

Ana Nenadovic (Berlin)

Performing Feminism, Autobiography, and Testimony. Feminist Rap in Latin America.

This article focuses on selected Latin American female rap artists (Anita Tijoux, Rebeca Lane, and the duo Krudas Cubensi), and the way they perform feminism, autobiography and testimony through their lyrics and performances. The analysis concentrates on the synergies between the texts themselves, the official music videos shared on YouTube and the background music. It aims to demonstrate that only such a synergistic approach to rap allows a profound understanding of its particularities and its contributions to feminist discourses and spaces for feminist testimony in the current rise of both right-wing politics and feminist movements on the continent.

Keywords: *feminist rap; Latin America; performance; performativity; autobiography;*

Mi rap no es femenino, solo feminista.
Rebeca Lane

1 Introduction

Hip hop is not only culture and art, but also protest and empowerment, too. It gives visibility and voice to those (self-)identified as invisible and unheard. Rap, one of hip hop's artistic expressions, thus, becomes a poetry of the oppressed. Rap artists seek inspiration in their own lives and construct their selves through the lyrics.

Due to the manifold possibilities of artistic creation, resistance and empowerment that hip hop culture holds, it has spread from the US to the entire world, establishing bonds between those commonly referred to as subaltern groups. Even though rap is often associated with the misogynistic objectification of women, it can also be used as a means of the feminist agenda. In fact, during the 1990s a new feminism – hip hop feminism – emerged in the US. Female artists have been expressing their criticism of male chauvinist expressions in rap and discussing feminist issues through rap ever since.

In this article, I aim to focus on recent feminist rap in Latin America and to explore how the artists perform their feminism, write their life-stories, and create new memory spaces through their lyrics and performances in YouTube videos. Considering the great number of feminist rap artists in Latin America, it is impossible to give a general overview. Instead, this article will focus on a few selected artists whose impact goes beyond their national contexts, and who explicitly engage in feminism. After giving a brief overview of the origins and the evolution of hip hop, in general, and hiphop feminism, in particular, the article concentrates on the lyrics themselves, on distinct approaches of reading and interpreting them, either as poetry or as life-narratives. It concludes with the proposition of combining both suggestions in order to achieve a thorough analysis of the lyrics. Finally, the focus turns to specific lyrics, written and performed by the Guatemalan Rebeca Lane, the Chilean Ana Tijoux, and the Cuban duo Krudas Cubensi, investigating how the artists define their feminism, construct their selves and open new spaces for memory and testimony for Latin American women through rap.

2 From the ghetto to hip hop feminism

*Más que ustedes conocemos la discriminación
Somos clase humilde, somos color
Además, somos mujeres, necesitamos amor*
Krudas Cubensi

Hip hop emerged in the 1970s as a culture of the US ghettos, mainly among Afro-Americans and Puerto Ricans. DJing, rap, break-dancing and graffiti constituted the four elements of expression. Gwendolyn Pough underlines the recent inclusion of film, spoken word, autobiographies, literature, journalism, activism and feminism into hip hop culture (cf. 2007: 79-80). Gilroy and others ascribe the origins of rap to African and Caribbean oral traditions, as griot or toasting (cf. Tickner 2008: 123). Tickner points out that

[s]imilar to rap, both [griot, toasting] are grounded in the lyrical and verbal abilities and the improvisational capacities of the speaker, and often make use of hidden discourses and cultural codes in order to criticize existing relations of domination and discrimination (id.).

Rabaka emphasizes the tight relations between hip hop, the cultural aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts movement, as well as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements (cf. 2011: 4). Furthermore, he points out the significant role speech occupies in hip hop culture.

Similar to past African American cultural aesthetic and sociopolitical movements, the hip hop generation has inherited African Americans' longstanding emphasis on eloquence, rhetoric, and the spiritual dimensions of the spoken word ... Therefore, is it any wonder that rap music ultimately eclipsed DJing, break-dancing and graffiti to become the major and most visible aspect of hip hop culture? (id.).

Rap, as well as the other expressions of hip hop culture, allowed artists within the marginalised population of the ghettos to express themselves, and to inscribe their experiences on walls (through graffiti), in music (through DJing) or voice (through rap) and on bodies (through break-dancing), thus breaking out of invisibility and voicelessness, and reclaiming their resistance to dominant ideologies (cf. Martínez 1997: 266). The ghetto youth assumed this responsibility and took spaces and voices, thereby breaking out of their subaltern position. By the early 1990s, rap experienced a division into two types of narratives: progressive or conscious rap and Gangsta rap. The latter relinquished the political commitment and favours a celebration of material wealth, violence, drug abuse, and misogyny (cf. Tickner 2008: 124).

Through commercialization, mass media and migrations, the hip hop culture translocated. Rap resorts to symbols, imageries, and cultural codes to expose and simultaneously subvert discourses and practices of domination and discrimination, making it, therefore, a universal art (cf. Tickner 2008: 127; Appadurai 1996: 110-112). Throughout the world, dominant modes of cultural production are re-inscribed in rap and, consequently, they acquire new meanings. Even though the appropriation of rap differs in the individual contexts (cf. Tickner 2008: 122), shared experiences of marginalization and domination constitute a common factor in rap from diverse contexts. Popular cultures' capacity to resist dominant structures as well as the complexity of rela-

tions between hegemonic models and subordinated groups have been disputed at large by thinkers such as Adorno, Marcuse, Clarke, Hall and Gilroy, among others, as Theresa Martínez points out (cf. 1997: 271). Still, she emphasises popular culture's potentiality for resistance asserting that «popular culture may be embedded within and even contribute to a dominant hegemonic framework, but it is still capable of resisting that framework [...]. Rap music is, perhaps, one of the most intriguing examples of such resistance» (ibid.: 272). Nonetheless, it is of great importance to mention the numerous contradictions in rap, regarding, especially, representations of women. While rap aims to raise consciousness on issues as social injustices and racism, sexism, a significant portion of hip hop culture is characterised by misogyny and the objectification of women. Yet, women have been using rap as a way of resistance to confront hip hop's inherent misogyny by creating spaces for themselves and denouncing diverse forms of discrimination within this culture:

Challenging male rappers' predominance, female rap artists have not only proven that they have lyrical skills; in their struggle to survive and thrive within this tradition, they have created spaces from which to deliver powerful messages from Black female and Black feminist perspectives (Keyes 2012: 400).

With the broad commercialization of rap music, the number of female rap artists has increased, as did the resistance against male domination in hip hop culture. On the one hand, numerous US female artists have rejected to be called feminists ever since, in spite of making gender issues subjects of their lyrics. On the other hand, third-wave feminists have theorized about hip hop culture, and thus favoured the development of hip hop feminism (cf. Pough 2007: 80-81). Hip hop feminism does not concentrate solely on the misogynistic representations and objectifications of women in hip hop culture, but goes beyond it, by theorizing about the lives of Afro-American women and female rappers in many aspects, emphasizing their agency and empowerment. Or, as Joan Morgan puts it:

In my quest to find a functional feminism for myself and my sistas – one that seeks empowerment on spiritual, material, physical, and emotional levels – I draw heavily on the cultural movement that defines my generation. As post-Civil Rights, post-feminist, post-soul children of hip-hop we have a dire need for the truth (2012: 418).

Hip hop feminism is intersectional, it takes into consideration gender, race, class, and different sexualities. Female artists appropriate rap and performances as platforms for the deconstruction and reconstruction of female identities (cf. Keyes 2012: 409) and, as the Chilean rap artist Anita Tijoux pointed out in an interview in 2015, obtain spaces and voices to reach a greater audience than academia does (2015).

Despite the correlations between US and Latin American hip hop feminisms, there are significant differences. Firstly, Latin American hip hop feminism includes other racial identities, and does not pertain exclusively to women of African descent. Secondly, it is explicitly transnational, whereas US artists and feminists ignore the existence of other hip hop feminisms, as Saunders indicates (cf. 2016: 180). Thirdly, Latin American female rap artists declare themselves feminists openly and proudly.

Rebeca Lane, Anita Tijoux, and Krudas Cubensi, whose lyrics will be analysed later in more detail in this article, define themselves as feminists. In their lyrics, they combine their political and feminist agendas with personal narratives. They perform their status as Latin American feminists by self-fashioning these identities through constructed conversations with others, be it either men, dominant structures, other women, or the audience. The performativity is based on words belonging to a language that usually denies women the same subjectivity as men, as Irigaray affirms in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (1985). But as the above-mentioned rap artists repeatedly enunciate the female subjectivity by employing the personal pronoun *she* more often than *he* and by equating the *I* or *we* with *she*, they subvert the language and perform their new identities precisely with words from the subverted language. Through reiterations of these performative acts, they create alternative discourses of femininity, female agency and empowerment.

Aside from defining their feminism in their lyrics, feminist rap artists create spaces for female solidarity, for memory, and for the struggles against the overt sexism Latin American women suffer daily.

3 Rap and the poetry of life writing

Poesía venenosa, por los poros sudo poesía venenosa
Rebeca Lane

Through rap, a modern form of poetry, those who are identified as marginalised are given a possibility to write their lives, oppose dominant structures, seize agency, and gain empowerment. Or, as Alexis Pate puts it:

What's more, by speaking in this new rap/poetic form, the speakers could suddenly claim agency. The *transformative power* of rap/poetry is quite amazing. To be a poet, to strive to tell the truth about one's life and circumstances, is also to take some responsibility and, consequently, some control over your social condition. This transformation is actually what coalesces into agency and personal power (2010: 27, my italics).

This transformative power of rap captivates artists from all over the world, and enables them to transfer individual and collective experiences, as well as cultural codes into memory to be shared with others. Pate insists that an effective understanding of rap can only be achieved by consciously focusing on the literary components of the lyrics and reading them attentively. Furthermore, he calls for a separation of text and music, as «[t]he words in rap are almost more important than the music» (Pate 2010: 38). The Brazilian linguist Marília Gessa criticises such a simplistic approach to rap. She points out that Pate only considers written texts as literature and disregards the power of performance, either live or in videos, and advocates a joint analysis of text, both oral and written, and performance for a profound understanding of rap (cf. 2011: 481-482).

By focussing on the artists' premise «to tell the truth about one's life and circumstances» (ibid.: 27), I attend to the life-writing in rap. As Coslett/Lury/Summerfield point out autobiography cannot be defined as a distinct genre. Autobiographical practices reveal themselves in various written, spoken and visual genres (2002: 1), as life-writing is characterized by «shifting and complex boundaries between self and other, past and present, writing and reading, fact and fiction» (Stanley 2002: 40). Hence, rap can be an expression of life-writing. There are different approaches to analysing the autobiographical components of rap lyrics, be it either to trace the connection between the *per-*

sonal with the *political* (cf. Coslett/Lury/Summerfield 2002: 2) or to uncover the development of the artist-selves. Hess proposes that «[a]s autobiography centres on the creation of a self, hip-hop narratives focus on the creation of an artist-self, whose success and celebrity are held accountable to the performer's lived experience» (2006: 62). In his article «From Bricks to Billboards. Hip-hop Autobiography», he focuses on commercially successful rap artists like Ice-T, Jay-Z or Eminem, and their progress from marginalization to prominence narrated through their lyrics. He accentuates that

[a]s MCs use their lyrics to chronicle their paths to success, hip-hop becomes more distinctly autobiographical than other popular music forms, where the performer's biography is represented primarily in press materials rather than in songs. Yet, ... I do not want to neglect the complex fictions created in the music through its use of hyperbole, metaphor, and parody, through which rap extends black traditions of Signifying (ibid.: 63).

Rap artists do not simply write their chronicles in the lyrics, they create a different self – the artist-self – through their art, deriving the artist's life stories from the real person's experiences. In conclusion, the *I* in rap lyrics does not necessarily refer to the real-life person, but only to the artist-person created through the lyrics themselves (cf. ibid.: 66). Focusing on referentiality, as De Man does (cf. 1979: 920), this means, that the *I* in her lyrics does not refer to the real person Rebeca Eunice Vargas but to Rebeca Lane, the pseudonym and artist-self.

Like Pate's analysis of rap as poetry, Hess's approach limits the autobiographical components of rap to the lyrics. In her studies on Jamaican dancehall, Hope, however, urges for a broader investigation of various genres of popular music which

arguably function as a form of life writing or self-narration that engages a variety of autobiographical acts to bring the artists | authors and audience | readers into a sphere of mutual creation and interpretation of artistic and social identities (2015: 108).

Furthermore, she insists that «it is critical to examine popular-music lyrics, performances, images, and audience response (where possible) as forms of self-narration that expand the range of texts beyond the purely written» (ibid.: 108). As identities are not fixed attributes, but are produced through cultural

norms, they tend to be unstable and of provisional nature (id.). Moreover, and especially from a feminist perspective, it is indispensable to recognise the impact social institutions have on the creation of selves and the articulation of life-narratives (cf. Stanley 2002: 44).

In my analysis of feminist rap in Latin America I aim to combine Pate's, Gessa's, Hess's and Hope's approaches by attending to both the poetic aspects of rap lyrics as well as to the complex interactions between the written texts and the performances in YouTube videos. Thus, I intend not only to answer De Man's question whether autobiography can be written in verse (cf. 1979: 920), but also to evaluate how feminism, autobiography and testimony are performed through the synergy between rap lyrics and performance in YouTube videos.

4 Performing feminism

No sumisa ni obediente, mujer fuerte insurgente
Anita Tijoux

Many female Latin American rap artists are womanists, that is feminists of colour, who «[l]ov[e] music. Lov[e] dance. Lov[e] the moon. *Lov[e]* the Spirit. Lov[e] love and food and roundness. Lov[e] struggle. *Lov[e]* the Folk. Lov[e] [themselves]. Regardless» (Walker 1983: xii, original italics). In some of their lyrics, they elaborate on their personal definition of feminism, as does the Guatemalan Rebeca Lane in *Bandera Negra (Black Flag)*. Rebeca Lane has her own homepage, where she shares her videos, lyrics and poems with her audience. As she states in her biography, it was through poetry that she got involved in hip hop culture (cf. Lane n.d.). Rap is her means to participate in the preservation of the memory of the genocide, and the struggles of women and other victimised groups in Guatemalan society. Rebeca states about herself: «As a poet she's been committed to her liberation as a woman and the heterosexual roles imposed on her body, and the colonization and militarization of the land she's been born in» (Lane n.d.). Her auto-definition as feminist and poet is also a recurrent motif in *Bandera Negra*.

In *Bandera Negra*, Rebeca speaks to an imagined patriarchal male other. She declares herself a feminist, an anarchist and a guerrillera who fights not with weapons, but with words against silencing and gender prejudices: «Mi rap no es femenino sólo feminista / No busco el poder porque yo soy una anarquista».¹ Her struggles against (neo-)colonization, patriarchal assumptions of femininity and oppression are tightly connected to her family's and the her country's history: «En esta vida y en la anterior soy guerrillera / Me matan pero vuelvo a nacer en esta tierra»² – referring to those women who were killed or disappeared during the Guatemalan civil war. One of them was her aunt Rebeca, a poet involved in the guerrilla movement (Lane n.d.). The rap artist symbolises the reincarnation of her aunt – not only was she named after her but she became a poet as well – and all the other disappeared Guatemalan women. Rebeca Lane recovers their voices in order to save their memory from oblivion: «Vengo a vengar con palabras a todos los muertos/ Prefiero cantar una canción en los entierros/ Vine a manchar tu pared con mi grito de esperanza/ Calladas gargantas yo cortaré de una tajada».³ Her feminism is not meant to constitute a threat to men, as feminism is not aimed against men in general, but against patriarchal structures and inequalities: «No quiero dominarte soy una artista... Tengo millones de huevos en cada ovario/ No me hace más mujer ni a vos te hace menos macho».⁴

Her performative speech acts are underlined by the performativity of her feminism, activism, and anarchism in her performance in the official music video. Rap and activism are combined, as the video shows the rapping Rebeca amid a group of anarchist feminists during the preparations for a manifestation. It is a subversion of numerous male rappers' videos, where a male rapper is surrounded by scantily clad women dancing lasciviously beside him. Whereas in those videos the women are objectified (cf. Pough 2007: 82-83)

¹ 'My rap is not female, only feminist/ I am not looking for power because I am an anarchist'. This and all following translations are mine.

² 'In this life and my former one I am a guerrilla fighter/ They killed me, but I was re-born on the same soil'.

³ 'I am here to take revenge with words for all the dead/ I prefer to sing a song at funerals/ I am here to mark your wall with my cry of hope/ Silent throats I will cut in one slice'.

⁴ 'I don't want to dominate you, I am an artist/ I have millions of eggs [balls] in each ovary/ They don't make me more of a woman neither you less of a man'.

and perceived through a male gaze, the women surrounding Rebeca assume agency. They write their protests on banners and on their bodies, they read, play the guitar, dance, take photos, and breastfeed their infants. The gaze is female, symbolised by the female photographer. They celebrate female solidarity as they act together in a group of equals; the camera focalises each of them at least once. As spectators, we testify to their seizing of public spaces for the feminist agenda. The group leaves the closed domestic space and marches to a square, in front of a church, with their banners, singing their rap song at the end of the video.

Another female rap artist who performs her feminism through lyrics and performances in YouTube videos is the Chilean Ana María Merino, known as Anita Tijoux. Whereas the persona in Rebeca Lane's *Bandera Negra* performs a feminist anarchist, Ana Tijoux's persona performs manifold female identities in *Antipatriarca* (*Anti Patriarchal*). Still, the addressee is a patriarchal male. Ana María Merino was born in France, after her Chilean parents had fled Pinochet's dictatorship, and returned to Chile after Pinochet lost power (Mineo 2016). Having grown up in a multi-ethnic context, her definition of feminism is not as connected to Latin American experiences as Rebeca Lane's. Tijoux affirms that hip hop, on the one hand, denounces social injustices, but it «can also talk about love, motherhood, and women's empowerment» (id.) – issues she frequently addresses in her rap lyrics.

In *Antipatriarca*, Anita refers to numerous possibilities for women to participate actively, and as equals to men, in society and in relationships:

Yo puedo ser tu hermana, tu hija, Tamara, Pamela o Valentina
Yo puedo ser tu gran amiga, incluso tu compañera de vida ...
Yo puedo ser jefa de hogar, empleada o intelectual
Yo puedo ser protagonista de nuestra historia y la que agita
La gente, la comunidad, la que despierta la vecindad.⁵

The *I* ('Yo') is not identical to the rap artist herself, rather it is a collective «I» which includes all women; the stories narrated in the lyrics may be derived either from the artist's personal experience or any other woman's. The lyrics

⁵ 'I could be your sister, your daughter, Tamara, Pamela or Valentina/ I could be your great friend, even your partner... I could be the head of the household, a maid or an intellectual/ I could be the protagonist of our history and the one to cause unrest/ Among the people, the community, I could be the one to wake up the neighbourhood'.

do not simply allow the female listeners/readers to identify themselves with the *I* but seek identification by generalizing it. This is achieved by giving the *I* different names and professions through the words in the lyrics, different nationalities, races and sexual orientations through the images in the YouTube video, implying that the differences are not relevant for the subjectification of the *I*, but only the common experience of resistance to subordination. The *I* is a consciously autonomous and independent woman. Like Rebeca, Anita explicitly identifies patriarchy, and not men in general, as the oppressor that needs to be confronted and resisted. The persona does not intend to isolate herself from men or to refuse involvement with them. On the contrary, she aims for relationships with men, but only those marked by equality: «Yo puedo ser cualquiera, de todas depende de cómo tú me apodas/ Pero no voy a ser la que obedece porque mi cuerpo me pertenece».⁶ The persona takes agency and opposes patriarchy through a performative speech act:

Tú no me vas a humillar, tú no me vas a gritar
 Tú no me vas a someter, tú no me vas a golpear
 Tú no me vas a denigrar, tú no me vas a obligar
 Tú no me vas a silenciar, tú no me vas a callar.⁷

Through the expression of her resistance, the persona becomes empowered.

As in *Bandera Negra*, the YouTube video and the music underline the feminist identity performed in the lyrics. It is through the music, specifically the Andean flute, that Anita alludes to her Chilean identity. Due to its construction, the video defines her feminism more explicitly as an intersectional and anti-heteronormative feminism. It features medium-close shots of different people rapping *Antipatriarca*. The people's genders, ages and races differ. They perform various non-heteronormative identities, e.g. a female construction worker, a queer man putting on make-up, a female boxer, a man doing housework, etc.

If in *Antipatriarca*, the integration of queer people in feminism is still implicit and realised only through the performance of queer identities in the

⁶ 'I could be anyone of those, it depends on how you call me/ but I won't be the one who obeys because my body belongs to me'.

⁷ 'You won't humiliate me, you won't shout at me/ You won't subjugate me, you won't punch me/ You won't degrade me, you won't oblige me/ You won't silence me, you won't shut me up'.

YouTube video, in *Mi Cuerpo Es Mío (My Body is Mine)* it is explicit both in the lyrics as well as in the video. Odaymara Cuesta and Olivia Prendes, who together form the duo Krudas Cubensi, openly challenge the hegemonic discourses concerning race, gender, and sexuality in Cuban society (Saunders 2009: 2). On their homepage they define themselves as «Cuban Hip Hop MCs, Independent Musicians, Poets, Theater [sic] Performers, Educators representing Black & Latin Womyn, Gender not conforming, Immigrants, Queers and People of Color» (Krudas Cubensi) and state explicitly that they «choose the art as a weapon to fight against oppression, for justice, for balance, for our rights, to celebrate the [sic] life» (id.). In *Mi Cuerpo Es Mío*, the lyrics' persona is clearly identifiable with the duo, and, alternative to the approach of Rebeca Lane and Anita Tijoux, Krudas Cubensi perform queerness not only through speech acts, like: «Krudas Cubensi one more time representing womyn and queer people choices», but also through their own bodies and choice of style. In their videos and during performances, both dress gender-neutral or what is considered to be men's clothes and Odaymara proudly displays her goatee beard.

Krudas Cubensi assume their responsibility to speak for other Afro-Cuban queer women who still have not obtained a voice in a socialist society that silences issues of racial and gender discrimination.⁸ This determination is underlined by the YouTube video by featuring only the duo rapping the lyrics. The agency of other women is depicted through the inclusion of photographs from feminist protests all over the world, and through the repetition of slogans of the global feminist left like: «Ni amo, ni estado, ni partido, ni marido».⁹ In the Cuban context, the self-definition of left activists constitutes a subversion of underground hip hop, which is usually alienated from the global left, due to its criticism of and distance from the left-wing Cuban government. Krudas Cubensi's feminism is, therefore, international and intersectional. Their lyrics mix Spanish and English and are inclusive of all races: «Desde inmemorables épocas tuvimos grandes hazañas Negras heroínas, blancas, chinas, todas chamanas, indias hermanas/ Luchando por un mejor

⁸ For further information on racism and sexism in Cuba see: Colón Pichardo (2016); Fernández (2001); Almeida Junco (2011).

⁹ 'No master, no state, no party, nor husband'.

mañana».¹⁰ Even though all of the here mentioned rap artists are known internationally, only the Cuban duo uses English in their lyrics or subtitles in their YouTube videos.

Through their lyrics/poems and their performances, these artists manifest their feminist ideas publicly, as the here presented analysis demonstrates. As Rebeca Lane's, Anita Tijoux's and Krudas Cubensi's feminism is tightly connected to their personal experiences and autobiographies, it gives them the possibility not only to perform their feminism through rap, but to integrate their life-stories into their art and to construct their artist-selves through the same means, and create memory spaces for their experiences.

5 Performing autobiography

Porque cuando escribo me siento libre
Rebeca Lane

In rap lyrics, the artist-self and the real-life person fuse together. Even though the rappers derive the narratives from their personal experiences, the lyrics construct a life belonging to the artist-selves. The autobiographies portrayed in rap lyrics are, therefore, frequently linked to rap itself and depict the transformation of the real-life persons into rap artists.

In 1977, Anita Tijoux performs the gradual disappearance of Ana María Merino and the rise of Anita Tijoux. At the beginning of the poem, Ana María is born and given an identity/a name she could not choose herself: «Nací un día de junio/ del año 1977 [...] Mi padre solo dijo es Ana María»,¹¹ but the *I* reclaims a life and voice of its own. Already during her childhood, Ana María (the *I*) aims to understand the world and to construct it according to her own ideas. In her adolescence, she relates to music as well as poetry and, thus, slowly starts transforming into Anita Tijoux: «Mi adolescencia/ Fue una etapa bizarra/ El cuerpo es batería/ Y la cabeza guitarra [...] Mi búsqueda fue me-

¹⁰ 'Since immemorial times we have achieved great deeds Black heroines, White, and Chinese, all shamans, and our indigenous sisters/ Fighting for a better tomorrow'.

¹¹ 'I was born on a June day/ in the year 1977 [...] My father only said this is Ana María'.

ro/ Proceso de pura pila/ Pupila de poeta». ¹² The artist, who seizes a voice, denounces injustices and tries to create her own world; is not a construct but has always been a part of the self: «Mi búsqueda no fue para mí cosa de escenario/ Fue algo necesario». ¹³ Hence, the emergence of the artist-self Anita Tijoux is portrayed as inevitable. The construction of the YouTube video affirms the gradual metamorphosis of Ana María Merino into Anita Tijoux and traces both their life-journeys. The video shows the viewers with the rapping artist against a background showing paintings of the child and adolescent Ana María, first in Paris and later in Santiago de Chile. So, the real-life person and the artist appear as two different selves, while simultaneously unifying and separating the past and the present, Ana María Merino and Anita Tijoux.

The poem's persona is, in Sara Ahmed's words, a 'willful child' destined to become a 'willful feminist', a woman who will speak up against the injustices and inequalities she perceives regardless of disturbing or bothering others:

I can hear how willfulness is used to judge a girl who is becoming feminist. Her will becomes a willful will insofar as it is defined against a collective or general will. Her own will is deemed to get in the way of what the collective wills. A willful will becomes identified as the will to govern the others. Her willfulness, in other words, is interpreted as a will to power, as if protesting against something masks a desire for that very thing. And then when she speaks the language of injustice, that speech is heard as just another way she imposes her own will on others (Ahmed 2017: 71).

Willfulness is negatively connoted and is used to describe women who are not willing to bow to power and accept their subaltern positions silently. Ahmed, however, suggests appropriating the adjective for the feminist agenda and turning it into a means of the fight against injustices: «Perhaps willfulness turns the diagnosis into a call – do not adjust to an unjust world!» (ibid.: 84). Such a reading concludes that Anita Tijoux narrates her separation from Ana María Merino and portrays her growing into a willful feminist in 1977.

Another rap artist declared willful is Rebeca Lane. In *Poesía Venenosa (Poisonous Poetry)* she gives an insight into the artist-self's life and the harsh criticism she has suffered in Guatemala because of her radical standpoints as an

¹² 'My adolescence/ was a strange state/ the body is a drum set/ and the head a guitar
[...] My search was just/ a process of pure battery/ Pupil of the poet'.

¹³ 'My search wasn't a matter of scene for me/ it was something necessary'.

anarchist, feminist, and LGBTQ activist. She openly defies her critics by accepting her willfulness and stating it as her weapon against injustices, inequalities, sexism, and racism:

Lamento mucho no cumplir con sus expectativas
Lo que pasa es que soy un poco conflictiva
Me motiva la polémica de las artes escénicas.¹⁴

[...]

Hoy tengo ganas de cantar incoherencias
Feminista posmoderna de la eterna primavera
Intento vivir del arte aunque realmente no quiera.¹⁵

Like Anita Tijoux, Rebeca Lane affirms that poetry/rap has always constituted an integral part of her being: «Pescar palabras lo traigo de nacimiento/ Me las trago todas para escupir el sentimiento».¹⁶ In *Poesía Venenosa*, the audience gains knowledge of the artist-self, her experiences, her feelings, and her decisions. Any doubts we might have on whether it is the real-life person or the artist-self who narrates her personal history are cast away by the performance in the YouTube video. The latter is constituted by a complex plot as Rebeca Lane appears in three different characters: On stage, she acts as a body displayed on a table and mourned by her female friends, as well as the witch who poisoned her backstage. Furthermore, she is the only person in the house applauding to the play on stage. Hence, in the video, Rebeca Lane plays with the audience's perception of subjectivities, and she encourages us to analyse whose life is being narrated in her lyrics.

While she and Anita Tijoux perform their autobiographies, they also testify to sociopolitical circumstances, be it either Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile or the precarious conditions in which art is created in Guatemala. Rap can, therefore, not only constitute a public space for feminism or life-narratives but it can also be a memory space for testimony.

¹⁴ 'I am very sorry for not fulfilling your expectations/ It is just that I am a bit controversial/ I am motivated by the polemic of the scenic arts'.

¹⁵ 'Today I want to sing incoherencies/ A postmodern feminist of an eternal spring/ I try to live from my art even though I actually don't want to'.

¹⁶ 'Since I was born I have been fishing for words/ I devour them all to spit out the feeling'.

6 Conclusions

As shown in this article, the hip hop culture, and rap as one of its artistic expressions, was born in the US-American ghettos, and quickly spread to many parts of the world, including Latin America. Even though rap, especially Gangsta rap, is known for its misogyny, women have seized spaces in this genre, fought against the experienced sexism and expanded rap's epistemology to feminism. Through rap, female Latin American artists contribute to the fight against injustices and inequalities: in their songs/poems they define their notion of feminism – decolonised and intersectional–, they share their personal experiences with their audience, and open new memory spaces for women. A profound analysis of the various shades of the performativity of feminism, autobiography, and testimony can only be achieved through a study of the synergies of the rap lyrics and performances, e.g. in YouTube videos, as Gessa and Hope suggest. By looking both at the text, a modern form of poetry, the performances in videos, which circulate globally via the web, and the background music, we are able to detect elements and nuances in the meanings we might have missed if we had concentrated only on one of the components. Rap is not a form of poetry which should be written down in private and shared purely in its written form; it is an essentially social form of poetry – it can only unfold entirely if performed publicly and engaged in interaction with others. Rap poems often centre around an *I*, which is not necessarily identical to the real-life person, but is a performative construction of the artist-self. This article is dedicated to the analysis of rap poems by Rebeca Lane, Anita Tijoux and Krudas Cubensi in regard to the performative acts of defining their notions of feminism, of constructing their artist-selves, and of opening spaces for (feminist) testimony. As elaborated above, a thorough understanding of the performative processes undertaken in rap poems by these three artists is only successful when we examine the texts, the performance in the YouTube videos, and the music in their combination. This multi-layered approach allows us to access the full meanings of the artists' definitions of intersectional and decolonial feminisms, the substance of their artist-selves as well as the extend of the possibilities rap offers as a medium and place of testimony.

The objective of this article is to widen the research field of hip hop studies in a Latin American context in order to show how conscious feminist rap can contribute to discourses on feminism, while simultaneously creating new spaces for feminist autobiographical expressions and testimonies in times when right-wing politics are on the rise – as are the feminist movements – in the entire continent, threatening the freedom of women, LGBTIQ, and non-binary people. By expanding the analysis from a purely textual level to a wider one, which includes the performance and the music, this article aims to pinpoint the particular characteristics of rap as both a literary and musical genre.

References

Primary References

- Anita Tijoux. 2010. «1977». In: *1977*. Nacional Records. CD.
----- «1977», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiQ7S38nKog> (last accessed 4.11.2018).
----- 2014. «Antipatriarca». In: *Vengo*. Nacional Records. CD.
----- «Antipatriarca», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoKoj8bFg2E> (last accessed 5.05.2018).
----- «La rabia no tiene voz», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKlgS-ho8Z0> (last accessed 5.05.2018).
Krudas Cubensi. 2014. «Mi cuerpo es mío.» In: *Poderosxs*. Independent. CD.
----- «Mi cuerpo es mío», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-Pgwldfx8U> (last accessed 7.05.2018).
Rebeca Lane. 2013. «Bandera Negra.» In: *Canto*. Outstanding Productions. CD.
----- «Bandera Negra», <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HbsZhzRBfg> (last accessed 7.05.2018).
----- 2015. «Poesía venenosa.» In: *Poesía Venenosa*. La Calle Producciones. CD.
----- «Poesía Venenosa», https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3YVlm3_tt8 (last accessed 4.11.2018).

Secondary References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke Univ. Pr.
Almeida Junco, Yulexis. 2011. «Género y racialidad: una reflexión obligada en la Cuba de hoy». In: Rubiera Castillo, Daisy; Martiatu Terry, Inés María (edd.): *Afrocubanas. Historia, pensamiento y prácticas culturales*. Havana: Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, 133-149.
Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota.
Colón Pichardo, Maikel. 2016. «Racismo y feminismo en Cuba: ¿Dos mitades de una misma naranja? Claves históricas para su estudio». In: *Boletín Americanista*. Año lxvi, Vol. 1, N° 72, 179-198.
Coslett, Tess; Lury, Celia; Summerfield, Penny. 2002. «Introduction». In: Coslett, Tess; Lury, Celia; Summerfield, Penny (edd.): *Feminism & Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. London et al.: Routledge, 1-21.
De Man, Paul. 1979. «Autobiography as De-facement». In: *MLN*. Vol.94, N°5, 919-930.
Fernández, Nadine. 2001. «The Changing Discourse on Race in Contemporary Cuba». In: *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Vol. 14, N° 2, 117-132.

- Gessa, Marília. 2011. «Ritmo e poesia em performance. Uma análise das relações entre texto e música no rap dos Racionais MC's». In: Frederico Augusto Garcia Fernandes et al.: *Anais do I Seminário Brasileiro de Poéticas Oraís: Vozes, Performances, Sonoridades*. Londrina: UEL, 480-500.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ.Pr.
- Gondouin, Sandra. 2017. «Rebeca Lane: «libre, atrevida y loca», la liberación del cuerpo por una rapera feminista de Guatemala.» In: *Amerika [En ligne]*, Vol. 16, <http://amerika.revues.org/8132> (last accessed 31.10. 2018).
- Hess, Mickey. 2006. «From Bricks to Billboards. Hip-hop Autobiography». In: *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*. Vol.39, N° 1, 61-77.
- Hope, Donna P. 2015. «Exploring Narratives of Contested Gender Identities in Jamaican Dancehall». In: *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Vol.30, N° 1, 107-129.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Parler n'est jamais neutre*. Paris: Ed. de Minuit.
- Keyes, Cheryl Lynette. 2012 [2004]. «Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance». In: Neal, Mark Anthony; Forman, Murray (edd.): *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. London et al.: Routledge, 400-412.
- Krudas Cubensi. No date given. «Homepage», <http://www.krudascubensi.com> (last accessed 7.05.2018).
- Lane, Rebeca. No date given. «Rebeca Lane», <https://www.rebecalane.com/> (last accessed 18.05.2019).
- Martínez, Theresa A. 1997. «Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance». In: *Sociological Perspectives*. Vol.40, N° 2, 265-286.
- Mineo, Liz. 2016. «For Ana Tijoux, hip-hop is home. France-born Chilean found her place in her music.» In: *Harvard Gazette*. April 21, 2016, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2016/04/for-ana-tijoux-hip-hop-is-home/> (last accessed 4.11.2017).
- Morgan, Joan. 2012 [2004]. «Hip-Hop Feminist». In: Neal, Mark Anthony; Forman, Murray (edd.): *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. London et al.: Routledge, 414-418.
- Pate, Alexs. 2010. *In the Heart of the Beat. The Poetry of Rap. African American Cultural Theory and Heritage*. Plymouth: Scarecrow Pr.
- Pough, Gwendolyn. 2007. «What It Do, Shorty? Women, Hip-Hop, and a Feminist Agenda». In: *Black Women, Gender + Families*. Vol. 1, N° 2, 78-99.
- Rabaka, Reiland. 2011. *Hip Hop's Inheritance. From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Saunders, Tanya. 2009. «La Lucha Mujerista: Krudas CUBENSI and Black Feminist Sexual Politics in Cuba». In: *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. Vol. 3, 1-20.
- 2016. «Towards a Transnational Hip-Hop Feminist Liberatory Praxis: A View from the Americas». In: *Social Identities*. Vol. 22, N° 2, 178-194.

- Stanley, Liz. 2002. «From 'Self-Made Women' to 'Women's Made-Selves'? Audit Selves, Simulation and Surveillance in the Rise of Public Woman». In: Coslett, Tess; Lury, Celia; Summerfield, Penny (edd.): *Feminism & Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. London et al.: Routledge, 40-60.
- Tickner, Arlene B. 2008. «Aquí en el Ghetto: Hip-Hop in Colombia, Cuba, and Mexico». In: *Latin American Politics and Society*. Vol. 50, N° 3, 121-146.
- Vargas, Rebeca Eunice. 2011. «Culturas juveniles y tribus urbanas en la ciudad de Guatemala. El caso de los y las Otaku.»
http://www.academia.edu/1088640/El_Hip_Hop_en_Guatemala_desde_la_perspectiva_de_los_Estudios_Culturales (last accessed 31.10.2018).
- Walker, Alice. 1983. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. San Diego et al.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.