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## “You Can’t Buy My Life”: Calle 13, the representations of the continent in the Latinoamérica musical narrative and the ambiguous Puerto Rican context

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## Abstract

The present article reflects on the complexity of the sociocultural context involving Puerto Rico and the Latin American identity. To do so, I construct a contextual analysis about the representations mapped in the musical narrative of *Latinoamerica*, by the group Calle 13. From a multidisciplinary perspective, I apply theorists such as Lefèbvre (1980), Quijano (1993; 2000), Hall (1998) and Janotti Jr. (2005) to discuss music products in the media sphere, constituting themselves as spaces that, when related to themes like Modernity and national and cultural identification, engender historical ideological tensions and disputes.

## Keywords

Puerto Rico; Latin American identity; Representations; Musical Narrative; New Latin American Song.

## Introduction

We are immersed in a global pop culture. We identify ourselves with a universe of innumerable references from music, movies, television and every possible media. We share signifiers that overcome borders, generations, gender, religion, etc. Contemporary culture is composed by a web of significant and signifiers woven together in a temporal dimension formed by political, social, cultural, economic and historical structures whose characteristics are visible and detectable on the sources of media processes.

How can music reflect ideological disputes related to identity construction and political and social hegemony? I tried to investigate this question through the song *Latinoamérica*, by the Puerto-Rican hip-hop *Calle 13*, from the 2011 album "*Entren los que quieran*". The work was released in a decisive moment for the political future of Puerto Rico, a Free State associated to the United States of America (as a semi-autonomous territory). Under a multidisciplinary perspective, I have done the analysis of the representations of Latin America in the musical narrative<sup>1</sup> in debate and its correlation to the Puerto-Rican situation, talking about how the identity theme presented here is crossed by projects of social and political transformation.

## Musical Narratives, identity and representations

Based on the idea by Napolitano (1998), a historian who studies cultural themes, that the analytical action on a musical creation demands an attention to the text (the lyrics), context and pretext of production, I intended to do research comprising the study of the song *Latinoamérica* and its surroundings in media culture. According to Kellner (2011), cultural products present an ideological dimension relating to struggles and different kinds of interests (economical and financial, political, etc.). One must bear in mind the criticism towards the messages in order to understand how the production, reproduction and mobilization of representations incur in processes of identification, in order to extract the structure of power, the hegemony, and the resistance acts related to the sociocultural climate. This should be understood in a context, in which elements such as time and memory are related to the existing sociopolitical order.

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen not to analyze the video clip of the song in order to focus more attentively on the musical media production, according to what is known as mass popular music – the audiovisual production of the song has its own interpretation, shown in exquisite imagery, however, it would deviate the attention from historical, social and political aspects that I intended to approach (although it certainly is a part of the media ecosystem to which the song belongs).

Culture and media build a structure of reality which may be thought of as a narrative. According to Ricoeur (1997), these are processes which integrate elements in a web and which work to compose an internal and an external significance, positioning it in reference to a wider web. Morigi and Bonotto (2004), when discussing the narratives in music, considered that they cross the dimensions of the intelligible and sensible experience, and the meanings that it disseminates bring the configurations of the context of generation. They also constitute a source of knowledge related to social investigations and also as a reference on culture, identity and memory belonging to a social group, as in the case of a traditionalist collection of songs.

[...] musical narrative, when expressing collective feelings through a metaphorical and poetical language, is a part of the culture and the history of a people. But because it is of a poetical and metaphorical nature, the musical narrative carries not only a rational significance, but also an affective one (Morigi, Bonotto, 2004, p. 148).

From the musical narrative in a media environment, I have projected the investigation of the representations which composed the song *Latinoamérica* using a multidisciplinary approach. Considering a popular song as a mass product (as a media product) Janotti, Jr. (2004) draws an analytical cartography structured in the investigation of music genre, performance, affection and rhythm which has helped in the construction of this research. Although I have not applied Janotti, Jr.'s structure in a schematic manner, I have used his ideas in the examination of *Calle 13's* song, with the processes involved in the production and consumption of sonographic media products in the background.

The investigation of the aspects shown in *Latinoamérica* should be focused on the construction of the representations that it mobilizes, widely related to references in the Latin American world. I have applied the concept of representation developed by Lefèbvre (1980) in which the author argues that the power of these sociocognitive structures is in their own existence, a reality/ ideal: they are formulated as a presence in absentia, caused by the existence of affections and knowledge related to them. "Small worlds, both internal (to the 'subjects'), and external (objective because they are social and because they include relationships with the 'objects')" (Lefèbvre, 1980). Representations have, at the same time, social, psychological and political nature. As a way of mediation between two instances they are facts derived from words and social practices, and they realize the illusion of totality in which the social world is based upon: they form contents, they act in the composition of meanings, and because they are related to language, they have a special place in social practices. Lefèbvre (1980) postulates a three-way conception for understanding these representations, connecting life

experiences (subjectivity, social interactions) and perceptions (theoretical institutionalized knowledge) to what is conceived (that which results and structures this contact), implying a dynamic of representative, representation, and represented. The act of representing expresses the conceptions that different social groups have about themselves and about others.

The adherence to certain values is intrinsic to hegemonic positions: every representation has values motivated by what is sensible. According to Lefèbvre, the set of representations whose composition abdicates the sphere of living experiences is formulated as an ideology. The representational abstraction should be understood by the convergence to concrete terms, as institutions, archetypes and symbols – in the case here presented the belonging to a certain identity of national bias. Frith (1996) noted that identity is always an ideal, and that the musical dimension allows for a real experience of what this utopia could be. Values, practices, experiences, ethics, and aesthetics structure a primordial interpretative horizon to understand this relationship. The author argues that music is the cultural product with the highest capacity for transcending geographic borders and defining places, which determines the importance of understanding the dimension of territory that musical expression brings.

### “Urban music”: the sound myriad in *Calle 13*

Exploring the representations in music production, we focus now on the song *Latinoamérica*, by the Puerto Rican duo *Calle 13*, from the 2011 album “*Entren los que quieran*”. The duo was formed in 2004 by the half-brothers René Pérez Joglar (Resident) and Eduardo Cabra Martínez (Visitor) and it had the regular participation of Ileana Cabra Joglar (PG-13). The group recorded five albums between 2005 and 2014 and was awarded with five Grammys and 19 Latin Grammys. In 2015 they disbanded and their former members went on solo careers. The group was known for mixing different genres and styles, such as rap rock, reggaeton, cumbia, candombe, ska, among others. Since it was difficult to label *Calle 13* in a single genre, the duo was defined, by part of the press, as “urban music”. The term is mostly due to the mix of rap and reggaeton, dominant genres in forming their identity – they are both considered to be periphery musical movements that ended up reaching different social strata after they were appropriated by the cultural industry.

To better understand the issue it is useful to read Janotti Jr. (2004). The author highlights the understanding of musical genre definitions as pieces interwoven in different processes related to contemporary music composing – they

constitute tendencies to establishing value of the products, implying forms of referential definitions connected to values of different tones (aesthetical, cultural, historical, etc.) which Janotti Jr. relates to economical rules (steering of the public to certain niches) semiotics (strategies of production of meaning) and formal and technical (related to reception and production of experiences).

So, in a broader sense, Calle 13 can be included in the hip-hop movement, whose musical expression is hip-hop, but it also includes break dancing and graffiti (Azevedo, 2001; Barbosa, 2005). Rap has emerged as a form of expressing resistance by the black population in the USA in the 1960's and 1970's but from the 1980's on it was incorporated into the mainstream (and market) culture. However, several aspects of the genre have remained attached to an imaginary ideal of oppression and rebellion, which is a factor for its popularity among periphery social groups in several parts of the globe. The manner of enunciating the verses seeks a direct, fast and blunt way of conveying the message (RAP stands for rhythm and poetry). Its power as a cultural expression is based on its origin as well as its appropriation by several different societies, and the combination of music and speech gives rise to a wide array of meanings. Its essence – the core of cultural attributes – has kept the need for mobilizing representations allusive to the original themes, such as social oppression, the hardships of living on the outskirts of large cities and racial discrimination.

The economic and cultural repercussion of Rap music lays in its capacity of touching the audience and reaching the social dimension as well as aiding in the construction of recognizing an identity based on individual and collective experiences translated into music. Self-recognition in rap means to recognize oneself in a history of inequality shown in a cultural product born in the margins of the mainstream discourse. The process of sense making in the consumption of rap is different depending on the location, and in the case of Calle 13, Latin hip-hop is the main reference, being recognized in any large city of the continent.

The theme of life in Puerto Rico and the use of elements from Latin American music genres are evident in their work mainly through elements of reggaeton. *Reguetón*, as it is known in Spanish-speaking countries, is an adaptation of the word reggaeton. It appeared in the 1960's and 1970's due to the transnational flux of people through the Caribbean, Latin America and the USA. It originated mainly from the Jamaican rhythms reggae and dancehall and it has a great influence from Afro-Panamanian musicians from the 1980's. The cultural exchange in the migration waves of thousands of Puerto-Rican citizens to the city of New York allowed the rhythm to arrive in the islands. According to Molina (2015), the genre, similarly to rap, can be considered a "hidden transcription", because it uses "native

tongue, idioms, satire and masked cultural codes to present a different perspective of the Latin experience in the USA" (2015, p. 122). Reguetón flourished in the recording sessions made in *marquesinas*, home studios in the areas around San Juan and other cities. The genre has become successful in uncovering social problems in the population, even to the point where it reaches the middle class and the elites.

The understanding of the main musical influences of the duo is relevant for the analysis of *Latinoamérica*, not because it confirms the musical trajectory of Calle 13, but especially because it is an aesthetically different creation. The work has a sonority and a theme close to the movement *Nueva Canción Latinoamericana*, also known as "protest songs" from the 1960's and 70's. The vocal lead Residente has stated that he was inspired by the Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa when he wrote the song.

*Nueva Canción* successfully integrates local and international cultural elements. The influence of different cultures from different countries has brought visibility for popular music from Argentina through Mercedes Sosa and Atahualpa Yupanqui, from Chile through Violeta Parra, from Uruguay through Alfredo Zitarrosa and Los Olimareños, and from Mexico through Amparo Ochoa. The dialogue among different heritages enables the construction of projects of artistic integration with a continental bias, with national and regional identities at play. It stimulates the building of transnational networks of new configurations of politics and culture.

The renovation and updating of the repertoire of folk music allows for the traditional sounds to remain, but with innovations brought about by contemporary references. There is the appropriation of social themes, such as the denunciation of the hardships faced by urban and rural workers, which contributes for a more pronounced politization. Most of the Latin American countries in the 1960's were ruled by dictatorial governments and many musicians were persecuted. In addition to that, *Nueva Canción* exposed the relevance of cultural domain in the discussion of revolutionary strategies: popular music is seen as a means of expressing ideas and art as an instrument of awareness, of intervention in the public space and the massive broadcast of political ideals.

## Complex identities: Latin America and Puerto Rico

The understanding of the narrative told in *Latinoamérica* demands a study on what exactly is the Latin American identity, and the complex relationship Puerto Ricans have with the main land. I have transversally examined the issues involved in the constitution of the universes of Latin America and Puerto Rico in order to

understand this identity in the midst of historical interpretations and political processes. Ultimately, I have advanced the questioning of the reasoning behind structural Cosmo visions.

## Latin America: heterogeneous unity

In order to try and understand *Latinoamérica* by Calle 13, it was necessary to examine the historical and sociopolitical process of formation of Latin America and study the mixed elements in the identitary formation sung by the Puerto Rican musicians. According to Rouquié (1991), the group of countries colonized by Portugal and Spain, in opposition to Anglo Saxon America, was labeled Latin due to the influence of France and French language upon the elites of the New World. However, the Latin strata of society was that of the oligarchs and those in power, and "*los de abajo*" (native populations and trafficked African slaves) were very distant from power, and had a negative perception of it. Colonization, initially, was marked by the disputes between the kingdoms of Portugal and Spain, with markedly different processes, especially in view of the more mercantilist and less religious character of the Portuguese. However, Fernandes (1998) stated that, economically, the differences were almost nonexistent: the Latin American elites had the same motivation and acted similarly.

An aristocratic, oligarchic or plutocratic organization of society would always mean an extreme concentration of wealth, social prestige and power in the hands of a few privileged people. Consequently, the political institutionalization of power was achieved by the permanent exclusion of the people and the conscious sacrifice of a democratic lifestyle. (Fernandes, 1998, p. 95)

The settlers kept a social order of subservience to the interests of the metropolis. Exploration, as time went by, became secondary, because of the less developed economy of Iberic countries, which were financed mainly by Venice, Holland and Great Britain. After the independences in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the former financiers became "partners" of the newly created nations, at the same time when the United States became the power nation of the continent. In this context, the elites had a pivotal role in affirming the position of Latin America in the world.

The effort needed to alter the whole infrastructure of the economy seemed to be so difficult and so expensive that (...) the elites in power preferred to choose a secondary and dependent economic role, accepting as an advantage the perpetuation of the economical structures established in the previous regime (Fernandes, 1998, p. 98)



The establishment of multinational corporations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the beginning of corporate capitalism was seen as an impulse for development but it also positioned Latin America in a role of servitude in the global economy – modernization is encouraged, but not autonomy. According to Fernandes (1998), lagging and the “unbreakable” bonds with the economically powerful nations are the portrait of the region. Rouquié (1991) considered that traits such as concentration of land ownership, singularity of modernization processes and prominent regional contrasts are characteristics of the region. Their unity might be observed in a “collective destiny forged by parallel evolutions, the same cultural belonging to the Western world and a multiform dependency to a unique center in the same continent” (Rouquié, 1991, p. 30).

## The case of Puerto Rico

The origin of Puerto Rico as a political unity in the historical background of the formation of Latin America dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century – with the defeat of Spain by the United States in the war of 1898 the islands became a North American protectorate. Their citizens, since 1917, have American citizenship and they have the right to vote in American elections provided that they reside in American territories. In 1952 Puerto Rico became an unincorporated territory, which, according to Baggio (1998), grants a certain autonomy but also keeps a certain colonial dimension in their relationship, for the islands are neither a state in the federation nor are they an independent nation. Although they are allowed to have a Constitution, the government of San Juan is subject to the Congress of the United States through a territorial clause: their sovereignty is subject to American legislative and the islands’ powers are revocable.

According to Meléndez (1993), the USA have implemented from the beginning of their presence in Puerto Rico an agenda of “Americanization”: aiding the development of political, economical and social institutions in accordance to their own interests. The measures were implemented with two prerogatives: the irreversibility of the annexation of Puerto Rico to the USA, and the need to attach Puerto Rican society to the USA. This Americanization was based on the “notion of superiority of American society and Anglo-Saxon race (...). Puerto Rico, of ‘tropical’ and Latin lineage should be immersed in the Anglo-Saxon ‘spirit’” (Meléndez, 1993, p. 56). These measures ranged from the establishment of economic relations to attempts to impose English as the official language, which strained the relations between government and subjects, and fanned the flames of the independence movement.

American administration was strongly against the independence movement, saying that the project was both undesirable and infeasible. Among the justifications given were the small size of the territory, a “scarce and undeveloped” population, the lack of natural and technological resources, a supposed incapacity to self-determination in government together with the “Latin tradition” of non-democratic governments and the incapacity to military self-defense, according to Meléndez (1993). With the non-incorporation to the USA, the islands are in an institutional limbo: they are neither annexed to the power to which they are “associated” nor do they have any prospect of being a sovereign nation.

Puerto Rican reality has peculiar elements in the context of Latin America: a country twice colonized, in different periods, by two countries with different cultures. Puerto Rico is deeply contradictory: they have a mixed and creole culture, with strong roots in Spain and in Africa, and also an economic and political subordination to the United States. How to remain Puerto Rican without political sovereignty? (Baggio, 1998, p. 8)

The view of Baggio on the complex Puerto Rican identity allows us to reflect on the representations of Latin America in the text we are analyzing here, for the disputes between those in favor of independence and those in favor of annexation keep shaping local reality. In 2012 a referendum was held, with two questions: on the first, about the change of the territory’s legal status, 54% of the population demanded the end of the model of freely associated state; on the second, 61% of the population supported the integration to the USA as the 51<sup>st</sup> State (33.3% wanted the free association and 5.5% were in favor of total independence). The islands’ elected leader, Alejandro García Padilla, recommended that the second question should be left blank, as a sign of protest.

However, the referendum was not binding, and despite the sympathetic declarations of the then President Barack Obama, the issue is far from resolved. One of the problems is the resistance of some American Congressmen to allow Puerto Rican citizens free access to the USA. Contrary to the logic of the 2012 referendum, the Puerto Rican Senate approved in 2015 a law that established Spanish as their primary official language, leaving English as a secondary language – in 1993 English had been declared as their official language, even though the vast majority of the population does not speak it.

Another referendum took place in 2017, and 97% of the people were in favor of the annexation. Only 23% of the registered voters participated, which exposed low confidence and low motivation in the electoral process. These two events, in 2012 and 2017, are part of a long list: since 1951, 14 referendums were held. Meanwhile, the United States Congress will not end the quarrel, which leaves

Puerto Ricans as second class citizens. They pay taxes, but they receive fewer funds than the American states, and they can only vote in presidential elections if they are residing in American territory.

## Distinct rationalities, different temporalities

The facts previously exposed by the political and economic rationality are extremely relevant to highlight the historical concept of colonialist dimension, in which the Western world, as the universal reference, is taken as the parameter for normality. Quijano (1993) observed that the instrumental reason raised in the Modern Age causes all the other dissonant thinking to be considered non-rational (primitive, backward), and the teleological interpretation of reality induces a perception of an “underdeveloped” or “developing” space, terms that indicate a biological state of inferiority. The relationship between the metropolis and the colonies, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, suffers the consequences of the establishment of Modern thinking as the parameter for social subjectivity: modern rationality brings promises of freedom as well as new ways of domination. Everything that does not conform to the “modernization” process becomes a problem for the hegemonic instrumental reason, defined by Quijano (1993) as the association between reason and domination.

The establishment of nations in the Latin-American continent is tensioned by the hegemonic conformation to the Western referential. According to Quijano (2002), it was articulated on four main axes: the colonialism of power and its relation to race; capitalism as a global system of social exploitation; State (and the contemporary Nation-State) as the core of collective authority; and euro centrism as the hegemonic system for controlling subjectivity/intersubjectivity, mainly in the construction of knowledge. In these crossings we are able to see several processes of building of identity – the concept of emotional belonging to a country is the primordial concept for the institution and the legitimacy of a national state.

National identity is a way of organization that has appeared intrinsically connected to Modernity and markedly reproduces itself as the continuity of a pre-modern community. According to Hall (1998), national identity is a discourse in charge of building narratives of a common understanding of what “nation” means. The construction of national identification is supported by emotion, in what is considered to be significant in the illusory understanding of reality. In the case of nationality, the formation of a set of referentials goes through the concept of “national spirit”, a cosmovision that may establish as primordial the conformation of a sovereign political structure that expresses the desire for self-determination of a

people. Like every identitary dimension, it is a delimitation of “us” and “them”, an indication of alterity.

Here we can begin to understand the representations in *Latinoamérica*, a process that begins with the knowledge that the sociocultural multiplicity in the continent is one of its main elements. Quijano (1993, p. 23) states that the latin-american identity is “a complex history of coming up with new historical meanings stemming from legitimate multiple heritages of rationality”. The different groups that make up latin-american societies bring different perspectives and interpretations of reality supported by their own cognitive matrixes. Their composition is a social and historical process that originates particular manners of consciousness about time, memory, self and others. Time, which in the history of Europe and the USA is perceived as a sequence – Kant’s unstoppable march of the human spirit – in the history of Latin America fuses together sequence and simultaneity.

The amalgam of temporalities may be apprehended in the process of the mixing of the races, a common trait in Latin population. The different religious beliefs are syncretic, the cultural heritages are mixed together, and musical rhythms influence one another and fuse together in new ones. However, hegemonic systems of power – political, economic and sociocultural – reflect the historic colonial makeup of the territory of Latin America. The attempt to escape this structural configuration (or, in a way, create an alternative) in a localized situation – the semi-autonomous state of Puerto Rico – is the main basis for the narrative contained in *Latinoamérica*.

## Representations in *Latinoamérica*

In terms of sound, *Latinoamérica* sourced its references directly from the movement Nueva Canción. Although the vocals by Residente are mainly sung in the style of rap, there are several varieties of singing, and special appearances by Totó La Momposina, from Colombia, Susana Bacca, from Peru, and Maria Rita, from Brazil, which are examples of the importance of melodic singing. In addition to that, the combination of orchestra and folk instruments from the continent (such as *marimba*, *charango* and *cajón*), played by the Argentinian musician Gustavo Santaolalla, produces a sound with lyrical nuances that seem to get closer from an ode to nature, which is many times sung in the lyrics, turning away from the urban tones in most of the group’s previous works. The dimension of the senses is heard in different moments, when the percussion dominates the melody and emulates a beating heart.

The work has a first person narrator, as if Latin America itself were singing its history. The voice of the continent focuses in three main themes: a) people's struggle; b) the consequences of exploitation; and c) the strength of nature. These themes motivate the formation, reproduction and mobilization of meanings in a historical and contemporary panorama, integrated by customs and traditions: it is from these social and cultural practices that collective characteristics and ideals can be seen. Social, cultural, political, historical, and economical references are not shown in a chronological line, but they are distributed along the song, forming a particular universe of reality, in which the importance of events is given by the territory itself.

I have observed the formation of eight representational matrixes of meaning, composed by social and natural events, processes or phenomena textually described: social and economic exploitation; nature/climate; geography; resistance/courage; customs/culture; politics/history; community; and mercantilization. The first verses show two dimensions essential for understanding the narrative and the representations we have mapped:

*Soy, soy lo que dejaron  
Soy toda la sobra de lo que se robaron  
Un pueblo escondido en la cima  
Mi piel es de cuero, por eso aguanta cualquier clima  
Soy una fábrica de humo  
Mano de obra campesina para tu consumo*

In these first verses, the Puerto-Rican singer simply states "I am" and then completes his thoughts by saying "I am what they have left behind; I am the leftovers of what they have stolen". The first statement is an affirmation of a Latin American identity, and then, as a consequence, to be formed as a result of exploitation. Then, Residente alludes to the people's resistance, but also to the view of workers as disposable individuals in the gears of production. This perception is a constant: the resilience of Latin people in the face of the disrespect of their rights and the low value of their lives in the sum of power relations, especially in the economic and political spheres.

The situation is synthetized later in the verse "I am the raw flesh of development", that highlights the consequences of instrumental rationality in the notion of economic development, in which seeking market value obscures the exploitation of inequality –keeping these socioeconomically inequalities is the basis of this project. The denial of a purely material existence, based on consumption, is evident in the affirmation of the importance of nature in the Latin way of life, and in their customs and beliefs. The chorus, sung by Totó La Momposina, Susana Baca

and Maria Rita, tries to make it clear that in the strength of nature resides the core of resistance and the strength of the people from the continent.

*Tú no puedes comprar el viento  
Tú no puedes comprar el sol  
Tú no puedes comprar la lluvia  
Tú no puedes comprar el calor  
Tú no puedes comprar las nubes  
Tú no puedes comprar los colores  
Tú no puedes comprar mi alegría  
Tú no puedes comprar mis dolores*

On the subject of nature, there is a dynamic of topophilia – the natural resources of the continent are seen as divine gifts. The lyrics talk about the elements – rain, cold weather, mountains, the Sun, wind, the ocean – as unique and special natural manifestations. The sun that shines on the continent is the brightest, the wind gently combs their hair, the snow is the mountains' make-up, the lungs breathe the purest of airs, etc.

The political undertones are the main theme, and in the final part this message is stronger. In relation to the characteristics of performance such as those cited by Janotti Jr (2004), the process of “corporification” of the voice is more notable in the singing, implied in the interpretative personalization of the sound message. Music takes over emotion in the extent that Residente's singing becomes stronger when he talks about the community ties that give strength to the Latin American people and allow them to survive exploitation, giving them the ability to face the hardest of adversities (in the metaphor of *marullos*, the tides) – the body of the singer, in his intonation and rhythm, is an important part in the structure of the message. The apex is the valorization of the courage of those who fought against authoritarianism, in a direct reference to Operation Condor, an action of political repression and State sponsored terrorism coordinated by the South American dictatorial regimes and the CIA. The power in the North is the hidden interlocutor whom the singer addresses:

*Trabajo bruto, pero con orgullo  
Aquí se comparte, lo mío es tuyo  
Este pueblo no se ahoga con marullo  
Y se derrumba yo lo reconstruyo  
Tampoco pestañeo cuando te miro  
Para que te recuerde de mi apellido  
La operación Condor invadiendo mi nido  
Perdono pero nunca olvido (¡oye!)*

The closing verses are sung by the guest singers, and Maria Rita (the only Brazilian) sings in Portuguese (“voices of one single heart”). The panoramas are

conjoined: the call to action against inequality and exploitation is also a call for the *borícuas* to integrate themselves to the Latin-American space, interpreting the story narrated here as their own.

*Vamos caminando*  
*Aquí se respira lucha*  
*Vamos caminando*  
*Yo canto porque se escucha*  
*Vamos dibujando el camino*  
*(Vozes de um só coração)*  
*Aquí estamos de pie*  
*¡Que viva la América!*  
*No puedes comprar mi vida*

### The Puerto Rican “latinidad” in Calle 13

It is symptomatic that the last verse in *Latinoamérica* is “you can’t buy my life”, especially considering that the song strongly criticizes the rationale behind the consumerist society. However, the political affiliations of Calle 13’s members allow us to deepen the analysis of the representations about the context of the island. Half-brothers René Pérez Joglar (Residente), singer and writer, and Eduardo Cabra Martínez (Visitante), musician, come from a politically active middle class family in San Juan. Residente’s mother, Flor Joglar de Gracia, is an actress who was a militant in the sovereignty movement *Juventud Independentista Universitaria*, she married Reinaldo Pérez Ramírez, Visitante’s father, a lawyer who was also a musician and writer, and who was president of *Juventud Independentista* and a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (he also participated in international brigades in Nicaragua, during the Nicaraguan revolution, and in Cuba).

The political view of Calle 13 seems to have been reinforced by Residente’s experiences as a student in the USA and in Spain. The singer openly supports independence and has given several interviews in which he has criticized the difference in treatment towards his fellow countrymen. In Residente’s opinion, the United States have an agenda to keep Puerto Ricans away from the rest of Latin America, which can be observed in the media products that are exported to the islands and in an educational system that is intended to whitewash the Latin heritage. Ever since their first hit song, *Querido FBI* [Dear FBI], in 2005, that criticized the American Bureau for the assassination of leftist leader Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, the position of Calle 13 against the neocolonial relationship is blunt. However, in “*Entren los que quieran*” (2011), the theme of independence is more apparent.

Right before the referendum in 2012, the vocalist sent a letter<sup>2</sup> to the then president of Argentina, Cristina Kirchner, affirming to speak for the countrymen who “fought for the independence of Puerto Rico, for those who are still behind bars because of that, for those who lost their lives in this fight and for those of us who are now carrying their torch”. In the same period, in an interview to the Belgian newspaper “*Mondiaal Nieuws*”, he exposed his opinion on the relationship between the islands and the Latin American continent:

Many Puerto Ricans don't understand why I want to make a connection between Puerto Rico and Latin America. We are born like that, with the invaders in front of us, and we are raised with that. The USA wants to sell us Latin America as a fucked-up continent. But it is well developed, a lot of things work better there than in Puerto Rico<sup>3</sup>.

In 2017, in an interview to the website “*El Reportero*”<sup>4</sup>, René Joglar questioned the North-American inertia and arrogance towards the islands. “They don't do anything. What are they going to do with Puerto Rico, which is, for them, nothing but a small island where there are only lizards and monkeys?” In another conversation<sup>5</sup> with the press, during a promotional event for his solo work, he said:

We can't depend on the United States. We don't want to be that half of the couple who needs to ask for money and permission to the other, for everything. We already know that Washington abandons their states when they are in trouble: it happened to New Orleans, to Detroit, to Michigan. Imagine how important they think an associated free state is.

Taking the tripartite concept by Lefèbvre (1980) – we can state that the life experiences lived by Calle 13 have an expressive impact on the production of *Latinoamérica*. They were raised in a family of independence activists; they had contact with ideas, customs, and values that are distant from the American ideology, especially linked to the interests of the local economic and political elites. The conservative view, in favor of the USA, is in opposition to the independence ideals, more related to left wing groups – the case of their father is example of that.

The formation of one's political views is frequently influenced by the social environment a person comes from. In addition to the independence movement heritage, in the case of Calle 13, we can also observe the preoccupation with formal

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.clarin.com/politica/calle-cristina-colonial-puerto-rico\\_0\\_rJ3WDHXhvXg.html](https://www.clarin.com/politica/calle-cristina-colonial-puerto-rico_0_rJ3WDHXhvXg.html)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.mo.be/artikel/puerto-ricanse-calle-13-klaar-om-europa-te-veroveren>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <http://elreporterosf.com/residente-comparte-su-vision-sobre-la-independencia-de-pr/>

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2017-05-05/residente-rene-perez-calle-13-separacion-disco\\_1377460/](https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2017-05-05/residente-rene-perez-calle-13-separacion-disco_1377460/)



education and the artistic vein. Residente and Visitante come from the working middle-class from Alto Trujillo neighborhood, where they lived near artists and musicians. Given the choice, the half-brothers chose the artistic path through formal education: Eduardo studied at *Conservatorio de Puerto Rico*, where he joined an instrumental group in the *Bayanga* project, which allowed him to tour abroad, mainly to the Caribbeans, Central America and the USA; René, after graduating from the School of Visual Arts in San Juan, got a scholarship in the American Savannah College of Art and Design. After that, he went to Barcelona, Spain, where he got involved in cinema.

The international period for Residente and Visitante seems to have given rise to the perception that, being a state with no definite legal status, Puerto Ricans are fundamentally incomplete. The contact with people who have national identities resulted in an experience of radical alterity symbolized by the foreign individual; however, Puerto Rican natives cannot define themselves through a national identity. They have less rights than the North American citizens, and culturally they do not see themselves (and they are not seen) as part of the United States. Language, customs, music, memories: in the case of the *borícuas*, these elements come from a universe of Latin symbolism. It is possible to outline, at least in part, the process of empathy by the members of Calle 13 in relation to the Latin American dimension: musicians with roots in the independence movement, who were raised in an environment of cultural effervescence, and who, in their international experiences, beyond sharing cultural references with people from different countries, also are considered to be foreign by those who control them politically.

This wide array of references evokes, in *Latinoamérica*, the production, reproduction and mobilization of representations based in a communal ideology, opposed to the individualism of instrumental reason which sustains the exploitation in their colonial and capitalist forms. In this ideal continent, people live in a cooperative manner, supporting each other in the face of adversity. There is also a communion with nature, in a way that it even helps define a people's identity. This is one of the main political claims of the song: there is a metaphysical relation between people and land that makes this place different from all the others – although it is not expressed; it is a clear allusion to the idea of *Pachamama* [Mother Earth]. Due to this entanglement, one can celebrate the goals scored by Argentinian soccer player Diego Maradona against England in the 1986 World Cup or to feel compassion towards the victims of persecution during the dictatorial regimes in Latin American countries. At the same time, it is not possible for the

“other side” to buy the clouds, the wind, the colors, the joys and the pain: they cannot buy these lives.

## Final Considerations

Analyzing musical works in a media perspective is to outline a path in which many elements cross: objective aspects, such as the ideas expressed by the lyrics; and subjective dimensions, perceived in the effect they cause. Musical works bring identity elements, historical context, concepts of life and of the world, to be understood as well as felt.

Musical production, in the condition of cultural and media objects, present ideological structures and express several symbolic struggles. Sometimes they bring explicit positioning on a given subject, as is the case of *Latinoamérica*. Considered to be an ode to the continent, the song has a purpose to create, domestically, identification between Puerto Ricans and the continental environment. The approximation to the movement *Nueva Canción* in its way of articulating the political and artistic spheres is evident especially by the change in musical style by Calle 13 for the production of the song.

The relation between individual and collective identification, and music, may be one of the principal forms of visible manifestation of the differences in cultural contexts. When it cites the ideological differences among Latin Americans, *Latinoamérica* comes as a narrative about an exploited territory which, however, is rich in the union of its natural characteristics and the strength of its inhabitants – “*un pueblo sin piernas pero que camina*” [a people without legs but who nevertheless still walks]. But, when focusing on the continental spectrum, Calle 13’s aim is on their small territory: in spite of their bonds to the USA, their heart – always present in the song through percussion sounds – repeals the world view represented by the powerful USA. In this sense, making Puerto Rico independent is ambiguous. The conquest of sovereignty, in the more modern meaning of the word, both presupposes and results in the approximation to a mythical conformation that unites the peoples, from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego. In a sense, the idea that it would be possible to have a structure that unifies millions of people under one identity, as it is presupposed by the discourse that sustains any Nation State.

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