already mentioned by Mendivil and Spencer (2016: 11) as a divergent point along with class. Despite continental miscegenation, it cannot be ignored that the idea of race configures imaginary territories, identities and spaces of resistance, also commonly associated with sounds, so that raciality and ethnicity contribute meanings to the social structures of the countries of this part of the world.



### Some Methodological Notes

The present work is part of a more extensive study that analysed youth musical consumption, paying particular attention to reggaeton, the scenes mentioned, some informal groups in the location, socio-musical leisure spaces and regulatory cultural policy. Although the general study used a methodological triangulation in which the qualitative and quantitative perspectives converged, in the present work we use a qualitative approach. We carried out ethnography as one of the fundamental empirical procedures in two senses. One part of the ethnography was carried out for several months in an independent music recording studio dedicated to urban music but specialized in the genres that surround the reggaeton scene. The other part of the ethnographic work was focused on the spaces where the concerts of reggaeton artists, rappers and reggae groups commonly take place and where dance competitions are held.

We used participant and non-participant observation. In a first stage for exploratory purposes and in a second stage to reveal the socio-musical dynamics in the aforementioned spaces. In-depth interviews were conducted with producers with different roles in each of the scenes. These were complemented with observation and the elicitation resource, taking into account music videos and documentaries. Public officials from the cultural sector in the city were also interviewed with a semi-structured design, as well as 30 consumers selected in public spaces. At the same time, a discussion group was held in a place dedicated to the reggaeton scene, arranged for the leisure of consumers and competitions between dancers.

An analysis of mixed visual and oral content was also made based on the music videos of rap, reggae and reggaeton performers in order to determine recurring meanings in the songs and in the visuality displayed during the staging. These results were compared with the performance on stage and in the daily life of the producers. Finally, a life story of one of the young leaders of a dance group was developed. The personal experience of this leader makes it possible to glimpse the relationships between groups, within them and also with cultural institutions.

### The Fragmented Mosaic of Urban Music in Cuba and in Santiago: Rap-Reggae and Reggaeton Scenes

If we observe the industrial conventions of the music world, “the urban” has a common thread with all the manifestations that emerged from the hip hop culture. Its cultists, from the beginning, already assimilated some contemporary

cultural expressions of West Indian immigrants in the United States, especially from Jamaica in the 1950s. Hence, reggae, ragamuffin and some Rastafarian precepts were not alien to some rappers.<sup>1</sup>

In Cuba, and especially in Santiago, the best known factions of urban music are precisely those involved with rap, reggae and reggaeton. The geo-cultural position of the city has been a significant influence on the character that the urban music macro-scene has acquired here. Considered the second in historical importance of the islands and the former capital (until 1556), it lies in eastern Cuba in a mountainous area with a bay that has accentuated since colonial times the link with the Caribbean islands. Its geographical location has promoted the historical and cultural link with the area, which has led to the already folkloric slogan of “Santiago, capital of the Caribbean.”

This had an impact on the influence that the Caribbean rhythms had on young people towards the end of the 20th century, when reggae, *ragamuffin*, *dancehall* and even the incipient reggaeton had a stronger impact on producers and consumers from Santiago and Guantanamo than on citizens of other parts of Cuba. In the midst of experimentation with urban music, the arrival of the new millennium brought with it the enthronement of reggaeton. However, a kind of split occurred. While some musicians committed themselves to rap and reggae, whose discursive matrices often had a critical nature, others preferred to take themes of everyday popular rhetoric to the extreme, through reggaeton and other later genres. This includes stark allusions to sex (preferably in the male-to-female direction), having fun or distinctions according to the acquisition of consumer goods.<sup>2</sup> So that, we are now witnessing an urban music scene in the city formed mainly by what we call rap-reggae and reggaeton. Both have logical communicating vessels, such as their roots in the visual and performative elements of hip hop, the most obvious sonic consequence of which is the recitative style of singing that singles out rap.

This becomes more complex in the reggaeton scene. It seems limited to name it this way since it currently consists of rhythms that go beyond reggaeton. This is consistent with Sá (2011: 154 in Pedro, Piquer and del Val, 2018: 72), who states that the scenes take certain genres and update them, and that

1 In this regard, Hess (2007: 6) recognizes, for example, that Jamaican *toasting* (verbal form to animate parties) permeated the rap form, while Kato (2007: 187–188) recalls the impact of the popular culture of the Jamaican ghetto on the nascent hip hop of the seventies.

2 This division is not symmetrical. Producers who are members of both the rap-reggae and reggaeton scenes consider themselves as urban musicians. However, while those dedicated to rap and reggae feel committed to social causes and, consequently, differentiated, those who decide on reggaeton represent themselves as integrated into the circuit in general and consider that the divisions constitute mere options for creation.

new genres or subgenres can arise from these interactions. The most obvious example we have today is when the same producers who specialize in reggaeton exhibit a type of music under the same visual and oral umbrella called “reparto”,<sup>3</sup> which is a mixture of rhythmic elements in which rumba stands out. Although it is a different metric, the exponents of this scene make explicit in their productions, as well as in their social relationships, the same symbolic universe expressed in jargon, socio-musical concepts, and visual styles that originate in the singer’s performance. This music is even developed in the same leisure spaces. For all these reasons, we believe that, although reggaeton constitutes only one of the musical options of these producers, those who defend other nearby rhythms share the same symbolic universe that they reconstruct in the interaction between all of them. Therefore, naming it the reggaeton scene is more operative than precise in technical musical terms.

### About Music Producers in the Reggaeton Scene

We have already mentioned the core position that producers<sup>4</sup> of the genres discussed here have in the music scenes. What are the activities, interactions and lifestyles that allow the people of the reggaeton scene to be identified as fundamental members of a music culture, and by extension also a visual culture? What cultural capitals of this music distinguish them from others? What cultural competencies do they have?

The ethnography carried out in one of the city’s independent urban music studios revealed explicit differences in style between the young reggaeton and *trap* producers and the author of this article, despite being part of the same macro-cultural wing of nation and city, as well as having similar ages. It must be taken into account that the concept of style involves a spectrum of meanings in subcultural and post-subcultural studies, such as the Birmingham school (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts and Powell, 1975: 175–191), the Ibero-American youth tradition (Feixa, 1999: 100–104); (Urteaga Castro-Pozo, 1998: 56) and also the more recent incursions into the community phenomenon (Brown, 2007: 64–66). Musicological studies have spread, necessarily in the

3 For about ten years, this term and socio-musical concept has been aimed at socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods and anyone who exhibits identities that accentuate belonging to them. The word, attached to Cuban urban scenes, especially in the capital, leaked into the way of making music and led to a sound style known today as “repartero”, as well as referring to all the fans who consume it. The same style can be found in various parts of the island.

4 We consider producers as everyone who participates in the creation of music and its visual materials.

theoretical determination of the musical genre (Orozco, 2014). In short, style combines the way in which the subject lives, the goods they consume (including cultural ones), the aesthetics with which they present themselves and the language and jargon they use. For the purposes of this work, we chose to operationalize and re-functionalize this broad concept into two close concepts: visual style and musical style.

The visual style will lead to valuing personal aesthetics as well as the scenic projection with which social actors dress themselves to dialogue, move and gesture when they start the dramaturgy of a role, and which, following Goffman (1997), are resources of the subject, or group, to appear in society in different spaces. It should not be overlooked that the protagonists of the ethnographic work build their personal aesthetics in a national context of poverty, a condition that directly influences the fashion market. On the other hand, with the musical style, the producers can be described and differentiated according to the way they interpret a song. Here the lexical-musical characteristics that characterize the genres stand out, combined with the rhythm and expressed by the interpreter or a group.

The common visual style of the producers revolves around wearing sparkling gold chains, caps in intense warm colours, dark glasses even in indoor spaces, earrings, tattoos and unconventional haircuts. Their regular clothing is dazzling and casual: ripped jeans, camouflage, loose fitting pullovers, and brightly coloured sportswear. Even when they wear formal dress, there are usually significant pockets of informality, represented, for example, by wearing sports shoes. These attributes have an added characteristic: their high cost compared to the average income in Cuba.

With regard to performance, producers often dress up in a dramaturgy that refers to the popular periphery. Their way of idealizing themselves for the interlocutors leads them to not be careful with their words, to be spontaneous. Some interviewees reinforced this presentation when speaking with another interlocutor in the same circuit: they tilted their heads, made hand gestures, and expanded their arms in expressions that were both playful (for example, when making figures with their hands) and challenging (such as puffing out their chests and tilting their heads).

This visual style combines the dazzling, informal and indiscreet in the way of dressing with playful and challenging elements in the dramaturgical projection. A kind of singular air that separates those who belong to this circuit from those who do not. Not surprisingly, the challenging and the dazzling are implicit traits of hip hop culture, a forerunner of the reggaeton scene. The protagonists of the rap-reggae scene incorporate this style, at least in the Cuban case, with small visual variations that separate them from the reggaeton scene. The most significant thing in assuming this visual style is that although

reggaeton producers make it their own on stage and in music videos, where the performance is more spectacular, they also use it in their daily life.

Moreover, the construction of a life experience centred on the genres of the reggaeton scene means they are also the ones who have the densest cultural capitals linked to the cultural products they create and exhibit. Without becoming exegetes or musicologists, although a good part of these singers and recorders have a basic academic level, the protagonists of this community of taste tend to naturally explain the history of the well-known urban rhythms: a story of the near past and continuous present in which they have also been recurring characters. Similarly, they can make comparisons between the microcosms of the scene, whose translocal natures do not detract from the existence of territorial nuances.

Cultural capitals are also observed in the flow of meanings that integrate the communicative sphere between producers, and of which words and phrases are core parts. Each musical genre implies a way of doing that becomes the musical style that the singer makes their own and turns into their interpretation. In this musical style, which becomes part of their lifestyle, the producers use words (not necessarily new and in fact often taken from the popular heritage of the moment), impregnated with meanings, linked to the musical. In this regard, the main actors of the reggaeton scene manifest a daily use of slang and phrases that they are constantly updating, and which involve a mesh of socio-musical concepts whose meanings are necessary for them. In this way, without the need for eulogies, these young people explain what is “repartera” music, what it means to be a “repa”, about the environment, with more street, with less street, and so on.

Cultural competencies also distinguish them from other participants on the music scene. The auditory disposition to listen and understand the content of some songs, which are convoluted for others, choosing types of timbres, identifying musical subgenres and even knowing how to project their voices with the aforementioned dramaturgy all involve cultural competencies in direct relation to the capital acquired.

Producers combine the three elements, styles, capitals and competencies, in their daily socialization. The substratum of the songs and the entire visuality, from the dramaturgy attached to the stereotypes of marginality to their playful and sexualized content, often come from the real social experiences of their protagonists.<sup>5</sup> How it is spoken, the secondary orality in vogue, the consumer

5 The empirical work showed that some producers cannot account for the experience of life immersed in a socially disadvantaged community because their daily lives do not pass close to these enclaves. However, constant socialization with others “educates” them in the symbolic universe that everyone considers a substrate for cultural production. Thus they come to remix the audio-visual content of the scene and form a connection between its matrixes, its protagonists.

goods to which they aspire, how to observe a woman and say extreme compliments with the support of their male group of friends, the vision of raciality with its discriminatory or self-discriminatory additions, all correspond to daily events of the informal life, “in the neighbourhood”, present in the subjectivity of a broad social group and exhibited massively by the producers of the scene.

### The Dancers: Special Prosumers

One of the most characteristic groups of the urban music scene, deployed in both the rap-reggae and reggaeton scene, is the dancers. The “break-dancers” or street dancers have defended this pristine manifestation of hip hop since its beginnings. In fact, in Santiago they marked the first public forms of youth devotion to this culture. However, it is currently no longer common for “street” dancers to participate in the activities organized by the community of musicians dedicated to rap and reggae, rather they have moved to the adjacent scene.

An outside observer could easily pass straight by the local dance dynamic that brings together young people from different parts of the city to participate in dance competitions. However, if we take into account that State structures manage almost all of the recreation options in the city and that these competitions are actually private initiatives, then we can admire the effort and courage involved in maintaining an informal dance and youth movement with private management. It is still true, however, that in Cuba almost nothing escapes the embrace of the State, and in this case, the platform of the movement is based in public spaces, obviously of the State, that are embedded in the structures of the cultural organism and therefore must abide by its cultural policy.

What place then do the dancers occupy in the scene? Are they producers or consumers? What is the importance of their role? How do they relate to the other participants in the scene? Do they contribute or hinder the development of the community of taste? These questions help us discover, in the informal non-professional groups of dancers from Santiago, some special participants of the urban music scene.

The dancers belonging to this independent movement perceive themselves as street or urban dancers, with a self-identification of urbanity closer to the producers who work on reggaeton and other associated genres. The participant observance carried out in the enclaves where these dancers go and perform revealed how the consumers of the reggaeton scene identify the dancers as an essential part of the scene and responsible for the visuality of the music. In this way, a couple of adolescents rebuked the main manager of the movement in

the middle of the public thoroughfare when, due to the epidemiological situation of COVID-19, in 2020, the premises were still closed. This demonstrates the recognition of the consumers towards the dancers.

Several dancers are linked through their cultural practices to producer networks and in fact participate in their creation. Indeed, their relationships with the private sector of the culture bring them closer to the independent managers most involved with urban music, especially the producers of the reggaeton community. Alliances between dancers, audiovisual producers, singers, owners of domestic music studios and the leaders or participants of the movement are common; the last with a career attached to reggaeton. In fact, for creating the choreography, some of the dance directors must work together with the recorders and the singers, both for editing the choreographed music *afterwards* and for the dancers to appear in the video clips.

At the same time, the constant socialization with the central agents of the scene influences the contents of the symbolic universe that surrounds this production and becomes palpable in the daily lives of the dancers, hence the frequent incorporation of the visual styles and concepts of the producers. For example, in the discussion group some young reggaeton consumers, also dancers, affirmed, "*When you dress how they dress, you feel the same as them*". Similarly, in another interview, one of the leaders of these dance groups recognized themselves as an artist and explained a contrast of styles between the "classical artist", their aspirations to become a professional dancer, and the urban world, to which they also feel they belong:

I mix with them to the point of what is urban ... Now I'm at home, I like chains, I really like to dress sporty, but when we're in the professional field ... it's different. I like to live the culture that I have always lived. My urban vibe, combing my hair all messy, putting on a thousand chains if I can put them on, the shoes that I like, in flip-flops, barefoot, live as I've always lived, because I know how to divide worlds, they're not two equal worlds, they're completely different, there's the urban and there's the classic.

If these considerations are taken into account, the dancers can be considered as producers within the reggaeton scene. At the same time, they can also identify themselves as consumers as they consume music fashion to function as a group. However, when we approach these groups, we observe that this position is not so clear. Their participation, although significant,

is tangential in their collective and leisure life. Their emotional ties to the group members and their devotion to empirically learned dance make them a close-knit community that actively participates as a group within the scene, although not all of its members feel that they belong. Likewise, while some dancers exhibit certain capitals and competencies related to the music in question (types of timbre, musical subgenres, history and news of recent singers), others only exhibit a narrow knowledge that is very functional for the dance practice.

It can be asserted then that dance groups, seen as units, are integrated into the reggaeton scene and occupy a central position as producers-consumers close to the creators of the music and its audio-visuals. Paradoxically for them, this constitutes an indirect significance, since, when observed individually, not all of the dancers take an active part in the scene. The interviews with members of the dance groups, as well as the participant observation in their competitive enclaves, revealed that some dancers feel that urban dance is not exclusive, and nor is it their main cultural practice, but rather it is belonging to a group where they feel like a family that is important.

This emotional character of the community, which refers to the reflections of Maffesoli (1996) and further back by Weber (1971), is one of the meanings that dancers express with greater recurrence. Moreover, these emotional ties provide, on the one hand, the collective protection of the group members when the relationships between the other competing groups become aggressive; a common occurrence in the movement. And on the other hand, they allow some young people to influence others to abandon deviant attitudes, close to the world of violence. In this regard, the leader of one of these groups explained:

Young leader: Most of them don't work and are dependant. They do nothing and as I told you, they are always involved in pumpunes (massive informal parties) and they're always in trouble. And here and there, if God wills or not, it gets them off this path.

Interviewer: And do you think your group took them a little off that path?

Young leader: Yes, because they focus on dance and I talk to them and say that they can't be in so much trouble.

This short segment illustrates the mediating functionality of dance groups, a parenthesis within the reggaeton music scene and an exemplification of the emotional connotation that links the community.



### Rastafari, a Culture Integrated in the Rap-Reggae Scene

So far, we have discussed some members of the Santiago reggaeton scene, but as mentioned at the beginning of the text, this is only one of the components of the urban music scene. The other part corresponds to the creators, consumers and confluence spaces dedicated to reggae and rap. This last group involves a culture that is integrated into this scene but whose genesis is not found in music, although this manifestation has a relevant role for its practitioners. We will look at the rap-reggae scene from the perspective of the Rastafarian participation in it. To what extent are Rastas part of it? How do they contribute? and What do the producers' practices contribute to them?

It is not the intention of this text to record the trajectory of the Rasta culture in the city of Santiago. It must be said, however, that this constitutes one of the primeval and privileged localities on the island with the typical presence of the Rastafari. The aforementioned dialogue between the eastern part of Cuba and the Caribbean explains the cultural and emotional links with the surrounding islands, of which the strong Rastafarian presence constitutes one of its edges. In fact, the community's own rap and reggae rhythmic binary configuration is due, to a large extent, to the influence of the Jamaican musical culture on the subjectivity of the creators of Santiago and their identity and emotional self-perception with the Caribbean. "Rita Marley was born in Santiago," some Rastas proudly say when asked in an interview to talk about their links with reggae and rap artists. This shows an aesthetic disposition towards reggae music that motivates them to remain linked to the scene.

Before proceeding further, we should clarify that not everyone who dresses as a Rastafarian feels that they are a Rastafarian. In this regard, Furé (2011) points out the difference between sympathizers and cultists themselves. Similarly, at least in Santiago de Cuba, not all those who perceive themselves as Rastafari have the same criteria on the continuity of the community. While some affirm their current local existence, others agree that, "those times are over" to give way to an individualization of the Rasta feeling. Despite this duality of opinion, the collective participation in festive and ritual activities, the feeling of brotherhood, and the artistic projects all together express community ties that survive the weakening factors.

Interviews with Rastas (young people and adults) and scholars revealed that there is no unique experience of the culture in the city. In general, the culture is moving away from its original orthodox forms as its members experience it in a constant syncretism with the cultural processes of the region and the

nation, to which is added the sensitivity and individual thought of each member, all in the midst of a mutable social context.

The first clue of the link between Rastafari and the music scene is observed in the interpreters themselves. The in-depth interviews conducted with the producers were accompanied by observation and elicitation, conducive to understanding why many rap and reggae singers adhere to the tricolour identity of the Rasta culture, both inside and outside the shows. In their songs, there are texts that point to an anti-racist ideology, proud of being black and expressing an anti-colonialist raciality. These meanings are consistent with the Rasta culture and motivate several singers to sympathize with this culture, without being part of it. In this way they have a coherent visual style: tricolour trousers, pullovers with the image of Bob Marley, the conspicuous use of dreadlocks and handmade wristbands with the Jamaican flag. This is an example of what Reguillo (2000: 77) values as the enhancement of biopolitics in the racial dimension in reference to the practices of Latin American youth cultures.

The self-assertive Rastas collaborate in different ways with the rap-reggae scene and even, to a lesser extent, with reggaeton performers. It is well known how reggae catapulted the Rastafarian culture to global dimensions based fundamentally on the work of Bob Marley in the seventies. The significance of this rhythm for Rastas encourages them to socialize with producers and become, if they are not musicians, habitual consumers of their sound and audio-visual work. Hence, in the typical places of the scene, as well as in music videos, it is common to observe the presence of Rastas and their fraternal interrelation with singers and DJ s.

Along with rap and reggae, other genres have also called for Rasta collaboration. What began as a unitary urban scene in the nineties, forked into two ways of making music and two linked but different universes. From *ragamuffin* to the current *trap*, other rhythmic platforms have also been constituted with the Rasta imprint. Discourses set to music, such as “Mr. Officer, let me sing my song” and “Someone who stops you is letting down Babylon” [alguien que le impida coger falla al Babilon], refer to their conflicts, including the already recurring contradiction between law enforcement officials and this community. This shows how the ideology, conflicts and claims of the Rastafari of the area are converted into socio-musical concepts in the rap-reggae scene, which the producers defend both in their music and in their daily lives.

In-depth interviews with various practitioners revealed the association of the Rasta phenomenon with physical spaces of social disadvantage, which also acquires connotations in the rap-reggae scene. However, the

places in the scene are not conditioned by the idea of marginality, in part because the largest number of the spatial structures available for their operation are in the hands of the State and do not have to coincide with enclaves habitually designated in the collective imagination as “marginal”. Nevertheless, the confluence of several practitioners in urban enclaves of high social complexity, recognized as peripheral, where several practitioners have their homes and celebrate festive activities,<sup>6</sup> is used in the media to link the idea of otherness and marginality with the Rastafarian presence. Therefore, another collaboration between the Rastafari and the scene consists of supporting recording the videos in disadvantaged areas of the urban fabric with high social complexity.

### In Way of Conclusion

The present research fits into the contemporary study angle on subculturalism and music. One of the scenes represented is made up of producers and consumers who socialize around capitals of artists, music and slang close to reggaeton and other surrounding genres. Where scene members dress or dream of dressing in the sparkling style of this symbolic audio-visual universe, and where sex, consumer society and entertainment, to cite just three examples, can break down the barriers of macro-socially regulated morality to express already naturalized meanings attached to the world of the marginal. On the other hand, those who choose rap, reggae and their mixture, prefer to develop cultural capitals related to usually critical contents, in which the significance of race occupies a central place, which is embodied in their everyday visual style.

The relationship between producers and consumers of the two scenes reveals that the urban scene is not as homogeneous as those who immerse themselves in its creative practices seem to consider it to be. In the same way, on each side of it, the differentiated appropriation of capital and competencies leads to varying intensities of participation, ranging from circumstantial members to committed ones. Three types of participants have been analysed: the producers of the reggaeton scene, who are at the core of it; the street dancers, who are members that are sometimes integrated and sometimes distant from

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6 An interviewed Rasta alluded to these festivities, and highlighted their location in the peripheral communities of the city with marginal stereotypical accents. They commented on their potential as a spontaneous domestic occurrence of community participation, unlike other places represented as quiet or residential neighbourhoods.

the reggaeton scene; and the Rastas, whose culture, although not born from musical practices, is a significant contributing factor to the rap-reggae scene due to the importance that its cultists give to this music.

The results discussed here should be considered against the backdrop of the Cuba of today, with its economic deficiencies, political problems and global epidemic. All of these elements influence the constant mutation of relationships between producers and consumers, and in which life in the networks is a new point of contrast, despite the high cost of the Internet connection. In addition, the collectives of the scenes analysed could also be considered in a comparative perspective with other communities. The urban scenes of Brazil, for example, and their links with the visuality of the favela could be closer to the Cuban and local reggaeton realities than is thought. The hip hop community, in another space of the continent, could also have links with the self-accentuated Caribbean identity of the producers of rap-reggae. Other analytical projections could study the translocal nature of these music scenes, enriched by their diaspora, or the definition of “urbanity” of these scenes based on the thinking of both the producers and researchers on the subject. These topics could nurture the *a posteriori* reflection on socio-musical phenomena in a translocal Cuban context.

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