WHAT KIND OF NATION? WHAT KIND OF MUSIC?: GENRE, AESTHETICS, AND NATIONALISM IN PUERTO RICAN HIP HOP

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ABSTRACT

(Under the direction of Michael Figueroa)

Puerto Rico’s status in relation to the United States has been fraught since 1898, when it became a US territory. Despite declining support on the Island for political independence, the rhetoric of independence has continued to hold a prominent place in public discourse and cultural production. In this thesis, I argue that Puerto Rican rap acts as a discursive field in which the idea of an independent Puerto Rican nation is shaped and contested. I first examine the politics of genre, focusing on Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Calle 13 as case studies highlighting the significance that genre has for the reception of musical representations of the nation. I then turn to an analysis of the music of Calle 13, specifically allusion and vocal flow, as a means towards understanding how that group musically imagines a Puerto Rico that aligns with the ideals of the Puerto Rican Independence Party.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about hip hop and its relationship to nationalism on the Island of Puerto Rico. The stakes are high given that Puerto Rican nationalism operates almost entirely within the cultural sphere—support for political independence has been consistently waning since the 1930s. A distinct Puerto Rican culture is thus understood by many nationalists on the Island as the strongest bulwark against total assimilation into the United States. Music, as Puerto Rico’s most visible cultural export—signifying the Island for both non-Puerto Ricans and the large Puerto Rican diaspora—provides a discursive field central to the imagining of the nation. Many artists, including some discussed in this thesis, are aware of music’s potential as a political space in which the imagined Puerto Rican nation can be shaped and contested. This imagining can be performed in part through the literal content of the lyrics. Some artists choose to engage directly with sociopolitical themes and issues in their lyrics—in what I refer to as explicitly political songs—while others perform songs with less direct engagement with sociopolitical issues.

Additionally, genre and aesthetics can be means through which artists articulate the nation. The two are related—aesthetics are often used to define genre and genre often dictates aesthetics—but neither can be reduced to the other. In twenty-first century Puerto Rico, the importance of genre is demonstrated by the contested relationship between reggaeton and hip hop. Despite aesthetic similarities, artists such as Calle 13 and Tego Calderón—as well as their fans—are conscientious in the ways that they position themselves in relation to genre. As will be seen in Chapter 1, there are political stakes to this genre negotiation, just as there are to musical aesthetics. If genre indexes its community of performers and listeners, aesthetics can act as icon,
suggesting characteristics of the imagined nation, as well as increase engagement on the part of listeners. In this thesis, I argue that an examination of genre and aesthetics in Puerto Rican rap reveals some of the tensions inherent in the Island’s nationalism. In addition to crafting political lyrics, artists take advantage of rap’s extra-linguistic features to articulate a more affective idea of the Puerto Rican nation.

A Brief Historical Sketch:

Nationalist rhetoric in modern Puerto Rico draws heavily on the Island’s history as a Spanish colony. For independentistas, those in favor of a politically independent Puerto Rico, this Spanish origin serves as one of the primary proscriptions to continuing political association, in whatever form, with the Anglo-rooted United States. The United States attempted to purchase Puerto Rico from Spain in the late nineteenth century, seeing its potential as a strategic naval position in the Caribbean, but the offer was rejected by the Spanish government. Spain was finally forced to cede the Island to the United States in 1898 following the Spanish-American War, and from that point on Puerto Rico has been subject to the rule of the US federal government. At the end of the war, the United States portrayed itself as the liberator of oppressed Spanish colonies in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, these islands merely saw one imperial power replaced by another. Although the United States eventually granted political sovereignty to Cuba and the Philippines—where there had been stronger pre-war independence movements—Puerto Rico remains a US territory. In the years immediately following Puerto Rico’s transfer to the United States, it was governed by the US Department of War, which oversaw a program of Americanization that was opposed by much of the local Puerto Rican leadership (see New York Times 1899; Tuthill 1899). This Americanization included among
other goals the replacement of Spanish with English and the development of modern capitalist structures on the Island.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Puerto Rico functioned with little autonomy. Its governor and upper legislative house were appointed by the US Congress, and although Puerto Ricans elected the members of their lower legislative chamber, there was in actuality neither self-governance nor self-determination.¹ This period also saw several attempts at political separation, with motions coming both from the Puerto Rican legislature and members of the US Congress, but each of these attempts was ultimately rejected by the US federal government. Instead, in 1917 Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship, thus tightening the social and political bond between the Island and the United States. The Island’s political status did not significantly change until 1947, when the United States granted Puerto Ricans the right to elect their own governor. In 1950, the Island was permitted to call a referendum on the adoption of a Puerto Rican constitution, which was approved two years later by a democratic majority. In accordance with this new constitution, Puerto Rico became an Associated Free State (Estado Libre Asociado, or ELA),² with the option of changing its political status at any point through a democratic referendum.³ Puerto Rico is subject to US federal laws except where specified otherwise. The ELA has a non-voting representative in the US House of Representatives who acts in an advisory role, a point of contention for many Puerto Ricans given that the Island is

1 Despite there being a semi-autonomous Puerto Rican legislature and governor, their power is limited. The US Congress still controls many of the same things that it does for US states, including: trade, treaty, immigration, broadcast regulations, and currency. The US Congress is also able to rule on the constitutionality of Puerto Rican laws and holds the authority to determine the Island’s political status.

2 In English, Puerto Rico is usually described as a Commonwealth, but this is due to a lack of appropriate English alternatives. Commonwealth does not accurately capture the nature of the Island’s political status (Diaz 2006), and so throughout this paper I use “ELA” to describe Puerto Rico’s current political status.

3 A referendum for a change of political status, even if passed by the Puerto Rican public, must still be approved and enacted by the US federal government. Even though congress has assured the Island that it would respect the outcome of such a referendum, that a change can only be enacted by congress undermines Puerto Rico’s right to self-determination.
governed by laws passed by the US Congress. Most of the local governance is carried out by a democratically elected Puerto Rican governor and bicameral legislature. This status has continued, relatively unchanged, into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

This is not to say that the status of the ELA has been uncontentious. The UN has repeatedly asserted Puerto Rico’s right, as a culturally independent nation, to democratic self-determination (Diaz 2006), and there have been four referenda on Puerto Rico’s political status since 1952. The one consistent trend in these plebiscites is that the preference for statehood increases in each successive vote. In 2012, the most recent referendum, 61.3% of voters preferred US statehood while only 5.5% favored independence (Cruz 2014). This reticence towards independence could be largely motivated by fears of economic instability (Cruz 2014; Picó 2014), but independence is also complicated by the growing social and cultural ties between Puerto Rico and the United States that are established and maintained by the almost 50% of all Puerto Ricans who live on the US mainland at any given time, many of them engaging in what Jorge Duany (2000) calls “circular, commuter, or revolving door migration:”

Circular migration can be defined operationally as a series of sequential moves in various directions for extended periods of time. This bilaterat movement of people creates a porous border zone between Puerto Rican and Nuyorican communities, which migrants continually cross and transgress, sometimes several times a year. Estimates of the volume of circular migration between the Island and the U.S. mainland range from 10 to 45 percent of the total flow. (19)

As Duany points out, this constant migratory exchange between Puerto Rico and the United States undermines conventional territorial notions of the nation.
The debate over Puerto Rico’s sovereignty—the status-question—remains unresolved in 2016.\(^4\) Rather than abating or fading into the background of political life on the Island, it has recently again become a prominent topic in public discourse. At the time of writing, Puerto Rico is experiencing an economic crisis so dire that many, including the Island’s governor, see the Island as perched on the cusp of humanitarian crisis (DeBonis 2015). The ELA is poorer than the poorest US state (Pringle 2012). Unemployment is double that of the mainland United States. Public debt has reached a level where it is no longer serviceable, and the government is struggling to provide basic services. It has begun defaulting on debt repayments, for which it anticipates lawsuits brought by creditors since, under current law, Puerto Rico is not permitted to declare bankruptcy.\(^5\) Faced with deteriorating conditions on the Island, many of those Puerto Ricans who can afford to do so are simply migrating to the mainland United States, thus making it even more difficult for the Puerto Rican government to meet its obligations.\(^6\) This leaves the Puerto Rican government with few options other than waiting for the US Congress to act on a relief package or similar program. It is likely that a Federal Control Board will be established in an attempt to take control of and guide the Island’s finances back to solvency, but even this solution cannot but highlight Puerto Rico’s lack of agency and right to self-determination (Walsh 2016a).

The Changing Nature of Nationalism on the Island:

Early in the twentieth century, there was far greater popular support for political independence (Soto-Crespo 2006), but a major shift occurred in 1946 when Luis Muñoz Marín—\(^4\) Otherwise diverse political parties often align around the status-question. It can be the distinguishing feature of an otherwise diffuse political conglomeration.\(^5\) All of this information is pulled from recent reporting in the press concerning the current Puerto Rican financial crisis. For a detailed discussion of the crisis, see Hinojosa (2016).\(^6\) This is primarily because those who can afford to leave the Island also represent the majority of the tax base.
the Puerto Rican poet and statesman, who both designed the ELA’s constitution and acted as its first governor—shocked many of his supporters by declaring that he was no longer an independentista (Azank 2012). He felt that stronger ties with the US federal government would benefit Puerto Ricans economically and socially, but was still wary of complete assimilation into the United States. Many of his critics accused him of giving up on the idea of a Puerto Rican nation, but he instead argued that rather than defining the nation as a political entity grounded in a specific geographic territory, it could be defined solely by its cultural production and practice (Soto-Crespo 2006). This approach also allows for the inclusion of the large diasporic community that self-identifies as Puerto Rican and presages the decline in independentismo’s popularity.7

Cultural nationalism did not originate with Muñoz Marín, but it had previously been integrated into the Island’s political nationalist movement. In the 1930s for example, the Generación del Treinta (Generation of 1930)—a nationalist movement comprising various poets and authors—combined both political and cultural nationalism in their ideology. They described the Puerto Rican nation as being founded on five primary premises: the Spanish language; the idea that the island territory contains the nation; origins rooted in the Island; a unique blend of Spanish, African, and indigenous history and heritage that defies US assimilation; and the Island’s unique folklore (Duany 2002).8 The first and primary characteristic in their list is language, and this emphasis on language helps to explain why music, poetry, and literature have been the primary spheres in which the Puerto Rican cultural nationalist project has operated.

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7 Significant to diasporic identity is that, unlike many other immigrant groups in the United States, Puerto Ricans tend not to use hyphenated descriptors such as Puerto Rican-American, even if they have been born and raised on the US mainland. This tendency further supports the idea of a strictly cultural foundation for the nation.

8 For a more detailed understanding of the Generación del Treinta’s ideology, see Antonio S. Pereira’s Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña (Pedreira 2001). Originally published in 1934, it is considered one of the movement’s principle texts and emphasizes a Euro-centric Puerto Rican identity.
Despite the decoupling in the 1950s—instigated by Muñoz Marín—of Puerto Rican cultural and political nationalism, the rhetoric of political nationalism continues to have an exaggerated presence in public discourse given that less than 6% of the population support independence as a feasible alternative to the ELA. Cruz (2014) offers a number of different arguments why this might be the case: the rhetoric of political nationalism helps to physically ground the more up-rooted cultural nationalism; political nationalism connects to larger intellectual trends in Latin America that see Puerto Rican independence as a moral necessity; and supporting political nationalism allows artists and individuals to tap into the cultural caché that accompanies an intellectual position at society’s periphery. These are all plausible arguments, but they alone cannot fully account for the continued presence of the rhetoric of independence in cultural production. This task is instead better accomplished by accounting for the ways in which cultural and political nationalism complement each other, and for this reason music is a fruitful field of inquiry. Music has long played a role in representing Puerto Rico. The music and culture of the jíbaro, the nineteenth-century Hispanic Puerto Rican peasant common to the Island’s interior, has long been adopted by independentistas as an icon of the nation. Later in the twentieth-century, salsa music became a sonic signifier for the Island, even though it was initially disputed due to its origins in diasporic Afro-Puerto Rican communities. But from plena and the cuatro to salsa and reggaeton, Puerto Rican musical representations have been contested by those on the Island and in the diaspora, because each is capable of presenting a different image of the nation.

Both Puerto Rican political and cultural nationalism are beset by serious problems and inconsistencies. Political nationalism risks excluding the Puerto Rican diaspora, even as it broadly includes everyone on the Island. Additionally, political independence may be seen as
impractical because of the ever-increasing reliance of the Island on the US federal government for social programs and economic stimulus; a political separation from the United States would risk pushing Puerto Rico into economic collapse at the same time that it removed the option for Puerto Ricans to leave the Island in search of economic opportunity in the mainland United States. Furthermore, a number of prominent former independentistas have left the movement precisely because they see the nationalist project as a conservative ideology that would simply shift the seat of colonial power from the US federal government to a more conservative native ruling upper-class, potentially reversing progress made on a number of progressive causes affecting disenfranchised groups such as, for example, Afro-Puerto Ricans or LGBTQ communities (Cruz 2014). Cultural nationalism is not immune to this risk, as it often tends towards an exclusionary normativity; Afro-Puerto Ricans, for example, are frequently left out of the culturally-constructed nation, especially since Puerto Rican cultural nationalism traditionally centers on the figure of the jíbaro, the inland peasant of European ancestry (Duany 2000). This exclusion reinscribes the racial hierarchies already prevalent on the Island, which privilege “white” features as an ideal. Additionally, increasingly circular migration between Puerto Rico and the United States threatens the sharp distinction between metropole and colony as Puerto Ricans maintain cultural practices acquired in the US, which significantly have included urban musics such as salsa and hip hop, even after returning to Puerto Rico.\footnote{See Chapter 1 for more discussion on musical migration between the US and the Island.}

The ELA maintains a certain level of autonomy, but the absence of \textit{de jure} colonial status does not necessarily preclude a \textit{de facto} colonial relationship founded on US cultural hegemony and Puerto Rican economic dependence. Independentismo no longer holds a prominent place in

\footnote{An even more pressing concern given Puerto Rico’s more recent severe economic crisis. See White (2015), Walsh (2016a; 2016b), Mahler and Confessore (2015).}
the platforms of any of the ELA’s major political parties (Picó 2014), but it continues to have a voice in Puerto Rico’s cultural production, especially among the middle and intellectual classes (Moreno 2009). So, the idea of nation in Puerto Rico cannot be dismissed, but it must be reconfigured to better reflect the growing divorce between the concepts of political and cultural sovereignty (Cruz 2014) and the transnational character of a diasporic community held together by cultural practice (Appadurai 1996).

A Musical Intervention:

On September 23, 2005, FBI agents surrounded a small farmhouse in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico. They were after 72-year-old Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, founding member of the Ejército Popular Boricua (the “Boricua Popular Army”), a militant Puerto Rican independence group more commonly known as Los Macheteros (“the machete-wielders”). Ojeda Ríos had long been living underground as a wanted man; in the mid-1980s he had skipped bail after being arrested by police for suspected ties to a number of bombings, shootings, and a $7 million armored car heist in the mainland United States (Fahrenthold and Marino 2005). But as time passed, he had become less cautious, occasionally appearing in public in Puerto Rico to give speeches supporting the cause of Puerto Rican independence from the United States. On that afternoon of September 23, 2005, when the FBI moved against Ojeda Ríos, both sides fired shots, and Ojeda Ríos was hit. Medical examiners estimate that he died from blood loss within fifteen minutes of suffering a gunshot wound around 6:08pm, but federal agents did not enter the house until the following morning. The US Department of Justice claimed that the delay resulted

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11 This in reference to the labor force that supported the sugar industry, at one time Puerto Rico’s primary industry. Workers used machetes to harvest the sugar cane in the fields; Boricua is a term used as either noun or adjective to refer to Puerto Rico or something as Puerto Rican. It is derived from borinquén, the name used by the Indigenous Taíno people to refer to the Island.
from agents’ concerns for their own safety, fearing that there might be another gunman or improvised explosive devices inside (Martin and Schnedar 2006), but a report authored by the Puerto Rican Civil Rights Commission concluded that the delay was meant to deny Ojeda Ríos needed medical attention, thus implicating the US federal government in murder (Comisión de Derechos Civiles del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico 2011).

Responses to Ojeda Ríos’ proliferated across the Island. Even among Puerto Ricans who did not sympathize with independentismo, there was a sense that the FBI was unjustified in the way that it handled the raid (The Washington Post 2005). In addition to raising questions of legality, the Puerto Rican press also represented the FBI operation as charged with symbolic meaning and as an attack on the very idea of Puerto Rican independence: the raid occurred on the 137th anniversary of the Grito de Lares uprising, the first (short-lived) successful Puerto Rican independence rebellion against Spain (Ortúzar 2015).

In parallel with press coverage of the killing of Ojeda Ríos was a song released by the Puerto Rican hip hop group Calle 13 titled “Querido F.B.I.” (“Dear F.B.I.”). René Pérez Joglar—Calle 13’s vocalist, who performs under the stage name Residente—claims that he was so angered by the news of Ojeda Ríos’ murder that he could not sleep that night. He felt he needed to respond in some way, and so he stayed up through the night writing and recording the song, working quickly enough to be able to release “Querido F.B.I.” as a free download within thirty hours of the raid. This quickly-composed song is often credited with bringing both Calle 13 and Puerto Rican independentismo to a much broader audience than had previously been the

12 Calle 13’s understanding of the public’s reaction to the raid was that Puerto Ricans were generally satisfied that the US federal government had eliminated someone perceived as a dangerous terrorist, even as they were unhappy with the way that it was handled (González 2013).

13 I refer to them throughout the paper as hip-hop artists rather than reggaetoneros. While the group was initially tied to Reggaeton, it is a genre that both they and many of their fans have since rejected for both aesthetic and social/political reasons. See Chapter 1 for more on the politics of genre. For more on “Querido F.B.I.” see Chapter 2.
case, introducing hip hop to a more independentismo-minded intellectual class and raising the cause of independentismo amongst people of the caseríos—the Island’s poor urban neighborhoods, typically populated by a disproportionately high percentage of Afro-Puerto Ricans (Moreno 2009; Davila 2005). Listening to the song, it is not hard to imagine why it made such an impact: a nearly ubiquitous two-bar drum beat backed by a static bass synthesizer plays though the track as the only accompaniment to Residente’s crescendoing vocal delivery. As the track plays, his voice becomes gradually louder and hoarser. The listener must wait nearly two minutes before a chorus section offers any respite from the mounting tension. The increasingly complex voice-music interaction further adds to this effect as Residente urges the Puerto Rican people to join him in armed resistance against the US federal government.

By beginning their career with this song, Calle 13 signaled a change of course for reggaeton. Some reggaeton musicians, such as Tego Calderón on his album El Abayarde (2003), had focused on the politics and social struggle of those in the caseríos, but never had reggaetoneros been so aggressively committed to independentismo (Díaz-Zambrana 2010). The aggressive political expression of “Querido F.B.I.” was especially striking given the widespread success of some of the song’s immediate predecessors: dance club hits such as Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina” and N.O.R.E.’s “Oye mi canto.” Calle 13 continued throughout their career to write socially- and politically-engaged songs—even more so on their later albums such as Entren Los Que Quieran (2010) and Multi_Viral (2014)—earning the support and endorsement of Puerto Rico’s official independentista movement led by the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño.

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14 “Caseríos” is term used to refer to poor urban neighborhoods. Generally, Afro-Puerto Ricans tend to comprise a higher percentage of the population of the caseríos than of the population of the Island more generally.

15 Heavily criticized for the content of this track, Residente has maintained in interviews that, though the track’s lyrics suggest violence, he was not literally inciting violence but rather making a critique and expressing his outrage at the events.

16 Though they would later try to disassociate themselves from the genre, early on they were seen as reggaetoneros.
(PIP), in spite of the PIP’s rejection of other independentista rappers and reggaetoneros. Part of Calle 13’s popularity within the PIP is due to their reputation as a politically-engaged hip hop group, but it also results from the character of the Puerto Rican nation that they put forward in their music, which differs from that of other artists such as Tego Calderón.

In 2013, Democracy Now!’s Juan González asked Residente about the increasingly political nature of their songs—in other words, about where this political engagement was coming from. Residente immediately brought up the Island’s political status: “I was raised in a pretty politicized environment, because of the political situation in Puerto Rico, because we are a colony of the United States” (González 2013b).17 Many scholars have written about Puerto Rican poetry as a decolonizing force and as a space of resistance to US hegemony (see, e.g., Dowdy 2010; Azank 2012; Cruz 2014; Duany 2000)—and indeed many rappers, including Residente, have likened themselves to poets. But little scholarly inquiry has been turned specifically towards the political work of reggaeton and hip hop, perhaps the most significant and far-reaching Puerto Rican verbal art of the past quarter century.18

Not all Puerto Rican hip hop is necessarily political in nature, but this music’s prominent place in public discourse and popular experience makes it an important discursive field for the Island’s cultural politics. Many Puerto Rican artists have used hip hop as a means of imagining and critiquing the nation in different ways—whether Calle 13’s advocacy for a Latin American Puerto Rico or Tego Calderón’s critique of what he sees as the Island’s exclusionary racial democracy. This thesis examines the means by which Puerto Rican rap artists use music as a discursive field in which the nation can be imagined and contested.

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17 All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

18 See chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the politics of genre, especially the divide between reggaeton and hip hop/rap.
In the first chapter, I focus on the politics of genre—especially the distinction made between reggaeton and hip hop—and the reasons why many politically-engaged Puerto Rican hip hop artists, as designated by both the artists themselves and by popular criticism, are disassociated from reggaeton despite sharing strong aesthetic similarities with the genre. I focus on three artists—Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Calle 13—because they are three of the most politically outspoken and well-known artists in Puerto Rico. Ultimately I argue that hip hop is understood as a more viable representative of the nation while reggaeton is politically neutralized because of the differences in the two genres’ race and class associations. As Juan Flores (1992) shows, Afro-Puerto Rican cultural expression has long been denied a role in shaping a national cultural ideal. He writes that: “It took the towering presence and symbolic passing of a black popular musician of the uncontested stature of [Rafael] Cortijo to force the questions of African and working-class culture onto the agenda of everyday Puerto Rican life” (188). Flores goes on to show how the trend towards rooting national culture in Afro-Puerto Rican and working-class culture has been resisted by the Island’s political and cultural elite, with some commentators insisting that Afro-Puerto Ricans are in need of “uplift” that can only be provided by Eurocentric cultural practices (190), and others denying any African influence in Puerto Rican culture—for example, on a trip to Spain Rafael Hernández Colón, then governor of the Island, “took the occasion to refer to the African contribution to Puerto Rican culture as a ‘mere rhetorical adscription’” (Flores 1992, 191). The struggle to claim a space for Afro-Puerto Ricans in the national imagination continues, and is reflected in the genre politics of hip hop and reggaeton.

Chapter two features an analysis of sonic representations of Puerto Rico in the songs of Calle13, the Island’s most popular hip hop group and the one most closely associated with the independentistas. Emphasis is placed on musical allusion as a means of positioning Puerto Rico
within a larger Latin American context in a way that rhetorically disassociates the Island from the United States. Finally, I turn to an examination of flow, defined by the style of a rapper’s vocal delivery and the way that it interacts with the *pista* (in Spanish-language rap, the term for the underlying musical track). I consider hip hop flow within the context of positive psychology’s flow states, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, to argue that a rapper’s flow can encourage an affective state of engagement that amplifies receptivity to a song’s generic and aesthetic political rhetoric.
CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF GENRE

Genre matters, and the boundaries between different genres are often fiercely defended (see Krims 2000). Rather than just conceptualizing genres as being static structures built around a set of shared musical characteristics or style, they can also be understood as active processes (Orozco González 1992), as negotiated by the network of actors involved in a music scene—including producers, fans, artists, journalists, record store owners (Holt 2007)—and as fluidly moving between different cultural structures and meanings (Lena 2012). Jennifer Lena (2012) offers an example of this approach when she writes that musical genres are “systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music” (Lena 2012, 6). Her work highlights some of the ways that genre is negotiated and shows how those actors negotiating genre are doing so from a variety of social and professional positions. Political ideologies often play a large role in this process. As Lena points out, political ideology, not stylistic features, is the main feature that distinguishes the North American genres she researches—straight-edge punk, white power rock, and riot grrrl—from one another.

Genre, understood in this way as a politically-inflected ongoing process of negotiation that is related to but not determined by musical style, becomes a medium of understanding social and cultural configurations and meanings. Within the context of Puerto Rican rap broadly construed, genre has been hotly contested by artists and fans, especially with regard to the boundary between hip hop and reggaeton. Despite aesthetic similarities and the fluid movement of some artists from one genre designation to another, many self-described hip hop artists
disparage reggaeton while reggaetoneros respond in kind.\textsuperscript{19} An examination of this contested border, of the ways that artists and fans understand and negotiate genre, reveals many of the socio-political structures operating on the Island. Toward that end I turn now to three related genres that have together formed Puerto Rico’s rap scene—\textit{underground}, reggaeton, and hip hop.

Of the three genre designations, underground is the least specific with regard to style or content.\textsuperscript{20} It generally refers to the rap scene in Puerto Rico in the 1980s-90s, and all Puerto Rican rap from this time can be broadly described as underground. In the mid-1990s, a particular sound—defined predominantly by the dembo rhythm (see Figure 1)—became more prevalent in underground. Around 2000, this sound became known as reggaeton. By 2005, Reggaeton’s international commercial success had encouraged a degree of standardization. Many reggaetoneros were using a standardized aesthetic and writing lyrics that were politically neutral. As a result politically-engaged artists, some of them former reggaetoneros, began describing their music as hip hop as a strategy of disassociating themselves from what they perceived as reggaeton’s homogeneity and materialism. The boundaries and politics of genre on the Island, and the ways that those genres relate to Puerto Rican nationalism, can be traced through the careers of three of the most prominent socially-engaged Puerto Rican artists: Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Calle 13.

\textsuperscript{19} I use “self-described” because many hip hop artists will claim that they are not reggaetoneros, even while fans and the industry claim that they are.

\textsuperscript{20} The English word “underground” is used in Puerto Rico as a noun referencing a genre of music, not as an adjective. Throughout this thesis, I use the term in this same way, as a name for the genre of music popular in the caseríos during from the 1980s-2000.
Vico C and Early Underground:

When early underground musicians brought recordings and stylized hip hop performance to the Island in the 1980s, largely through processes of circular migration between the Island and New York, the music was met with suspicion. According to Raquel Z. Rivera (1997), mainstream Puerto Rican society viewed it as an American cultural product, completely distinct from the Island’s culture. Even though diasporic Puerto Ricans were involved in hip hop’s early development in New York, the relationship between hip hop and the Puerto Rican nation was complicated by the ambivalence of those on the Island towards those living abroad—primarily in New York, though more recently in Florida as well—whom some on the Island distrusted as not truly Puerto Rican, as somehow corrupted by their separation from the Island and their integration into Anglo and African American culture (Rivera-Rideau 2015). The Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States was often viewed as more representative of African American culture than of the culture of the Island. This helps to explain resistance to the genre in Puerto Rico as a product of cultural imperialism, as a foreign imposition. After all, many of the young artists who formed the early hip hop scene around San Juan were Puerto Rican migrants from the United States.

The rapper Vico C (b. 1971), was one of these young Puerto Rican artists. Born in Brooklyn to Puerto Rican parents, he had already become interested in hip hop and African American culture by the time he moved to San Juan with his parents. He was not the first to introduce hip hop to the Island, but because of his prominence in the early scene he is

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21 This despite the fact that many stateside Puerto Ricans, especially those with lighter skin, had trouble fully integrating into African American communities. For example, DJ Charlie Chase, who was born in New York to Puerto Rican parents and self-identifies as Latino, has recounted how even in the 1970s he often did not feel welcome at hip hop events. He describes trying to stay out of view while performing with the Cold Crush Brothers so that people would not realize that he was Latino. Many in NY’s hip hop scene, he says, felt that since he wasn’t African American he would not really be able to understand hip hop (Flores 2000).
retrospectively credited by fans and artists as one of the rappers who made it possible for hip hop to be Puerto Rican music, primarily through his use of Spanish rather than English in his rapping (Pacini Hernandez 2009)—especially significant in regard to Puerto Rican nationalism given the Spanish language’s prominence in conceptions of a national culture. As one of the first rappers to use Spanish, he is cited as a major influence by many later Puerto Rican hip hop artists (including Tego Calderón and Calle 13).22

The sound of Vico C’s songs varies greatly across the span of his long career. From the mid-1980s through to the present, Vico C has recorded songs with a sound associated both with US hip hop—hear, for example, “La Recta Final” (“The Straight Line”) 1989)—and reggaeton—for example, “Capicú” (2003). Vico C occasionally incorporates the sounds of other Puerto Rican musical genres, most notably salsa. His song “Aquí la que falló fue usted” (“You were the one who failed here”) (2009)—performed with Andy Montañez of the well-known Puerto Rican salsa group El Gran Combo—has hardly any of the stylistic features characteristic of hip hop or reggaeton, but such songs stand as exceptions in his overall output.

Vico C is widely respected by later rappers as el filósofo (the philosopher) for the themes and issues he addresses in his songs.23 Whereas the lyrics of many underground songs from the 1980s and early 90s were characterized by hyper-sexuality and aggression (Pacini Hernandez 2009), Vico C’s songs featured political and social justice themes. For example, in “El Filósofo”, from Misión: La Cima (“Mission: the Summit”) (1994), he criticizes Puerto Rico’s political system.

22 For example, in 2015 Calle 13’s Residente posted to social media a picture of himself with Vico C, taken at a Tego Calderón concert to which they had both been invited as guest performers. Residente’s caption read: “En Puerto Rico todos empezamos a rapear gracias a este tipo, por eso hay que pedirle la bendición siempre.” (“In Puerto Rico we all began to rap thanks to this guy. That’s why you always need to ask his blessing.”)

23 Though the name is perhaps taken from his song “El filósofo,” in which he raps “Soy el filósofo” (“I am the philosopher”), later artists, such as Calle 13, reference the quality and content of his lyrics as the reason for the moniker.
"El Filósofo," Vico C

La política es verdad y es engaño
En esta época te hace daño
Criminalidad cada cuatro años
Esos políticos son muy extraños
Ofrecen las cosas y nunca las cumplen
En las elecciones que nadie los culpen
Palabras bien falsa ellos siempre dicen
Nacionalistas siempre los maldecen
Muy mala cosa va en esta era
Y la política es la falla primera
Tengo en mi mente una solución
Que el FBI investigue la movida de la corrupción

Politics is truth, and it’s trickery
In this age it will do you harm.
Criminality every four years,
Those politicians are very strange
They offer things and never follow through
In the elections, nobody faults them
They are always telling lies
The nationalists are always cursing them.
Really bad things are happening these days
And politics is the first at fault
I have in mind a solution
Let the FBI investigate all the corruption.

Vico C accuses politicians of being corrupt lying charlatans, but notably excludes nationalists in this group ("The nationalist are always cursing them"). Internal critiques leveled at political structures within Puerto Rico are prevalent in Vico C’s work; he often highlights some of the struggles of daily life in the caseríos and the lack of action by those in power. He occasionally makes a statement regarding the status-question, both in his songs and in his public appearances, but he displays a certain amount of ambivalence towards the issue. For example, in 1994 he participated in old San Juan’s Fourth of July Celebration—in celebration of US independence—but at that same celebration he refused to sign an American flag for a fan, saying that he only signed flags with one star (i.e. the Puerto Rican flag; see R. Z. Rivera 1997, 247). In the mid-1990s, Vico C converted to evangelical Christianity following a near-lethal motorcycle accident that led to struggles with substance addiction. His subsequent albums, starting with Aquel que había muerto (He Who had Died) (1998), typically align with his new religious ideals. While not
all of the songs are explicitly political or oriented towards social justice themes, they are generally seen by fans as distinct from the more misogynist and consumer-oriented songs characteristic of later underground and reggaeton artists, for example Winsin y Yandel’s “Sexy Movimiento” (“Sexy Movement”) (2007). Though Vico C was not the only underground artist characterized by songs committed to social justice or political struggle, as the most well-known he is representative of some of the musical characteristics and consciousness-raising work within the underground scene.

Underground’s Broader Reception:

Musical genres are shaped and distinguished by more than just aesthetic phenomena. They carry with them the values and ideologies that produced and shaped them. Petra Rivera-Rideau’s Remixing Reggaetón: The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico (2015) is one of the only extended scholarly works tracing a broad history of reggaeton in Puerto Rico, especially as it relates to race. She emphasizes the ways that reggaeton artists use music to disrupt a privileging of whiteness on the Island. I rely on her work heavily throughout this chapter, drawing on both its information and analysis. As Rivera-Rideau points out, early hip hop artists in Puerto Rico did introduce elements of African American culture and racialization to the scene. This racialization is significant for the ways that it contrasts with Puerto Rican narratives of racial mixture and harmony founded in the ideals of mestizaje. Mestizaje is an ideology common throughout Latin America that posits contemporary Latin American populations and societies as all sharing common European, Indigenous, and African ancestry. According to the ideology of mestizaje, this mixture has produced race-less societies where all members are equal.25 Rivera-Rideau (2015) connects much of the racial rhetoric surrounding underground music to mestizaje,

25 For more on mestizaje and music, see for example Aharonián (1994), Cunin (2014), Wong (2012), and Moore (1997).
showing how it positions blackness as a US import, since Puerto Ricans could not actually be “black” due to the process of harmonious racial mixing. This kind of rhetoric served to further marginalize inhabitants of the caseríos, primarily Afro-Puerto Ricans, by suggesting that they could not be authentic Puerto Ricans because of their embrace of an Afro-centric racial identity. The racialized language deployed against underground in the press highlights the popular link between the genre and African Americans. A condemning 1996 editorial by Edwin Reyes (1944-2000)—a poet and columnist for Claridad, a weekly independentista newspaper—described underground as beginning in the “black and Hispanic ghettos of North America. [It is a] primitive form of musical expression that lends itself perfectly to broadcasting the most primordial forms of emotion” (quoted in Rivera-Rideau 2015, 46). Reyes’ disparaging comments towards underground, as well as other negative public responses, echo those made towards Afro-Puerto Rican music in 1988, when an intense public debate erupted over the renaming of San Juan’s Centro de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Center) after Rafael Cortijo, renowned Afro-Puerto Rican salsero and champion of Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices. Juan Flores (1992) cites Marcelino Canino—professor of folklore—as writing that “though musicians of the stature of Mozart found inspiration in the dances and tunes of the common folk, Cortijo’s music can only be described as ‘vulgar’ and ‘lumpen’” (190). Canino went on to argue that this music “only denigrated [the black race] further” (190). Resistance towards Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices, especially popular musics, was thus already a recurring phenomenon on the Island, and underground’s reception was but one of many episodes in that pattern.

Because underground was a point of contact between Afro-Puerto Ricans and larger African diaspora communities, the Puerto Rican rap scene challenged the hegemonic Puerto Rican national narrative. It was tolerated by the government and dominant social classes—i.e.
there were no concerted efforts to censor or eradicate it—so long as it was confined to the caseríos, which were already stereotyped as plagued by crime and delinquency. The term itself, “underground”, highlights the music’s marginal status. Artists and fans circulated songs through the exchange of home-recorded cassette tapes, and the music largely circumvented the structures of a commercial music industry (Rivera-Rideau 2015, 21). However, in the 1990s underground gradually began to exceed containment within the boundaries of the caseríos, becoming popular among young middle-class Puerto Ricans. Once it left the caseríos and started becoming more popular among young, middle-class—often lighter-skinned—Puerto Ricans, underground was much more visible and commanded more attention in news media and the Island’s public discourse.

In response to this growing popularity, many Puerto Rican commentators mobilized the disparaging rhetoric surrounding rap in the US against underground in Puerto Rico. The genre was linked to materialist consumer culture, violence, delinquency, and drug use (Rivera-Rideau 2015). Also motivating the campaign against underground, however, was the desire to suppress new conceptions of blackness that ran counter to the normative narrative of a peaceful and egalitarian racial mixture (Rivera 1997). This became most apparent in the mano dura contra el crímen campaign, a program founded in 1993 in response to widespread concern over perceived increases in crime—especially violent crime—on the island. Both the police and the National Guard overwhelmingly targeted the caseríos, establishing outposts within those neighborhoods and conducting raids into private homes, which only served to further stigmatize these neighborhoods in the popular imagination as dangerous places overrun with criminals. The

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26 As Rivera-Rideau (2015) points out, possession of underground cassettes was even allowed as evidence admissable in court when trying a suspect for other crimes.

27 The “hard hand against crime” campaign
mano dura directly targeted underground as well. By 1995 the genre had earned broader public attention, and recordings were being sold in record stores instead of just spreading through an informal economy (Rivera-Rideau 2015). The Puerto Rican Drugs and Vice Control Bureau began conducting raids on these shops to confiscate underground records, and the government established strict censorship laws to try to stamp out the still-marginal underground scene.

Because the genre was, in the mid-1990s, still primarily practiced by people at the racial and class margins, the new laws met with little resistance from those with the power to stop them. Furthermore, both independentistas and statists saw underground fans and artists as indicative of some of the major problems facing the Island. In Raquel Z. Rivera’s “Rapping Two Versions of the Same Requiem” (1997), the author traces the early history of underground and examines the ways that the music played a role in shaping public representations of both the caseríos and the nation. As she points out, many underground fans were viewed as either delinquents in need of the mano dura to make them into productive and peaceful members of society—a position taken by statists and those in favor of the status-quo—or as victims of US mental colonization who needed guidance back to a true Puerto Rican identity—a position taken by the independentistas. From both sides of the status-divide, underground was understood as a problem to be dealt with. However, the censorship laws only had the opposite effect. The mano dura campaign and its attack on underground served as publicity for the genre. The censorship laws also had other unintended consequences that made underground more accessible. Rappers began crafting their songs so that they would slip through the net of censorship by avoiding anything prohibited by the anti-obscenities legislation, which made their songs more suitable for public airplay over the radio (Rivera-Rideau 2015). This exposure greatly increased the spread of underground beyond the caseríos—on the Island and abroad—and helped to create new young
middle- and upper-class fans. But by that point, it was already being referred to as “reggaeton.”

The international success of some reggaetoneros and their producers hastened the codification of this new distinct genre that had outgrown its status as a sub-style of underground.

The Rise of Reggaeton:

Vico C, though considered the pioneer of Puerto Rican hip hop, is also considered a foundational figure for reggaeton on the Island. The boundary between the two genres is fluid, if it exists at all, which makes it easy for both raperos and reggaetoneros to claim him as their own. This fluidity also makes it possible for individual artists to negotiate their position relative to either underground (or later, hip hop) and reggaeton.

Many fans throughout the US and Latin America now perceive reggaeton as a quintessentially Puerto Rican musical genre, but its development was a transnational process that occurred in spaces of cultural exchange between Jamaica, Panama, the United States, and Puerto Rico (Marshall 2009). In the 1990s, reggae en español (Spanish language reggae) was already an established, if heterogeneous, genre around the Spanish-speaking Caribbean basin. Although Puerto Rico did have a well-established roots reggae scene (Gaztambide-Fernández 2004), far more central to the development of reggaeton was the popularity of Jamaican dancehall, as mediated through Panamanian artists (Marshall 2008). Throughout the twentieth century,

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28 Some scholars, such as Wayne Marshall (2009) at times write as if the two are synonymous, with the term “reggaeton” coined in the late 1990s to describe what to that point had been referred to as underground. While this may have been true in the 1990s, reggaeton’s commercial success led to a standardization that, in general, was far less eclectic and heterogeneous than early underground. Because conceptions of reggaeton are now largely shaped by commercial superstars such as Daddy Yankee and Yandel who rely heavily on a techno dance-club aesthetic, I find it helpful to maintain a distinction between underground and reggaeton.

29 As Gastambide-Fernández (2004) writes, in contrast to the dancehall-inspired reggaeton, Puerto Rico’s roots reggae scene was largely a white middle- and upper-class phenomenon centered on surf culture and consumption of a commercialized reggae aesthetic based on the genre’s superficial features. It was completely divorced from Afrodisporic identity and Jamaican reggae’s liberation ideology.
Panama was home to a large Jamaican population that had first arrived during the construction of the Panama Canal. These immigrant communities maintained familial and cultural ties to Jamaica, and so Panamanian artists were exposed to the latest trends in reggae, including dancehall in the 1980s (Marshall 2008). It is here in Panama that reggaeton’s ubiquitous dembo rhythm came to prominence, especially through reggae en español singer El General’s cover of Jamaican dancehall artist Shaba Ranks’ “Dem Bow.”

As Wayne Marshall (2009) explains, the dembo rhythm superimposes dancehall’s 3-3-2 rhythm over hip hop’s steady downbeat emphasis (see Figure 1). A heavy bass drum sounds on beats 1 and 2, marking the measure with two evenly-spaced pulses, while the snare drum plays the syncopated 3-3-2 above it. This combined syncopation is often heard as characteristically Afro-Caribbean (Marshall 2009).

![Figure 1: Dembo Rhythmic Cell](image)

The connection to the African diaspora was further strengthened in Puerto Rico by dembo’s prominence in the music of the caseríos. The mixtapes of DJ Playero (b. 1964)—a central figure

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30 Ranks’ song is nationalist piece that equates “deviant” sexual practices—for example, homosexuality or oral sex—with imperialism. Those “sexual deviants” are portrayed as undermining Jamaican identity and sovereignty. In its transnational spread, however, these initial connotations have been lost. Dembo is now used as a strictly sonic descriptor, whether to reference the genre or the specific rhythm (Marshall 2008).

31 The 3-3-2 syncopation of the snare alone also sonically alludes to Afro-Caribbean music through its likeness to the common clave pattern, of which the 3-side uses the same 3-3-2 structure.
in the underground scene who was instrumental in underground’s development into reggaeton and its spread throughout the Island—demonstrate the growing ubiquity of dembo in underground music through the 1990s.\textsuperscript{32} Many soon-to-be reggaeton stars first appeared on these highly-regarded mixtapes. Dembo is prominent throughout, but it is essentially the only rhythmic backing used by the later tapes.\textsuperscript{33} This increasing dominance of dembo demonstrates a gradual shift from an eclectic underground to what would shortly be named “reggaeton”—which, just like underground, stood as an icon of Afro-Latino identity, especially given its history rooted in multiple African diaspora musics.

In 2004, there was a major change in reggaeton, brought on by the international success of Daddy Yankee’s “Gasolina.” This song was played on radio throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America—as well as in Puerto Rico—and it became a popular club hit (Marshall 2009). Following the success of “Gasolina,” its production team Luny Tunes—comprising Victor Cabrera and Francisco Saldana, Dominican-born producers who met in Massachusetts and moved to Puerto Rico when they began their music careers—launched a number of other hit singles by artists such as Don Omar, Ivy Queen, and Tego Calderón. The Luny Tunes sound, which featured dembo throughout and relied on a timbral palette drawn more from electronica than hip hop, became the new standard around which the genre coalesced. In this way reggaeton became sonically more standardized at the same time that it became more commercial. Many critics, including artists such as Tego Calderón and Calle 13, have since lamented in songs and interviews what they perceive as the genre’s homogeneity, apoliticism,

\textsuperscript{32} Most of these mixtapes are not commercially available. However, some have been uploaded to site like youtube. A search for DJ Playero will bring up several examples, typically titled Playero [#].

\textsuperscript{33} Consider, for example, Playero 37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4AMJkKFaPI> (accessed 10 March 2016).
and materialism. Despite initially being classified as reggaeton by critics and fans, both of those artists attempted to disassociate themselves from the genre and align themselves with hip hop as a socially- and politically-engaged alternative.

**Tego Calderón and a Reggaeton Alternative:**

In 2004, Vico C released his album *En Honor a la Verdad (In Honor of the Truth)*, which included “El Bueno, el malo, y el feo” (“The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”). This song featured Eddie Dee (b. 1977), also a major figure in the early underground and reggaeton scenes, and Tego Calderón (b. 1972), a relative newcomer whose debut album had only come out two years earlier. The song features an electronic synthesizer ostinato, heavy bass downbeats, a synthesized string section, and Afro-Caribbean hand drum. All of this sounds over a dembo rhythmic track. Unlike some of the more club-oriented reggaeton singles released that year, “El Bueno, el malo, y el feo” is explicitly political in its social critique. For example, Calderón in his verse calls out Puerto Rico’s inherent prejudice against Afro-Puerto Ricans and those from the caseríos.

“El Bueno, el malo, y el feo,” Tego Calderón

Y esos que están culpándonos,
Ahorrándonos, hablando basofía, marginándonos
En vez de ser Tego el que te canta
Podría ser Tego el que te asalta. Saco de trampa.
Lucho pa’ que mi hija nunca pase hambre
Por eso tienen que matarme.

And those that are faulting us,
Saving us, talking trash, marginalizing us
Instead of being Tego who sings for you,
I could be Tego who assaults you. A freeloader.
I fight so my daughter doesn’t go hungry,
For this they have to kill me.

He calls attention to the effects of social policies, such as the mano dura campaign, which marginalize Afro-Puerto Ricans and portray them as dangerous criminals. He raps that because
he is black, he is stereotyped as someone who might commit assault. Finally, Calderón seeks to highlight the hypocrisy of Puerto Rican social structures and government policy by insinuating that Afro-Puerto Ricans and those of the caseríos are not being targeted because of their actions or behaviors—he is, after all, only trying to get by, feed his daughter—but because of their racial and class identities. “El Bueno, el malo, y el feo” highlights many of the major trends that set Calderón apart from many of his reggaeton contemporaries. Performing in this song with Vico C and Eddie Dee, he aligns himself with political artists who were active in the hip hop scene of the caseríos before the rise of reggaeton brought the genre to the mainstream.

Born in the San Juan neighborhood of Santurce, Calderón moved first to Rio Grande—the caserío where his father grew up—and then to Rio Piedras, where he spent most of his youth. His father was committed to raising Afro-Puerto Rican consciousness on the Island, and he would regularly take both Tego and his sister Kenya to Loíza to participate in various Afro-Puerto Rican cultural practices—including bomba, plena, and bajando los santos. Calderón studied percussion at the Escuela Libre de Música, a Puerto Rican high school specializing in music studies, but before graduating he moved with his father to Miami and finished his formal education at a Miami public school. According to Calderón, although he did not take his music studies seriously while at the Escuela Libre, he still credits the experience with refining his ear and exposing him to a wide variety of music and dance that he otherwise would not have

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34 Another possible reading of this line understands it as a threat. Addressing those who marginalize and denigrate Afro-Puerto Ricans, he warns that he could easily go from singing to them to assaulting them. However, given the line’s context within the song, I hold to my initial reading which highlights problems of representation.

35 All of these towns, including Loíza, are within 20 miles of each other in the northeast corner of the Island.

36 “Calling down the Saints.” The phrase refers to the Santería practice of inviting spirit possession through music. It typically involves ritual drumming, call and response singing, and dancing.
encountered, thus contributing to his musical eclecticism (R. Z. Rivera 2004). After finishing high school, he remained in Miami working odd jobs. It was there that Calderón says he came to know hip hop. Enamored by rappers such as Rakim and KRS-One, Calderón initially tried to write hip hop songs in English. It was only upon returning to Puerto Rico, when he heard Vico C and—as he describes them—less talented MCs on the radio rapping in Spanish, that he began to explore rapping in his native language (R. Z. Rivera 2004).

Within a few years, he made his first public performance on Canal 18’s television program *Viernes de Rap* (*Rap Fridays*), but it was still about a decade before he released his first studio album, *El Abayarde* (2003). From the beginning, Calderón sought—both rhetorically and to a certain extent aesthetically—to avoid being labelled as reggaeton. In an interview, he reflected on the difficulty he had building his career in the 1990s:

No me estaba enfocando, porque lo que estaba sucediendo en la escena de la isla era el reggaetón y a mí lo que me gustaba era el hip hop y yo iba totalmente opuesto a lo que estaba sucediendo. Entonces por eso se me hizo tan difícil. Porque yo me negué a cantar reggaetón. (R. Z. Rivera 2004)

I wasn’t focused, because what was happening in the Island’s scene was reggaeton and what I liked was hip hop, and I was totally opposed to what was going on. So that’s why it was so difficult for me. Because I refused to sing reggaeton. (R. Z. Rivera 2004)

Despite his initial refusal to perform reggaeton, he did record several songs in that style on *El Abayarde* (2003). Three of the songs on the album are produced by Luny Tunes, and these fit

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37 In his in-depth interview with Raquel Z. Rivera, Calderón specifically mentions classical music and ballet, as well as other popular styles.

38 The two rappers he names as major influences in his art, Rakim and KRS-One, are both important figures in NY’s early hip hop scene who are known for their viruosity as MCs and their socially conscious lyrics (the latter especially applies to KRS-One).

39 Most of the biographical information in this section is gleaned from Raquel Z. Rivera’s excellet interview with Calderón, which took place in 2003 at La Casita de Chema in the Bronx.

40 An Abayarde is a type of insect similar to a fire ant—it is small but has a painful bite. In Puerto Rico, it can also be used to refer to a child who is misbehaving or bothersome.
squarely within a reggaeton style defined by prominent use of dembo, the timbre and placement of the instruments in the pista, and in part by highly sexualized lyrics. In an interview with R. Z. Rivera (2004), Calderón tries to separate himself from reggaeton even in these songs.

Explaining “Lleva y trae,” one of the reggaeton songs from *El Abayarde* produced by Luny Tunes which features a back-and-forth between a male and female rapper, Calderón said:

> Escribí la parte de la muchacha y me gusta porque hice a las muchachas sentir parte del disco. […] Yo lo escribí porque quería que supieran que yo también siento respeto por las féminas y que son bien importantes en lo que es la sociedad como tal. [Las muchachas] también tienen su carácter y su genio, y quise incluirlas ahí en mi disco. (R. Z. Rivera 2004)

> I wrote the woman’s part, and I like it because it makes women feel like they are part of the album. […] I wrote it because I wanted them to know that I also respect women and feel that they are really important in society as such. [Women] also have their own character and their genius, and I wanted to include them there on my album. (R. Z. Rivera 2004)

Calderón thinks of reggaeton as an overwhelmingly *machista* genre that, even when it does make space for women, only objectifies them. In demonstrating his respect for women, he is also disassociating himself from reggaeton. Some Puerto Rican hip hop fans pushed back against his apologetics, accusing him of “selling out” by including more mainstream reggaeton tracks. Calderón understands it differently: because he had already proven himself to the hip hop community he was free to try out reggaeton as a way to further his career and as a way to bring new listeners to his more socially-conscious hip hop tracks (R. Z. Rivera 2004).41

Calderón is also differentiated from other reggaetoneros through his explicit commitment to Afro-Puerto Rican and Afro-diasporic communities.42 Some of this commitment comes across in his musical aesthetic. On *El Abayarde* (2004) he included a song titled “Loíza” that

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41 This argument is also be used in the apologetics of Calle 13 in their attempts to explain some of their more mainstream reggaeton songs.

42 See for example, his editorial in the New York Post (Calderón 2007), in which he denounces the racism in Latin America towards Afrolatin@s that gets buried beneath the rhetoric of mestizaje.
incorporates bomba as part of the underlying rhythmic track. He has said that, even though many warned him not to include bomba—either in “Loíza” or in the many bomba interludes throughout the album—he believed it was important both to acknowledge Afro-Puerto Rican culture and to help keep those traditions alive by validating them for younger Puerto Ricans who might see them as something exclusively of their parents’ generation (R. Z. Rivera 2004). The town of Loíza, originally a settlement for freed slaves, acts as a metonym for the entire Afro-Puerto Rican population and is still widely considered—in official promotional material meant to promote tourism, in the press, and by many artists—the center of Afro-Puerto Rican culture on the Island. There are several festivals in the town that celebrate the Afro-Puerto Rican community, and folkloric tourism is an important part of the town’s economy (Hiraldo and Ortega-Brena 2006). Calderón’s reference to the town of Loíza can therefore be understood as a political statement. In the lyrics of “Loíza,” he not only aligns himself with the Afro-Puerto Rican community, but he also calls out some of the structural biases that work against the interests of the people of Loíza.

“Loíza,” Tego Calderón

Ando sin prisa
Pero tu leontitud me coleriza
Y el que no brega con Loíza
Me quiere hacer pensar
Que soy parte de una triglogia racial
Donde to’ el mundo es igual, sin trato especial
[...]
No todos somos iguales en terminos legales
Y eso está probao en los tribunales
En lo claro la justicia se obtiene con cascajos
Por eso estamos como estamos

I go in no hurry,
But your slowness makes me angry
And the one who doesn’t stand with Loiza
Wants to make me think
That I am part of a racial trilogy
Where everyone is equal, without special treatment.
[...]
We are not all equal under the law
And this is proven in the courts.
In plain daylight justice is bought with coin
And that’s why we are how we are

Specifically, he challenges the myth of racial equality founded on the ideology of harmonious racial mixture, or mestizaje, that often ignores racial identities in favor of nationalities or
regional identifications (E. Rivera 2008). As Calderón sings in “Loíza,” he believes that there is widespread prejudice, both social and legal, against Afro-Puerto Ricans, despite the official insistence that all Puerto Ricans come out of the same mixture of Spanish, Indigenous, and African ancestry. By insisting on a racialized Afro-Puerto Rican identity, both rhetorically in the lyrics and sonically in the inclusion of bomba, Calderón claims a space for Afro-Puerto Ricans in public discourse and representations of the nation, in the process undermining what Maritza Q. Rivera (2006) identifies as mestizaje’s tendency to disempower Latin America’s racially-marginalized populations.

In addition to championing Afro-Puerto Rican identity, Calderón is a fierce independentista. Throughout his career he has spoken out in favor of Puerto Rico breaking from the United States entirely to form a fully independent nation-state. Puerto Rican independentismo embraces the ideology of mestizaje, and there is some fear amongst liberal Puerto Ricans that any social changes that were to come about as a result of independence would work against the interests of marginalized populations that do not conform to the normative vision of Puerto Rico, as represented by the jíbaro. Calderón’s Afro-centric politics, then, are at odds with mainstream independentismo. Rivera-Rideau (2015) attempts to reconcile Calderón’s work with independentista rhetoric by arguing that the Afro-Puerto Rican elements included in Calderón’s songs are a part of “folkloric blackness.” As such, she argues, they can be incorporated into independentismo without threatening the status quo; they fit within the ideology of mestizaje. Through the folkloric, she reads Calderón’s music as a performance of one of the three races that have contributed to the present Puerto Rico instead of as a living tradition practiced by current Afro-Puerto Ricans. She writes:
Besides relegating blackness to the past, this distancing [accomplished by folkloric blackness] also involves locating it within specific places in Puerto Rico (for example, the town of Loíza […]), imagined to be distinct from the rest of the island. Confining folkloric blackness to restricted places and time implies that blackness is irrelevant to contemporary Puerto Rican society, while simultaneously acknowledging the African heritage that is part of Puerto Rico’s racially mixed identity. (Rivera-Rideau 2015, 10)

It follows, then, that Bomba—because it is not a part of the lived experience of most inhabitants of the caseríos—is not a threat to independentismo’s racial rhetoric. Rivera-Rideau’s reliance on folkloric blackness in her interpretation of the politics of Calderón’s music ignores, however, the extra-musical elements that frame an audience’s experience of songs such as “Loíza.” All of Calderón’s rhetoric—in his lyrics, interviews, and public appearances—shapes an audience’s stance towards his music, and thus towards the interpretation of his inclusion of Afro-Puerto Rican elements. His general championing of Afro-Puerto Rican communities and condemnation of metstizaje ideology (Calderón 2007) resists a hearing that understands Afro-Puerto Rican musical signifiers as nothing more than a nostalgic nod towards the past, as upholding the idea of racial democracy.

Whether or not one hears Calderón’s music as a type of folkloric blackness amenable to the politics of the PIP—the largest pro-independence political organization on the Island—Calderón has openly condemned the PIP along with the rest of the Island’s politicians. He made news in 2015 when, in frustration, he walked off the set of Univision’s Los 6 de la Tarde—a live-broadcast evening talk show—when Héctor Ferrer, former Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) politician and guest on the show with Calderón, refused to acknowledge the validity of
Calderón’s critiques of the Puerto Rican government.\textsuperscript{43} Before leaving, Calderón accused not just Ferrer, but all of Puerto Rico’s politicians of an ignorance of the everyday lived experience of many Puerto Ricans and likened Puerto Rico’s politicians to mafiosos.\textsuperscript{44} He claimed that the PIP was no better than the other parties when it came to looking out for the interests of all Puerto Ricans. In January 2016, Calderón again made news when he endorsed David Bernier, leader of the PPD, for governor. Calderón said over twitter: “My brother DAVID BERNIER WHY ARE YOU GETTING INVOLVED WITH THIS? But fuck it, I’m with you!!!”\textsuperscript{45} He also criticized the PIP candidate, Maria Lourdes Santiago, saying “she doesn’t do anything”\textsuperscript{46} (“Tego Calderón Apoya a David Bernier” 2016). Calderón’s support for a PPD candidate, someone publicly in favor of the current ELA status, provoked criticism from many of his fans, especially given his vocal support of independence (“Tego Calderón va a Todas Por Defender a David Bernier” 2016).

In this way, Calderón confounds the typical political divide on the Island by supporting independence, but not the party that builds its platform around independence. He focuses his attention on the domestic policies that will have a greater effect on the lived experience of Puerto Ricans generally. His use of folkloric blackness in his music does not make him palatable to the PIP, nor does anything about either his songs or his self-representation suggest this is his goal. In his public rhetoric he actively disassociates himself from the independentistas because the independence they offer would do little to help poor or Afro-Puerto Ricans, and would do

\textsuperscript{43} His critiques included issues such as the way that drug penalties targeted the poor and the ways that lax firearms restrictions were damaging poor neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{44} For a video of this conversation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSx8MPfrR6U>.

\textsuperscript{45} “Mi hermano DAVID BERNIER PA QUE TE METISTE EN ESO? Pero me@jodi contigo estoy!!!”; also significant is Calderón’s Twitter username, “Cortijo Vive en Mi” (“Cortijo Lives in Me”), which references Rafael Cortijo.

\textsuperscript{46} “no hace na”
nothing to address the underlying structures of racism and oppression present in Puerto Rican political and social life. For Calderón, part of this underlying structure is a mental colonization that encourages consumerism above all else (R. Z. Rivera 2004). Although he does not see any objective features distinguishing reggaeton from hip hop as entirely different genres (R. Z. Rivera 2004), embracing hip hop over reggaeton does allow him to separate himself from the latter’s perceived commercialism and materialism, thus making it easier for him to present himself as a politically-engaged artist.

Calle 13’s More Acceptable Nation:

Calle 13 is one of Puerto Rican’s best-known musical groups—judging by album sales—both at home and abroad. They first came to prominence with “Querido F.B.I.” shortly before the release of their first album in 2005. They have since gone on to produce five full-length albums, the most recent of which is Multi_Viral (2014). Calle 13’s core musicians are René Pérez Joglar (lead vocalist) and Eduardo Cabra Martínez (instrumentalist/composer), stepbrothers who go by the stage-names Residente and Visitante, respectively. Other musicians are brought on as needed, especially for live performances. Calle 13 regularly tours with a twelve-part ensemble of musicians—who play a range of instruments, including bass guitar, guitar, drum kit, brass, and percussion—and has collaborated with other artists from various parts of Latin America (Rohter 2010). They have received widespread popular and critical acclaim, including twenty-two Latin Grammy awards and three Grammys to date. This speaks to their prominence as public figures both on the Island and throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

Beginning with Los de Atrás Vienen Conmigo (2008), their third studio album, Calle 13’s songs more actively disassociate the group from reggaeton, and even antagonize some of the
genre’s most popular artists. For example, that album includes a song titled “Que Lloren” (“Let Them Cry”), which alludes to another song of the same title by Ivy Queen, an influential reggaetonera.

“Que Lloren,” Calle 13

Dejame darte un par de detalles, yo no soy calle
Perdona que lo subraye nuevamente, yo no soy calle
Y si veo alguna tripa algún día
Puede que me desmaye o que el corazón me falle
Pero hay un solo problema, tú tampoco eres calle
No estás vendiendo discos y te estás promocionando en Don Francisco
[…]
Tú eres un producto enlatado encima de un anaque
antes cantaba rap y ahora eres pop como Luis Miguel
Baladista como Lubriel, toda la vida como Emanuel
Como Juan Gabriel o como Amanda Miguel
Gracias a que eres un bruto colgado con un tercer grado de estudio
Las rimas no te dan ni para un interludio
[…]
Es muy fácil ser esclavo de la industria navegando a favor de la marea
Tu te vendiste más barato que una prostituta en la autopista
Esa es la diferencia de un negociante y un artista.
Let me give you a few details, I’m not from the street
Let me underline that again, I’m not from the street
And if I see someone spill their guts some day
It’s possible I’ll faint, or my heart will fail me
But there’s only one problem, you’re not street either
You’re not selling albums and you’re promoting yourself on Don Francisco
[…]
You are a canned product up on a shelf.
Before you sang rap and now you’re pop like Luis Miguel
Balladeer like Lubriel, your whole life like Emanuel
Like Juan Gabriel or Amanda Miguel
Thanks to the fact that you’re an empty-headed brute with a third-grade education
Your rhymes aren’t even enough for an interlude.
[…]
It’s so easy to be a slave to the industry, setting your course by the tides.
You sold yourself cheaper than a prostitute on the side of the highway.
That is the difference between a businessperson and an artist.

The song begins with a dedication to “all the cry-babies of the genre of reggaeton. So that they learn.” Many of the critiques levied by Residente in this song echo those made by Calderón in interviews. Residente accuses reggaetoneros of being manufactured products whose only purpose is to make money, for themselves or their managers and labels. He also criticizes them

47 Don Francisco Presente (Don Francisco Presents), a popular US Spanish-language talk show aired on Univision from 2001-2012.

48 All well-known singers of romantic pop songs.

49 “todos los llorones del género del reggaeton. Pa’ que aprendan.”
for being guided by the latest fad (“setting your course by the tides”) rather than by any real artistic or social integrity. These attacks against the genre continued in later albums. On *Multi_Viral* (2014), the song “Adentro” (“Inside”) also directly attacks reggaetoneros.

Residente calls out an un-named reggaetonero’s gangster posturing as a fiction used to sell records that does nothing but encourage more violence and materialism amongst Puerto Rico’s young people.\(^{50}\) The song was heard as a direct personal attack by Cosculluela, a well-known reggaetonero, and prompted him to write on Twitter: “Heard ya record… U aint got shit on me. Say no name play no game.” Residente responded indirectly, tweeting: “If you’re a ‘rapper’ and you’re ‘annoyed’ by perceived allusions to you in the song ‘Adentro,’ it’s because you have it *Adentro* [Inside]… Don’t worry, it’ll pass…” (Rapetón Staff 2014).\(^{51}\) In the last verse, Residente turns his critique inwards as a way of distinguishing himself from reggaetoneros, whose lyrics are typically full of braggadocio. He lists some of his shortcomings and mistakes in a show of humility and claims that things such as art and family are what drive him.\(^{52}\)

The group has also attempted in interviews and public appearances to distance themselves from reggaeton on aesthetic grounds. In an interview (Garsd 2012), Residente claimed that Calle 13 “has never been reggaeton, since the beginning. We always try to do things different and we just use reggaeton the same way we use cumbia, or bossa nova, or tango, or other rhythms. [We’ve used reggaeton] like six times in our entire life” (Garsd 2012). He

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\(^{50}\) In the music video for this song, Residente’s Maserati—according to him a shameful purchase he made when he first became famous—slowly moves down a gauntlet of young men while they fill it with both guns and bling. At the end of the video, Residente smashes the gangster-iconography-laden car with a baseball bat (in the video given to him by Willie Mays) before pushing it over a cliff.

\(^{51}\) Cosculluela’s tweet is in English. Residente’s original reads: “Si eres ‘rapero’ y te ‘picaste’ sintiéndote aludido con el tema ‘Adentro’ es porque la tienes Adentro… No te preocupes, pasará...”

\(^{52}\) This approach is similar to one taken by Calderón, who makes a show of humility as a way of setting himself apart from other reggaetoneros (R. Z. Rivera 2004).
elaborates that Calle 13’s honesty separates them from the more commercial genre of reggaeton, indirectly associating musical aesthetic with social values. Calle 13’s lyrics have always involved social critique, and this tendency has become more explicit with their more recent albums. With regard to dembo, while some of Calle 13’s earlier singles use the rhythm, it is conspicuously absent from the songs included on their 2014 album. Residente has also lamented that many fans and critics have referred to them as alternative reggaeton. He finds reggaeton to be musically and artistically empty: “it’s a thing for dancing, for having a good time […] but on an artistic level, conceptually speaking, in my opinion it has nothing to offer the world. […] You go to a dance club and you dance and you forget things and feel good, and you forget your problems” (quoted in Rapetón Staff 2014). By disparaging reggaeton, Residente is able to represent himself as a politically-engaged artist.

As they gained increasing artistic and commercial success, Calle 13 demonstrated a continued commitment to political engagement. Compared with their earlier work, Entren los que Quieran (2010) and Multi_Viral (2014) show a broadening of scope beyond the explicitly political to more general social issues. For example, “Querido F.B.I.” (2005) targets a specific incident, the influence of which did not extend much beyond Puerto Rico. In contrast, “Latinoamérica,” a song from the album Entren los que quieran, highlights the general exploitation of Latin America and Latin Americans, and the title track from Multi_Viral serves as a call to general collective action in the face of oppression. In “Multi_Viral,” Residente

53 Early singles tended to criticize individuals, with an implicit social critique in the background. For example, “Atrévete-te-te,” from their first album, criticizes a woman for aping North American aesthetics and culture. However, most of the songs on Entren los que quieran feature much more direct criticism of large-scale social institutions and problems.

54 “Es cosa para bailar, para pasarla bien […] pero al nivel artístico, conceptualmente hablando, no tiene nada que ofrecer para mí al mundo […] Vas a una discoteca y tú bailas y se te olviden las cosas y estás bien, se te olviden los problemas.”
mentions specific activist groups from different regions. The song also features Tom Morello, guitarist for the US band Rage Against the Machine; Kamilya Jubran, a Palestinian singer-songwriter; and Julian Assange, Australian founder of Wikileaks. The song is also multi-lingual, with sections in Spanish, English, Arabic, and French. All of these features de-localize the song from any particular place.

As is Tego Calderón, both members of Calle 13 are committed independentistas. They have at times—especially earlier in their career—earned the ire of the ruling PPD, leading to official condemnation and even radio censorship (Santiago 2010), but they have also been embraced by the independentista establishment—with the PIP, the Federación Universitaria Pro Independentista, the Partido Nacionalista, and the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano (among others) all naming Calle 13 as “special ambassadors” for the Island (“Reconocen a Calle 13 Como Embajadores Especiales,” 2011). Tego Calderón, on the other hand, has been rejected by and rejects the PIP and official independentismo.

Unlike Calderón, the two brothers of Calle 13 grew up in a middle-class suburb rather than a caserío. Their stage names—Residente and Visitante—reflect this, deriving from the experience when they were children of crossing in an out of Residente’s gated community: the guard at the gate would ask them whether they were a resident or visitor, and the two adopted their respective answers as pseudonyms. Residente has described himself as a champion for the middle class, those who are “too poor to be rich and too rich to be poor” (Posada and De Beaufort 2009). Another characteristic that sets them apart from Calderón is the way that they engage with the Island’s racial discourse. Unlike Calderón, who makes a point of calling attention to his blackness, Residente’s and Visitante’s race goes unmarked. Neither they nor reporters comment on it in interviews, and it is not addressed in any of their songs. Because they
do not directly engage with racial discourse on the Island, they do not threaten as Calderón does the ideology of mestizaje and racial harmony put forward by dominant Puerto Rican culture.

They also differ from Calderón in their formal education. Visitante has a BS in computer science and Residente has a BS in accountancy and an MFA in graphic design. The two are thus far removed from the social and economic milieu familiar to many of the other underground artists and reggaetoneros, something that they embrace and at times even seem to use to legitimize themselves as artists. For example, in “Que Lloren,” Residente refers to his opponent—a nameless reggaetonero—as an empty-headed brute who has nothing beyond a third-grade education, arguing that for this reason his opponent lacks the verbal facility to be a legitimate rapper (see page 36). Insults of this sort are common in hip hop, but the projected difference in education between Residente and his opponent is amplified by a difference in language use. Residente’s employs a more standard Spanish in his lyrics than is typical in reggaeton, which tends to use a great deal of slang or non-standard Spanish. Thus, Residente linguistically evokes his class privilege and uses it to his advantage.

Despite their differences, Calle 13 and Tego Calderón maintain mutual respect for each other and have collaborated on several projects—most recently at a joint concert in Puerto Rico featuring Calderón, Calle 13, and Vico C (“Tego Calderón Dio Gran Concierto Con Vico C, Calle 13 Y Otros” 2015)—but they present very different visions for an independent Puerto Rican nation. While Calderón insists on a Puerto Rico that acknowledges and works for marginalized groups on the Island, specifically Afro-Puerto Ricans, Calle 13 conforms more closely to the Puerto Rico presented by the PIP, which depicts the Island as a nation integrated within Latin America rather than as part of the United States and as an expression of the tenants of mestizaje. Calle 13 is thus much less critical of, and poses less of a challenge to, the internal
power structures on the Island, and it is for this reason that the group has been held up by the PIP as a representative of independentismo while Calderón has been ignored, just as Cortijo was in the 1980s (Flores 1992). The PIP’s advocacy and support for Calle 13 is enabled in part by the group’s navigation of genre. Underground and reggaeton were too closely associated with US commercialism, the caseríos, and Afro-Puerto Ricans. By working to disassociate themselves from reggaeton, presenting themselves instead as hip hop artists in opposition to that genre, Calle 13 became more suitable representations of the nation.
CHAPTER 2: MUSICAL ALLUSION AND MATTERS OF FLOW

Genre frames an artist’s reception and cues listeners to have particular stances towards the music and its political message, but musical aesthetics are central to crafting that message. In this chapter, I first examine the ways that Calle 13 use musical allusion as a means of positioning the Puerto Rican nation. Then, I argue that a rapper’s flow is instrumental in the reception of a song’s political content because of effusive flow’s encouragement of psychological flow-states in the listener.

Hip hop is a prominent global musical phenomenon. From its beginnings in the US, it has spread to many other parts of the world. As seen in the previous chapter, artists often localize this globalized music, and so it is by no means stylistically homogeneous (see for example Sigler and Balaji 2013; Bennett 1999; Aidi 2014). However, there are some common features shared by many hip hop songs regardless of place, and many of these stylistic foundations—among them rapping, looping, and musical allusion or sampling—were first introduced in the United States. Musical allusion has been an element of the aesthetics of hip-hop since its beginnings in the Bronx and it has a continued significance in Puerto Rican hip hop. US hip hop DJs in the 1970s and 80s relied heavily on sampling as a compositional practice, quoting and manipulating the fragments of other tracks to build their own songs (Williams 2013; Demers 2003; Schloss and Chang 2014). Beyond serving aesthetic ends, the practice of sampling can also establish particular ideological, political, or social stances. By means of sampling, hip-hop artists are able to put themselves in dialogue with other artists and thinkers, encouraging a certain stance towards both the sampled music itself and the ideas and ideologies informing that music (Tillet
2014). For example, James Brown is one of the most sampled artists (“Most Sampled Artists | WhoSampled” 2016).55 Some of this is due to Brown’s sound, but sampling Brown can also serve as an index for his social activism and association with the Black Power movement. Using a sample of James Brown in the construction of a new musical track can situate the sampling artist as sympathetic to Brown’s politics and activism. In this way, musical reference can be a potent sociopolitical tool; this practice continues into the twenty-first century and can be seen in a number of Puerto Rican artists, but musical allusion using newly-composed material often replaces sampling.56

Musical allusion is especially important in Puerto Rico since it is through allusion that some artists such as Calderón mark their songs as Puerto Rican. This was not always the case, and early Puerto Rican underground songs from the 1980s were typically not audibly marked as Puerto Rican; the primary feature that really distinguished Puerto Rican artists from their contemporaries in the United States was their use of the Spanish language in their songs. For example, many of Vico C’s pistas sound similar to those found in hip hop from the mainland United States. This began to change slightly at the turn of the twenty-first century. Not only did reggaeton—specifically the dembo beat—emerge as a distinctly Puerto Rican sound,57 but artists also began to incorporate other Puerto Rican sonic markers into their pistas. Vico C started occasionally referencing salsa styles in his songs, as he does in “Inglesa” (“English Girl”) from his 1994 album Hispanic Soul. The song begins with a vamp comprising a standard güiro pattern, punctuated with hits by a horn section. Over this vamp, a British woman marvels at how

55 Whosampled.com, despite being open to public contribution, is moderated. I consider it accurate enough for broad general information.

56 This is not unique to Puerto Rico and can be in part attributed to increasingly strict copyright laws that make sampling more difficult and more expensive.

57 This despite reggaetons transnational origins, as discussed in the previous chapter.
nice and exotic Puerto Rico is. The vamp ends with her saying: “So you’re Vico C… can you play a ritmo para mí.” The music stops, and after a measure of silence Vico C responds: “Hmmm, ok.” It is at this point that he starts rapping and the pista, which is composed of a typical montuno, begins. Montunos, the repetitive rhythmic and harmonic patterns common to salsa and son, serve as a clear and powerful sonic marker of Puerto Rico, especially since salsa by this point had gained a degree of acceptance as the Island’s national music. As Vico C treats salsa, Tego Calderón references Afro-Puerto Rican musics in his pistas. For example, “Loiza” (discussed in Chapter 1) has as its foundation an allusion to bomba, one of the most iconic Afro-Puerto Rican music and dance practices. These allusions figure centrally in the songs’ aesthetics, but they can also contribute to shaping the way the Puerto Rican nation is imagined by both performers and listeners. Calderón’s incorporation of more explicitly Afro-Puerto Rican musics such as bomba and plena challenges the dominant discourse of racial democracy on the Island that Pretends equality while at the same time it erases the continued Afro-Puerto Rican presence on the Island. This is, after all, the lyrical theme of “Loiza.”

Alluding to Latin America:

On their first two albums (2005 and 2007), Calle 13 were marketed as reggaeton, a genre tightly linked to the Island and one from which they later tried to disassociate themselves. Collaboration with well-known living artists can be a powerful mode of alluding to other musics, and it is one that Calle 13 frequently employs. For example, their first album features Voltio, another Puerto Rican reggaeton artist, who performs on “La Aguacatona,” a song whose pista references funk and in which Voltio and Residente comment on a woman’s appearance. From their second album on, however, Calle 13 broaden the geographic and musical scope of their
collaborations in a move towards a larger, more inclusive aesthetic. The group has recorded with—among others—Café Tacuba (rock/Mexico), Shakira (rock, pop/Colombia), Bajofondo (electrotango/Argentina), Orishas (hip hop/Cuba), Mercedes Sosa (folk, nueva canción/Argentina), and Rubén Blades (salsa/Panama). Aesthetically, these collaborations add an eclecticism to their music and makes it easier for the group to experiment with different styles since the songs tend to allude to their collaborators’ aesthetic. Because most of these co-performers are well-known Latin American artists, their involvement could be heard as a rhetorical move to position Puerto Rico more as a part of Latin America rather than the United States, especially when heard in the larger context of Calle 13’s ouvre and political statements.⁵⁸

Among their collaborators were Susana Baca (Peru) and Totó la Momposina (Colombia) on the song “Latinoamérica” from Entren Los Que Quieran (2010). These artists are widely recognized for their performance of and championing of African and Indigenous traditions. Calle 13’s collaboration with these two artists who are known for promoting the cultures of subaltern groups further suggests an inclusive tendency in their music. “Latinoamérica” is representative of the group’s “successful” music and of the musical and political concerns heard across their output beginning with Entren Los Que Quieran. The most prominent musical allusion in “Latinoamérica” is to nueva canción (new song), an artistic and social movement that began in Chile in the 1960s and quickly spread to other parts of Latin America, such as Cuba and Argentina.⁵⁹ Stylistically, the genre can be heard as folk revival, but social factors also played a

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⁵⁸ Some would see this as a rejection of a true Puerto Rican identity that had become a shameful reminder of US colonialism (Negrón-Muntaner 2004). This could be an interesting way of interpreting and making sense of why independentistas embrace Calle 13 and reject Calderón. Whether or not Calle 13’s Latinization results from a rejection of self, this process of musical allusion and collaboration still allows us to understand how Puerto Rico is being imagined by some artists and politicians.

⁵⁹ Though the local variant of this music was sometimes described by different names in different regions, e.g. Nueva Trova in Cuba, the basic shared characteristics and ideals mark them all as part of the same movement (Fairley 1984).
large role in defining nueva canción. Nueva canción was often associated with leftist politics. Its popular appeal and political overtones prompted various conservative dictatorships to view the music as a dangerous political tool. Some even acted against the musicians; for example, Chilean Dictator Pinochet exiled Isabel Parra (b. 1939)—singer-songwriter of the nueva canción movement and daughter of famed folklorist and musician Violeta Parra—to France and also had the nueva canción artist and activist Victor Jara (1932-1973) murdered by government agents (Watts and Franklin 2015). Nueva canción was not just a response to direct political repression, but it was often viewed as a social and political movement that resisted North American imperialism, hegemony, and consumerism (Fairley 1984).

Even though they are primarily identified as a hip hop group, Calle 13 has several songs that stylistically invoke the nueva canción tradition. “Latinoamérica” displays many typical features of the genre, including use of folk instruments and lyrics that focus on collective struggle and solidarity. Residente, the group’s rapper, has pointed to Mercedes Sosa, an Argentine singer canonical to the nueva canción movement, as a source of inspiration for “Latinoamérica” (Diario 2016: 26). This connection is strengthened by the many elements typical of nueva canción that are present in the song, including characteristic rhythms and instrumentations that allude to various folk genres and traditions, as well as a text focusing on collective identity and agency.

Instrumentation is one of the primary ways in which the song alludes to folk music. As Jan Fairley (1984) points out, the timbral palate associated with nueva canción consisted of acoustic instruments from across Latin America. The bombo, Venezuelan cuatro, charango,

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60 While labeling songs as popular or folkloric can be problematic, especially given that the terms are used differently in the Spanish-speaking Americas than they are in the US, many fans and critics use the term “folklórico” when describing this music, so I will continue to do so here. See Sydney Hutchinson (Hutchinson 2011).
guitar, and various other percussion instruments formed the foundational sound to which other instruments could be added. The basic sound of “Latinoamérica” resembles Fairley’s description of the standard Nueva Canción instrumentation (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: “Latinoamérica,” Instrumentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>V1</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>V2</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>V3</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapper</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singer (text)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Singer (vocables)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s Choir</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cuatro Venezolano</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charango</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bass Guitar</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solo Violin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strings</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Ping</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussion (Bombo and Güiro)</td>
<td>x (no bombo)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x = present; - = limited presence

The güiro cubano, the maracas, and the bombo legüero—the percussion section—are a constant presence throughout the song, together playing a two-against-three pattern common in many Latin American folk genres. The cuatro Venezolano and the nylon-stringed guitar feature as the primary harmonic instruments, and violins and a charango—an guitar-like Andean string instrument—are used to provide melodic fills and timbral density, respectively. Thus, the instrumentation not only references nueva canción but also projects the idea of an inclusive *panlatinidad* in the way that it sonically evokes folk genres from across Latin America.61

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61 Pan-Latinidad is a contested concept. While it implies a regional solidarity, it can also be used to erase or undermine the identities of marginal groups. Much recent scholarship tends to view it as a US phenomenon resulting...
The rhythmic structure of the song also builds on folk musics, and in doing so contributes to referencing the nueva canción tradition. Throughout its entirety, there is a polymetrical 3/4 against 6/8 (see Figure 3).
The transcription of the instruments is accurate—since the primary purpose of this figure is to show the ways that the instruments are interacting in a 3/4 against 6/8 structure—but the voice’s rhythms and accent patterns do not fit neatly into standard Western notation. A rough transcription of the vocal part is included here to give a general idea of how the voice interacts with the rest of the instrumentation, but is not meant as an accurate descriptive representation.
The bombo plays a consistent 3/4 pattern while the güiro superimposes a 6/8 pattern. The guitar also alternates measures of 6/8 and 3/4 throughout. Many of the folk musics of Latin America rely heavily on a hemiola comprising alternating 6/8 and 3/4 measures, a product of Spanish influence, but there are also some folk genres, such as the Argentine chamamé and chacarera, that feature the two meters superimposed on each other. While the metrical structure of “Latinoamérica” may not be heard as a definitive reference to the chamamé or chacarera, such a connection is strengthened by Residente’s reference to Sosa, who was one of the folklore singers that helped to popularize the genres. Extra-musical framing can play an important role along with musical features in alluding to other musics and contexts.

The structure and thematic content of the lyrics also position Calle 13’s music as a continuation of the nueva canción tradition. In an interview with the US National Public Radio (NPR), Residente claims that “Latinoamérica” was in part a response to Rubén Blades’s salsa single, “Buscando América” (“Searching for America”), a song that searches for a version of America that has been hidden and neglected (Garsd 2012).

“Buscando América,” Rubén Blades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estoy buscando a Amèrica y temo no encontrarla</td>
<td>I’m looking for America and am afraid I won’t find it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sus huellas se han perdido entre la oscuridad</td>
<td>Its traces have been lost in the darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy llamando a América pero no me responde</td>
<td>I’m calling to America but it’s not responding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La han desaparecido los que temen la verdad</td>
<td>Those that fear the truth have made it disappear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envueltos entre sombras, negamos lo que es cierto:</td>
<td>Wrapped in shadows, we deny what is true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mientras no haya justicia, jamás tendremos paz</td>
<td>While there is no justice, we will never have peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viviendo dictaduras, te busco y no te encuentro</td>
<td>Living through dictatorships, I look but can’t find you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu torturado cuerpo no saben dónde está</td>
<td>They don’t know where your tortured body is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Residente has often stated his admiration of Blades. He even collaborated with him on the song, “La Perla” (“The Pearl”), also from Entren los que Quieran (2010). But still he claims that, as a rapper, he has the ability to describe more than Blades did because of the volume of text that he delivers over the course of a song, suggesting that hip hop is a more efficacious political music than sung traditions. If “Latinoamérica” is to be heard as a response to Blades, then it portrays the empowered Latin America sought in his song. The chorus is a static statement of defiance. Each line begins with “Tú no puedes comprar...” (“You cannot buy…”), a phrase that is repeated eight times in each chorus.

“Latinoamérica,” Calle 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar el viento.</td>
<td>You can’t buy the wind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar el sol.</td>
<td>You can’t buy the sun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar la lluvia.</td>
<td>You can’t buy the rain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar el calor.</td>
<td>You can’t buy the heat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar las nubes.</td>
<td>You can’t buy the clouds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar los colores</td>
<td>You can’t buy the colors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar mi alegría.</td>
<td>You can’t buy my happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no puedes comprar mis dolores.</td>
<td>You can’t buy my pain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This phrase creates a cumulative effect, enhancing its anti-neo-liberal message. It repeats, changing each time the concluding word, “You cannot buy the [wind/sun/rain/heat/clouds/colors]” and finally “You cannot buy my [happiness/pain].” The defiant text, combined with the natural imagery, further reinforces the allusion to nueva canción.

While the chorus is relatively static, the lyrics of the verses are dynamic. Each time a new verse begins, its tone and emphasis are different from the one that precedes it. These changes

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63 “La Perla” is the name of a low-income neighborhood in San Juan.

64 This is not a passive-voice “you,” which translate as “no se puede,” but a you with a definite addressee, in this case those with socio-economic power.

65 The chorus preceding the bridge uses the Portuguese language instead of the Spanish, and this translation implicitly includes Brazil as sharing in this imagined common Latin American experience.
project increased agency, tracing a path from inaction to action. The primary verb in the first verse is “soy” (I am). Residente lists all of the things that he is, with many references to place and the natural world and some references to Latin America history and culture (e.g. “Soy la fotografía de un desaparecido” or “Soy Maradona contra Inglaterra anotándose dos goles”). These references extend beyond Puerto Rico to include Argentina, Colombia, and the Andes. With the beginning of the second verse, the primary verb becomes “tengo” (I have), a somewhat more active though still limited agency. Again, this second verse features references to both Latin American geography and culture/history. The third verse abandons both “soy” and “tengo” when it shifts towards a variety of more active verbs: “trabajar” (to work), “compartir” (to share), “construir” (to build), “perdonar” (to pardon), “olvidar” (to forget). Implicit in this pattern is a growing sense of agency and a more active role for the speaker as the song progresses. Residente at the beginning simply is, he then has, and finally acts. The closing line, with its implicit threat, “Perdono pero nunca olvido” (“I forgive but I never forget”), solidifies the narrator’s position of power.

The bridge and the coda both reinforce the themes of the chorus. The choir sings “Vamos caminando. Vamos dibujando el camino” (“We walk. We go drawing the path”). This both echoes the closing of the first verse and makes a claim for self-determination. The singers from the chorus echo sentiments from earlier in the song, closing with “No puedes comprar mi vida” (“You cannot buy my life”). When all of these textual features are viewed in the context of the song's formal structure, a large-scale process emerges: there is a gradual movement from passive to active as the verses take on more of the defiance of the chorus. By the end of the song, the

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66 “I am the photograph of one of the disappeared.” references the victims of Argentina’s dirty war (c. 1974-83), in which the Military Government “disappeared” (murdered) political dissidents. “I am Maradona scoring two goals against England” references the Argentine soccer player’s two goals against England in the 1986 FIFA World Cup, the second of which was declared Goal of the Century in a 2002 FIFA poll.
verse-chorus structure begins to break down, and Residente yields the floor to a children’s choir. Both the text of the song—with its allusion to other Latin American regions, peoples, and cultures—and the song’s sonic allusion to nueva canción suggest Puerto Rican affinity to Latin America. Because the United States is portrayed by the group and by independentistas as the Island’s oppressor, this shift towards a more explicitly Latin American identity implies an escape from that oppression and an increase in Puerto Rican agency. Despite Calle 13’s public advocacy for an independent Puerto Rico, the song does not specifically mention the status question, and thus could be heard as supporting a cultural rather than political Puerto Rican nationalism. This allows them to project the idea of a Puerto Rican nation without having to address either the unlikelihood of political independence or its challenges.

From Flow to Flow—Implications of Positive Psychology for the Political Power of Hip Hop:

“Flow” is a concept invoked in many discursive contexts to reflect upon a state of being. It is often used to describe someone performing at their best, but it can also refer to an affective state experienced by the subject. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theoretical and experimental work on flow has been influential as a foundational idea in the field of positive psychology, and I suggest that it can inform an understanding of how a rappers use flow to create meaning in hip hop. The two concepts of flow are not directly related, but they can be put into productive dialogue with each other. Csikzentmihalyi’s flow theory aims at laying the foundation for a more fulfilling life. Some of the main features characterizing flow in his work include: intense

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67 It is significant that the point when the speaker seizes agency is also the point when the choir and singers enter together, along with the fullest orchestration. This suggests power in community and is reflected in the music video, which accompanies the coda with scenes of people working together, helping each other.

concentration on the present moment, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of agency, and a balance between a sense of challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). In the psychological literature, many scholars have applied the theory of flow in order to worker productivity by getting employees to engage more fully with tasks (Beard 2014). Another main theme in the scholarship is the use of flow theory to improve general happiness by pointing people towards the types of activity that have high potential for creating flow states.

Music scholars have taken up the concept of flow to a certain extent. Much of this has been aimed at improving music pedagogy (Sinnamon, Moran, and O’Connell 2012; O’Neill 1999). Others have looked tangentially at the concept of flow as a way of understanding the experience and meaning of performance for the performer. Turino (2014), for example, uses Csikzentmihalyi’s flow theory in conjunction with Peirce’s concept of firstness, secondness, and thirdness as a way of understanding a performance experience from the performer’s point of view, in this case his own. Flow, as described by Csikzentmihalyi, is a psychological state both produced and experienced by an individual, so within any given performance context, some may experience flow while others may not. For each person, achieving a flow state will depend on how the experience interacts with their background and stance towards the experience. It is thus difficult to know with certainty whether or not an experience will produce flow and for whom, but we can hypothesize the creation of flow states for at least some participants based on the presence of features that generally lead to flow. Because these flow criteria are more readily apparent in music making, whether performing or practicing, most scholarship dealing with flow states and music has focused on musicians.
Less common is the application of flow theory to the listener’s experience of music. While it might seem obvious how flow theory could apply in more directly participatory settings—for example, where audience members are dancing or engaging in co-performance with musicians—it can also be used to explore listening more generally. Central to this application of flow theory to musical listening is the argument that attentive listening is never a passive phenomenon. Many scholars have thickened our understanding of the act of listening. Tom Rice (2015) positions “listening” as active, in opposition to the more passive “hearing.” He writes that, “musical listening in particular has also positioned the listener as involved, consciously or otherwise, in wider processes and communities of musical consumption, interpretation, circulation, and production” (Rice 2015, 102). Feld and Keil (1994) have examined how groove engages audiences in listening as active participation. Turino (2014) has taken a semiotic approach, using Peircian concepts of signification to understand the production of musical meaning, and these concepts necessitate active participation by the audience since the relationship between sign and signifier is so rarely an inherent feature of the sign itself. Recently, other scholars have taken a phenomenological approach to understanding audience experience. For example, Harris Berger’s Stance (2009) applies phenomenology to musical experience in a compelling way that allows for an understanding of how musical meaning may be intersubjectively created by everyone involved. He writes:

Even when the scholar is able to identify particular formal techniques that everyone would agree play some role in the evocation of meaning, such features never exist by themselves. On the contrary, they must be applied by the producer of the text […] Likewise, those engaged in reception may grasp the technique easily or with difficulty
Such qualities of production or reception inflect the meaning of the underlying technique. (Berger 2009, 4)

In all of these models, the audience, rather than being inert receptors of musical performance, are responsible for the active co-creation of musical meaning, which is mutually constituted between the music, the performers, and the audience.

Once listening is understood in this way, as an active process of engagement, it becomes possible to apply Csikzentmihalyi’s flow theory towards understanding how hip hop flow might convey musical meaning in a way that extends beyond the performers to include the broader community of listeners. For example, flow can be simple or complex depending on the lyrical structure and its interaction with the pista. A more simple flow creates a regular and predictable lyric structure that aligns with musical structure poses fewer challenges to parsing meaning than does a more complex inter-structural interaction. Complex flow, on the other hand, can be understood as posing challenges to a listener’s ability to grasp the meaning—whether semantic, syntactic, symbolic, or sonic—of the lyrics. A more complex interaction between the pista and the voice requires more focused attention on the part of the listener. Furthermore, a more complex flow’s multiple and competing time streams, primarily in the rhythmic structures of the pista and the voice, often manipulate the listener’s sense of time, of time’s structures. All of these features of hip hop flow—a balance of challenge and skill, focused attention, and an altered sense of time—are central to Csikszentmihályi's flow theory. The more complex a rapper’s flow, the more challenging it is for listeners to segment and structure the text. While complex flow may prove too much for novice listeners, it may create flow states for those more experienced with hip hop listening.
Matters of Flow and Why Flow Matters:

Flow can convey affect, identity, cultural stance, political ideology, and more. Because flow is a central feature of hip hop aesthetics, it can also be a powerful tool for hip hop’s meaningfulness. There are many definitions of flow, but for my purposes an important point of departure is the axiomatic understanding of how smoothly the listener is moved from line to line, rhyme to rhyme (Pate 2009). Flow is somewhat dependent on textual features such as rhyme, repetition, syntax, consonance, and assonance; but flow most clearly becomes manifest in performance. Many features of performance and delivery—such as pacing and register (i.e., the character of the voice)—contribute to flow, but I agree with Adam Bradley (2009) when he writes that in the case of hip hop what is of paramount concern is the relationship between the voice and the underlying rhythmic structure. The pista provides a regular rhythmic backdrop with which the voice can interact in a number of different ways—reinforcing it, contradicting it, or falling somewhere in between these possibilities.

Considerations of flow are much more prominent in popular discourse than in academic work. When it is addressed by scholarship, it is most often analyzed towards descriptive aesthetic ends. Adam Krims (2000), one of the most cited scholars in the academic study of hip hop flow, creates a useful system of flow taxonomy founded on characteristics of vocal delivery (e.g. sung, speech-like, or percussive) and the relationship between the voice and the underlying musical structure. Krims’ model considers the musical track and the text as two rhythmic streams running simultaneously and uses the ways that the rhythms and structures/segmentations of one overlap with the other as a basis for classification. He uses his flow classification in support of his system of hip hop sub-genre designations. For Krims, while genre may be involved in the performance of identity, flow itself is simply an aesthetic feature that works towards projecting a particular
style. Felicia Miyakawa (2005) expands on Krims’ work, claiming his original taxonomy to be a blunt but useful tool. I agree with her critique of his classificatory system as blunt, but given that an artist’s flow may be highly individual and change from song to song, or even within songs, any taxonomy must generalize in order to be useful. Although Miyakawa adds additional nuance to the academic discourse on flow, she still addresses the issue as one of aesthetics, using her exploration of flow in order to describe Five Percenter rap, a particular subgenre of hip hop.

More recently, some scholars have begun to explore the ways that flow might convey extra-musical meaning—for example Griffith Rollefson’s (2015) study of flow and the metaphor of illness, in which he explores how the concept of illness in hip hop connects to a long tradition of performance of disability in Afro-diasporic culture.

In Puerto Rico, style of flow is sometimes heard as a racial marker. Rivera-Rideau (2015) notes that many people in the Puerto Rican hip hop and reggaeton scenes understand flow as being racially marked, specifically citing claims that Tego Calderón’s flow is one of the primary features that distinguish him from “white” rappers (Rivera-Rideau 2015: 87; cf. Calderón 2007). Fans on internet forums often invoke flow as a marker of genre and genre valuation. For example, in 2011 a user posted the question, “¿Que significa Flow en el sentido del reggaeton?” (“What does flow mean in the case of reggaeton”), which prompted some of the following responses:

“bueno, sobre el flow en el reguetton, solo es una imitacion a un termino del mundo del rap que se refiere a un flujo de inspiracion....”

“En el reggaeton, nada, puesto que los reggaetoneros jamás han tenido flow. Los únicos que tienen flow real, style, y eso son los raperos.”

“pues en el hip hop es la fluidez de tus palabras con la que rapeas sobre el beat […] en el sentido reggaeton el flow no significa nada ya que hablan solo por hablar y

“well, when it comes to flow in reggaeton, it’s only an imitation of a term from the world of rap which refers to a flow of inspiration....”

“In reggaeton, nothing, given that reggaetoneros have never had flow. The only ones who have real flow, style, and all that are rappers.”

“well in hip hop it’s the fluidity of your words when you rap over the beat […] in the case of reggaeton flow doesn’t mean anything given that they speak only to
hacen rimas sin sentido flow para ellos les suena sexual y quizá lo interpretan como la fluidez y el ritmo con el que te muevas en la cama al tener sexo” (“¿Qué Significa Flow En El Sentido Del Reggaeton?” 2016)

hear themselves speak and make nonsense rhymes for them flow sounds sexy and maybe they interpret it as the fluidity and rhythm with which you move in bed having sex” (“¿Qué Significa Flow En El Sentido Del Reggaeton?” 2016)

Listeners’ connection between flow and social engagement(or lack thereof), as suggested by the last response given above, suggests that flow warrants consideration as an active feature of hip hop’s political and social significance.

The flow of Residente’s performances vary greatly from song to song, especially in Calle 13’s first two albums. However, their later albums evince a more standardized use of flow that parallels their growing interest in writing socially and politically engaged music. But before tracing the development of Residente’s flow, a comparison between three of Calle 13’s early singles will help to sharpen the distinction between three styles, which roughly align with Adam Krims’ (2000) schemata of sung, percussive-effusive, and speech-effusive styles. According to Krims’ taxonomy, sung flow is characterized by “rhythmic repetition, on-beat accents (especially strong-beat ones), regular, on-beat pauses […], and strict couplet groupings” (50). Sung style is common amongst many early rap artists such as Grandmaster Flash or the Beastie Boys. Effusive styles are distinguished from sung style by:

a tendency in rap music to spill over the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet, and, for that matter, of duple and quadruple groupings in general. […] The spilling-over of rhythmic boundaries may involve staggering the syntax and/or the rhymes; it may also involve relentless subdivision of the beat; it may involve repeated off-beat (or weak-beat) accents; or it may involve any other strategy that creates polyrhythms with four-measure groupings of 4/4 time. (Krims 2000, 50)
Though Krims creates two non-exclusive effusive classifications, speech and percussive, the former being characterized by the natural patterns of spoken prose and the latter highlighting the voice as a rhythmic instrument, in this thesis I deal primarily with the larger opposition between sung and effusive styles.

On Calle 13 (2005), the group’s eponymous debut album, Residente employs sung flow more regularly than he has on any album since. “La Jirafa” (“The Giraffe”), a light-hearted love song included in Calle 13, is a clear example of Residente’s sung flow. The song is nonsensical in its use of surreal imagery and metaphor.

“La Jirafa,” Calle 13

Mi canelita, mi azucarita, mi Linda Sara
Mi tormentita huracanada, mi Santa Clara. No voy a dejar que te pise ninguna cosa rara
Voy a prender las velas pa’ que no te pase nada
Aqui no hay cuchillos, ni pistolas
Aqui hay muchas muchas muchas cacerolas

My little cinnamon, my sugar, my Linda Sara
My little hurricane, my Santa Clara. I will not let any strange things step on you.
I’m going to light candles so nothing happens to you.
Here there are no knives nor guns.
Here there are a lot a lot a lot of saucepans

In “La Jirafa,” musical units for the most part correspond with textual units, the end of a four-beat measure almost always coinciding with the end of a linguistic syntactical unit. The phrases are delineated with prominent end-rhyme, and though there is some internal rhyme near the beginning of the excerpt, it is not prevalent enough to disrupt the stability of the parallel relationship between voice and pista. Although this type of flow was common in the early days of hip hop, many twenty-first-century rappers avoid it, arguing that its simplicity and predictability no longer have a place in hip hop (Caplan 2014). Additionally, the coincidence of syntactic break with end rhyme impedes development; it stops the forward momentum of the voice and leaves each phrase as a disjunctive unit completely separated from its neighboring units.
In contrast to “La Jirafa” vis-à-vis both flow and political engagement is the song “Querido F.B.I.” (“Dear F.B.I.), released as a single that same year. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the song was motivated by the killing of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos on September 23, 2005 by the FBI in a raid on his home in Puerto Rico. The language of “Querido F.B.I.” is addressed to the FBI—and by extension the US federal government. Residente threatens the government and its representatives, rapping “It’s for my mother that today I dress as a machetero / and tonight I’m going to hang 10 marines,”69 and incites the Puerto Rican public to join him in armed resistance. The pista features a two-measure drum loop that is repeated continuously through the whole song, with the exception of a few brief moments when a measure of silence serves to draw attention to a line in the voice. Structurally, the track allows for the sense of cumulative development in its delay of a chorus until more than half-way through its 3:30 time total. The first 1:55 is described by a gradual crescendo, both in the increasingly complex text-music interaction and in the rising pitch and register of Residente’s voice, which gets progressively louder until, by the time the chorus enters, he is yelling the lines at the limits of his voice.

Additionally, “Querido F.B.I.” has several large-scale features that help to characterize it as having speech-effusive flow, which is much more fluid than the sung flow of “La Jirafa.” The text-music interaction in “Querido F.B.I.” also creates a more aggressive flow that reinforces the violent call to action presented by “Querido F.B.I.” Considering the text alone, most of the song is organized in rhyming couplets (a feature common to most of Calle 13’s songs). For example, the climax occurs around 0:40 into the song when there is a roll call that name-checks a number of different cities and neighborhoods on the Island before claiming that the FBI has gotten itself into a mess. It could be read as follows:

69 “Por mi madre que hoy me disfrazo de machetero / Y esta noche voy a ahorcar a diez marineros.”
“Querido F.B.I.,” Calle 13

Que se activen La Perla, Lloren, Barbosa, Manuela, Caimito, Vista Hermosa, Covadonga, Camarones, Alturas, Torres Sabanas, Villa Esperanza, Sabana Abajo, Villa Fontana, Gladiolas, Villa Carolina, el pueblo de Trujillo, Las parcelas, San John, Monte Hatillo, Canales, San José, Río Grande, Luquillo, Puerta de Tierra, Santurce, Monasillo, urbanizaciones, caseríos.

El FBI se ha metido en un lío.

Rise up La Perla, Lloren, Barbosa, Manuela, Caimito, Vista Hermosa, Covadonga, Camarones, Alturas, Torres Sabanas, Villa Esperanza, Sabana Abajo, Villa Fontana, Gladiolas, Villa Carolina, el pueblo de Trujillo, Las parcelas, San John, Monte Hatillo, Canales, San José, Río Grande, Luquillo, Puerta de Tierra, Santurce, Monasillo, urbanizaciones, caseríos.

The FBI has gotten itself into a mess.

But rearranging the layout of the text so that it better aligns with the metrical structure of its performance shows how this potential rhythmic clarity is obscured:

“Querido F.B.I.” Calle 13

Que se activen La Perla, Lloren, Barbosa, Manuela, Caimito, Vista Hermosa, Covadonga, Camarones, Alturas, Torres Sabanas, Villa Esperanza, Sabana Abajo, Villa Fontana, Gladiolas, Villa Carolina, el pueblo de Trujillo, Las parcelas, San John, Monte Hatillo, Canales, San José, Río Grande, Luquillo, Puerta de Tierra, Santurce, Monasillo, urbanizaciones, caseríos.

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The FBI has gotten itself into a mess.

The excerpt opens with two rhyming couplets and then moves on to a six-item chain rhyme (rhymes appear in bold in the above text). However, this structure is obscured in its delivery. The nature of the roll call as a syntax-less string of cities creates a sense of building pressure; the listener is syntactically stuck, but there continues to be a crescendo in Residente’s voice, implying an eventual violent release. This linguistic stasis, combined with the short repetitive instrumental loop, is disorienting to the listener. The distinction between musical and linguistic phrases begins to dissolve. This effect is strengthened by constant enjambment and the

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70 No translation is required here, since after the first line this section features only the names of towns and neighborhoods.
disappearance of the loop for half of a beat cycle (indicated by the underlined phrase in the above text). When the drum loop is reintroduced, it creates a rhythmic dissonance, implying a downbeat mid-measure even as the following cycles continue to accentuate the original downbeat with a kick drum hit. This metrical shift is also reinforced by internal rhyme which reinforces the new displaced meter by suggesting end rhyme in what is originally mid-measure (see the Sabanas-Fontana rhyme). The rhyme scheme eventually becomes entirely irregular with the -illo chain rhyme. By the time Residente reaches the end of the roll call, all sense of structure has vanished and the listener is completely disoriented, which doubles as an illustration of the “lío” (“mess”) in which the US federal government will soon find itself.

Most other songs by Calle 13 do not feature such complex flow as that heard in “Querido F.B.I.,” nor as simple flow as that heard in “La Jirafa.” The first single from their debut album, titled “Atrévete-te-te” (“Dare to-to-to”), employs something akin to Krim’s percussion-effusive flow, which is characterized by the use of the voice as a percussion instrument in ways that do not necessarily align with the underlying instrumental track’s rhythmic structure. While the song is not explicitly political—the group thinks of it as one of their “fun songs” (González 2013)—it does have undertones of cultural nationalism. In “Atrévete-te-te,” Residente flirts with a presumably Puerto Rican woman infatuated with Anglo-American culture and exhorts her to dare to stop pretending and embrace her true Boricua identity. Musically the track invokes cumbia in its rhythms and accompaniment patterns, and at the time of its release it stood out to fans and critics as having an unusual instrumentation for reggaeton, most notably in its inclusion of clarinet.

“Atrévete-te-te” is composed mostly of rhyming couplets, with musical measures usually coinciding with syntactical units. However, other features of the track, many of them present in
the song’s chorus, make the flow more complex than that of a song like “La Jirafa.” End rhyme is common, but by no means uniformly present. In the first two lines of the chorus, for example, Residente uses internal rhyme to create a more effusive flow.

“Atrévete-te-te,” Calle 13

Atrévete-te-te salte del closet. E-scápate, quítate el esmalte. Deja de taparte, que nadie va a retra -tarte. Levántate, ponte hyper. Préndete sácale chispas al instante Préndete en fuego como un lighter Sacúdete el sudor como si fueras un wiper Que tú eres callejera, Street Fighter.

Dare yourself to come out of the closet. E-scape, take off your nail polish. Stop covering up, no one is going to photograph you. Get up, get hyper. Ignite yourself, send out sparks right now. Light yourself on fire just like a lighter. Shake off your sweat as if you were a wiper. You’re a street girl, a Street Fighter.

The first line ends with a split rhyme ("closet. E-“) that echoes the “–ete” sound of the opening word, “Atrévete.” The ending of the second line, while a slant rhyme with the end of the first line, is sonically more closely tied to the “–ate” sound that permeates the rest of the second line. Residente continues to use rhyme in a way that creates effusive flow throughout the rest of the chorus, shifting the place of the “end rhyme” to the second and then first beat of the measure (taparte-retratarte) and mixing internal/end rhyme across lines (Levántate-ponte-instante). When he finally does shift to a more sung style flow with conventional end rhyme towards the end of the chorus, he does so with English words. This linking of the English language with a more square and predictable flow acts within the track’s narrative as a gentle teasing of the anglophile object of his attention, and outside the track’s narrative as a subtle argument for Puerto Rican cultural nationalism.

Other features of the delivery also contribute to creating an effusive style flow. Whereas pauses in “La Jirafa” consistently arrive at the end of a musical unit, here they are just as likely to occur mid-measure. For example, there is a pause after “taparte” in the middle of line three, which then runs into line four without skipping a beat. This disjunction between the voice and
the music creates rhythmic complexity that is only heightened by the frequent syncopations, where the natural accent of a word falls between musical beats (e.g. as is the case with “Levántate,” “Ponte,” and “Préndete en fuego”).

Thus, both the flow and the nationalist message of “Atrévete-te-te” differ from those of “Querido F.B.I.” The nationalism is less explicit and the flow more regular. But there is also more of a nationalist message and more complex flow than there is in “La Jirafa.” Over time, Calle 13 wrote more songs featuring effusive flow, socially engaged content, and aspirations towards cultural nationalism. Their later songs tend to address perceived social and political problems and engage with nationalist discourse in a less explicitly political way. This trend becomes most apparent with *Entren Los Que Quieran* (2010), in which hardly any of the songs can be characterized by predominant use of sung style flow. This shift in flow style also correlates with a turn towards more socially engaged music. One track in particular stands out as a tongue-in-cheek commentary on this development. “Muerte en Hawaii” (“Death in Hawaii”) is a naïve and silly love song similar in many ways to “La Jirafa.” The musical setting evokes Hawaii with gently strummed ukulele and slide guitar. Residente uses sung style flow throughout as he addresses a woman and brags about all of the fantastic things that she inspires him to do. Syntactic units coincide with musical units and end rhymes structure the track into a series of rhyming couplets.

“Muerte en Hawaii,” Calle 13

Sé pelear todas las artes marciales. También sé como comunicarme con los animales. Mientras más pasa el tiempo me veo más joven y esta canción la compuse sin escuchar como Beethoven. Por ti, todo lo que hago lo hago por ti. Es que tú me sacas lo mejor de mí. Soy todo lo que soy porque tú eres todo lo que quiero. I know all of the martial arts. Also I know how to communicate with animals. The more time passes the younger I look and I wrote this song without listening just like Beethoven. Because of you, everything I do I do because of you. You bring out the best in me. I am everything that I am because you are everything that I want.
In this excerpt, syntactic units in the text do not directly align with musical measures in the first three lines, but textual syntax is reinforced by the end rhymes occurring regularly on beat-class 4. The beginnings of the following phrases (e.g. “También,” “y esta can-“) are heard as clear anacrases.

The song’s ending is poignant; after the final chorus there is a musical outro in which (presumably) the singer whistles a melody to the same ukulele accompaniment present throughout the rest of the song. However, this melody is cut off mid-phrase by a gunshot, followed by the sound of the ukulele dropping to the ground and then a heavier thump, which the could be interpreted as the musician’s dying body hitting the ground. The track closes with about ten seconds of silence, save for the sound of sea gulls at the shore. Given its place on an album otherwise concerned with social engagement, “Muerte en Hawaii” can be read as a cynical turning away from the naïveté of light-hearted love songs and the sung style flow best suited to their expression. Calle 13 abandon both as they seek to create more socially engaged music that stands as a cultural representation of the Puerto Rican nation.

The more subtly effusive flow and nationalism of “Atrévete-te-te” continues on Calle 13’s latest album, *Multi_Viral* (2014). Musically, the album’s title track is driven by a heavy drum beat and prominently features looped guitar riffs performed by Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine, a North American rap-rock group strongly associated with political activism. The song features text in French, English, and Arabic—the latter two performed respectively by collaborators Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, and Kamilya Jubran, a

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71 WikiLeaks is an international non-profit best known for publishing classified information online. After Assange published a large cache of US government classified documents in 2010, the US department of justice sought to prosecute him under the Espionage Act of 1917. Assange, an Australian citizen, has since sought refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, from whence he has been applying to various nations for asylum.
Palestinian singer who is best known as lead singer of the former revolutionary band Sabreen.\(^{72}\)

Assange recorded spoken text which is used in the song’s bridge, and Jubran sings during the choruses. This collaboration implies analogy between Puerto Rico’s and Palestine’s struggles for independent statehood and demonstrates solidarity with Assange in his undermining of the US government.

Like “Atrévete-te-te,” “Multi_Viral” employs percussion-effusive flow.

“Multi_Viral,” Calle 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No nos</th>
<th>They won’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parán, porque un mensaje contundente</td>
<td>stop us, because an overwhelming message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convierte a cualquier teniente en un tiburón sin dientes.</td>
<td>can change any lieutenant into a toothless shark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El estado nos teme por que al mismo</td>
<td>The state fears us because at the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiempo Somos 132 y 15-M. Si la</td>
<td>time We Are 132 and 15-M.(^{73}) If the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prensa no habla, nosotros damos los detalles,</td>
<td>press doesn’t speak, we give the details,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pintando las paredes con aerosol en las calles.</td>
<td>Painting the walls with aerosol in the streets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levanto mi pancarta y la difundo. Con solo una</td>
<td>I lift my banner and spread the word. With just one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persona que la lea ya empieza a cambiar el mundo.</td>
<td>person who reads it the world begins to change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though the text is structured around rhyming couplets, frequent enjambment serves to move the listener forward. Additionally, the metrical placement of end rhymes is shifted from line to line (e.g. “teme” occurs on beat-class 3 while “M” occurs on beat-class 4). The difference is subtle, but it is enough to complicate what could otherwise be considered sung style flow, and this complication leads to greater engagement on the part of listeners.

The text-music relationships in songs like “Querido F.B.I.” or “Multi_Viral” are more complex than they are in others such as “La Girafa” or “Muerte en Hawaii,” in large part because of the former’s more effusive flow, and this in turn facilitates flow-states. Because flow states

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\(^{72}\) For more on Sabreen (1982-2002), see chapter 4 of McDonald (2013: 129-143). Similar to Calle 13, they were a cosmopolitan protest group popular with the Palestinian middle and upper classes.

\(^{73}\) “Soy 132” is a 2012 Mexican social movement led primarily by university students in protest of the national media’s coverage of elections, which was heavily biased in favor of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the political party that has dominated Mexican politics for almost the entirety of the twentieth century. 15-M is a 2011 Spanish anti-austerity movement.
can lead to a greater sense of agency on the part of the listener, it is appropriate that more politically-engaged songs would rely more heavily on effusive flow styles; in a song like “Querido F.B.I.,” which calls for resisting oppression and colonization, an induced flow state makes listeners more receptive to the lyrics and allows them to experience in a limited way the agency advocated for in the song. By allowing the audience to momentarily embody liberation, effusive hip hop flow becomes a powerful political tool.
EPILOGUE:

The 2011 Latin Grammy Awards ceremony opened with a performance by Calle 13 of their song “Latinoamérica.” The song began with the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar, led by Gustavo Dudamel, in a musical introduction evocative of Andean flutes. The orchestra then played a full arrangement of the song’s chorus, at the end of which Residente emerged on stage to dedicate the song to all of Latin America. The song continues with Calle 13, singer PG-13, a full live backing band, Dudamel, and the orchestra (which doubles as choir). Although nothing explicitly political was said during this performance, Residente’s shirt, which read “Un Solo Estrella Libre!” over an image of the Puerto Rican flag, as well as the text of the song offer critique of the US government’s policy towards Puerto Rico and Latin America more generally. This collective performance, which teamed one of Puerto Rico’s most popular musical groups with one of Venezuela’s most cherished artistic institutions, showcased Calle 13’s move towards panlatinidad as a central element in Puerto Rican identity.

74 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8W34jyNUid0, accessed 17 March 2016.

75 OSSB was formerly Venezuela’s premier youth orchestra, founded by José Antonio Abreu, architect of that nation’s influential el Sistema music program.

76 PG-13 is the stage name of Ileana Cabra Joglar, a Puerto Rican singer-songwriter and the sister of Residente and Visitante.

77 “A single free star!” A slogan popular with independentistas, it references the single star of the Puerto Rican flag; though there was nothing explicitly political said in this performance, in each of their acceptance speeches for the nine awards they one that evening, Residente called out a different political or social cause, including accessible education in Latin America and an end to Payola. His speech on the latter was abruptly cut off by Univision, the network presenting the awards show that had also been accused of using payola to ensure that artists on their own label were successful. See (Garsd 2016).

78 Hugo Chávez, then president of Venezuela, tweeted: “Bravo por nuestra Orquesta ‘SimónBolívar’! Bravo por nuestro GustavoDudamel! Bravo por ‘Calle 13’!! ViviremosYVenceremos!” (“Bravo for our Orchestra
This performance highlights the ways that music shapes the ways in which the nation is imagined, both through the actual sonic qualities of songs, as well as the artists’ personal backgrounds and extra-musical activities. As popular public figures, many of these artists have a much broader base of followers than do politicians, and so political parties and movements can benefit from endorsements and support, as is the case in the relationship between Calle 13 and Puerto Rico’s independentistas. While Residente and Visitante continue looking outwards to Latin America in their imagining of Puerto Rico, other artists such as Tego Calderón look inwards in their advocacy for a Puerto Rico that includes those excluded from hegemonic representations of the nation.  

The continuing contested nature of the Puerto Rican nation has recently come into sharper focus with the Island’s financial crisis and seeming inability to address it without relying on the US federal congress to act. Simultaneously, the diaspora is also changing, with Florida surpassing New York as the primary region for Puerto Rican migration. These challenges and changes will shape the debate surrounding the status-question, and music is sure to play a role in this debate. As artists contribute and respond to proposals and ideas for Puerto Rico, as they engage with independentistas and statists, they will continue to inform the various conceptions of self and nation circulating the Island.

‘SimónBolivar’! Bravo for our GustavoDudamel! Bravo for ‘Calle 13’!! We will live and we will win!”). See (“Sinfónica Simón Bolivar Y Calle 13 Impactaron En Los Grammy | Correo Del Orinoco” 2011). The inclusion of Venezuela is significant, since that country under Chavez has been one of the most vocal of the region in their opposition to the US government and its foreign policy.  

In contrast to Calle 13’s collaborations with Dudamel, Sinfónica Simón Bolivar, and artists from all over Latin America and the Global South, Calderón’s recent collaborative efforts have focused on working with Puerto Rican artists such as Don Omar, a reggaetonero, and Kany García, a singer-songwriter (“Tego Calderón Ofrecerá Gran Concierto En La Isla” 2015).


