The expression of afrocolombian identity in the work of Chocquibtown

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Abstract

This paper will examine the work of ChocQuibTown with regards to their approach to race and auto-determination, and how their music works both to shape and reflect the image of collective identity in the Chocoano region of Colombia. Looking at social, legislative and political ethnicity, it will address the various ways in which ethnicity can be defined, and how ChocQuibTown encompass each of these. It will then address the fusion of influences that come not only from within Colombia, but also from the African roots of the afrocolombian people, as well as from other pats of the African diaspora, which come together in the music to create a unique sound that speaks to and for the Afrocolombian community of Chocó.

Keywords

Music, collective identity, ethnicity, diaspora.

La expresión de la identidad afrocolombiana en el trabajo de ChocQuibTown

Resumen

Este documento examinará el trabajo de ChocQuibTown con respecto a su enfoque hacia la raza y la auto-determinación, y de cómo su música funciona tanto para dar forma como para reflejar la imagen de la identidad colectiva en la región chocoana de Colombia. Desde el punto de vista de la etnia social, legislativa y política, se abordarán las diversas formas en que la etnicidad puede ser definida, y cómo ChocQuibTown abarca cada una de ellas. Más adelante en el documento, se expondrá la fusión de influencias que vienen no sólo desde el interior de Colombia, sino también de las raíces africanas de las personas afrocolombianas, así como de otros caminos de la diáspora africana, que confluyen en la música para crear un sonido único que habla de y para la comunidad afrocolombiana de Chocó.

Palabras clave

Música, identidad colectiva, origen étnico, diáspora.

L'expression de l'identité afrocolombienne dans le travail artistique de ChocQuibTown

Résumé

Cet article analyse le travail artistique de ChocQuibTown et l'approche que le groupe porte sur la race et l'autodétermination. L'article montrera la façon dont cette musique façonne et reflète l'image de l'identité collective de la région colombienne du Choco et présentera les diverses définitions de l'origine ethnique d'un point de vue social, législatif et politique.

L'article abordera ensuite la fusion des influences provenant des régions centrales mais aussi des racines africaines de la population afrocolombienne qui se retrouvent dans cette musique pour créer un son unique destiné à la communauté afrocolombiennes du Choco.

Mots clés

Musique, identité collective, ethnicité, disapora.

A expressão da identidade afrocolombiana no trabalho de ChocQuibTown

Resumo

Neste artigo, o trabalho de Chocquibtown será examinado em relação à sua abordagem à raça e à autodeterminação. Além disso, decorrerá sobre como sua música trabalha para dar forma e refletir a imagem da identidade coletiva na região de Chocó na Colômbia. Com relação ao aspecto social, legislativo e de etnia política, abordará as várias maneiras as quais se podem definir "etnia", e de como ChocQuibTown cobre cada uma delas. Posteriormente, abordará a fusão de influências provenientes não só do interior da Colômbia, mas também a partir das raízes africanas da população afro-colombiana e outras ondas da diáspora Africana, que moldaram a música para criar um som único que fala com e para a comunidade afrocolombiana de Chocó.

Palavras-chave

Música, identidade coletiva, etnia, diáspora.

1. Introduction: music as a product of culture, history and identity

Music plays a significant part in any culture's expression and development of identity. As time goes on, the music of a particular region changes organically as it absorbs elements of other influences that people of a particular region are influenced by. One example is the unique development of rai music in North Africa, which was the music of the Bedouin shepherds in Oran, Algeria in the 1930s. Over time the language of rai music developed, blending a mixture of French, Spanish and Arabic, and in recent decades it has become recognisable by the common use of synthesisers mixed with traditional drumming. The face of the genre has been greatly shaped by issues such as independence and religious censorship, and the journey of the genre itself over time expresses the journey of the Algerian people.

Music from the Pacific coast in Colombia is developing in a similar way, reflecting the evolution of the region's culture, history and identity. In Colombia, different genres dominate each region and in recent years, the music of the Pacific coast has undergone great changes that reflect the shift in understanding collective identity, particularly in the department of Chocó. The traditional folk music, which itself is a blend of Spanish and African influences that reflect the racial and historical backdrop of the area, has adapted and developed as the idea of race and identity has opened to an international level. The globalisation of music in recent decades has played a significant role in introducing new concepts to music in the Pacific region particularly with the rise in popularity of hip hop, predominantly in black audiences.

This paper will focus on the resulting mixture of traditional folk music from the Pacific coast with hip hop, as it appears in the work of the popular Chocoano group, ChocQuibTown. It will address the question of Chocoano identity as it is presented in the music of this group in particular, looking at the issues of race and minority groups and how various factors in politics and social matters have both influenced their identity which is expressed through music, and how the music itself then impacts on the identity factors from which it originates. Focusing on the point of black identity in Chocó and the music

of ChocQuibTown, it will look both at the historical importance of Africa as the birthplace of African identity, and the contemporary black influences from other genres of the contemporary African diaspora.

Questions of race and ethnicity are not limited to simply defining one's identity. Their implications can greatly impact on the treatment and rights of minority groups as well as the face and perception of a nation, a fact that is clearly evident in Latin America. Colombia is a unique example within Latin America because on top of the typical issues that affect minorities (both from indigenous and the African diaspora) the situation has an added complication because of the conflicts within the country; drug trafficking, FARC, paramilitary groups and the resulting displacement affect, above all, the indigenous groups and Afro-descendent communities in the country.

Colombia is an expansive, diverse country. For this reason, each state or department has its own identity and culture as a result of its specific history, economy, production, and perhaps most importantly, the groups of people who have made each department what it is. Chocó is the only department in Colombia with coastlines along both the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. People from Chocó consider their department to be more of the Pacific side, bordering on Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Nariño, which is why they identify with and share cultural aspects, socio-economic problems and politics with these departments. Although the statistics vary widely between sources, some cite that the majority of the Afrocolombian communities that exist in the coastal regions account for up to 90% of the population along the Pacific, and 60% on the Atlantic (Minority Rights Group International, n.d). Chocó is the Colombian department with the highest Afro-descendent population.

Both Chocoanos and human rights groups often referred to Chocó as an invisible or forgotten state. In 2007, the Colombian media reported that 50 children had died of starvation in that area over a three-year period. During the same year, it was reported that despite the fact that the department is located in the part of Colombia with the highest rainfall, people from Chocó often struggled with the access to clean water (Semana, 2007).

Besides the poverty that may be found in Chocó and the Pacific coast, the region itself is rich in biodiversity, gold mines, and a culture that is also very diverse. The face of the national culture in Colombia seems to be very white, considering the visible success of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Fernando Botero and Carlos Vives, but this image omits the integral role that Afro-descendent communities and culture have played in the formation of Colombian culture. Communities of African origin have contributed both talent and passion to the fabric of the national culture, although this influence is often silently denied. Dennis (2012) comments that music has always been the most common form of cultural expression not only for afrocolombians, but also Afro-descendent communities on an international level. In addition to this, Hall (1997) explains that historically, the people of the African diaspora have found the form and structure of their cultural life more in music than in literature. That is not to say that there are no afrocolombian writers (Manuela Zapata Olivella is one talented Afrocolombian writer worth noting), but that the music plays a very important role in the history of people of the African diaspora. This is because access to literature and education has been limited due to the history of slavery and oppression of the afrodescendent people. Music has always been of considerable importance in afrodescendent communities throughout the diaspora.

2. ChocQuibTown and music in the Pacific region of Colombia

In the Pacific region of Colombia, there are many artists who produce incredible music representing their culture and people. The Festival of Pacific Music Petronio Alvarez takes place every August in Cali, the capital of Valle del Cauca, and celebrates its 17th year this summer. The organizers of the event say:

> El Festival de Música del Pacífico Petronio Álvarez se ha consolidado como un proceso cultural que busca desarrollar, conservar y divulgar las músicas tradicionales de la región, porque instauran unas relaciones y unas prácticas sociales que, desde la dimensión simbólica

y representativa, son el eje cohesionador del tejido social regional que crea sentido de pertenencia, reivindicando los valores y aportes de la etnia afrocolombiana en la identidad nacional ("XVII Festival de Música," n.d).

This statement broadly sets the tone for the context in which the music of ChocQuibTown is created. A newly vocal sense of pride has begun to resonate in other regions of Colombia, as the easily recognisable music of ChocQuibTown has spread to speakers far away from the Pacific region. Their sound can be easily identified because of their unique fusion of influences from Colombian folk music and hip hop, and their lyrics that frequently make reference to aspects of their culture. Their role has come to be an important one in the cultural identity and representation of Chocó, both at home and further afield.

In recent years, ChocQuibTown has done amazing things for the visibility of the Pacific culture. In the description of the artists featured in the Petronio Alvarez Festival there is a clear tone of pride and respect towards the group: "Se destacan, el reconocido Chocquibtown que recientemente conquistó fama mundial al obtener el premio en los Grammy Latinos 2010 interpretando música fusión del Pacífico. Se presentó además durante la entrega de los Grammy Anglos, dónde fue nominado." ("XVII Festival de Música," n.d).

ChocQuibTown is not an accidental name. The root of this title refers to the origin of the group: "Choc" comes from Chocó, the department whose capital is Quibdó, hence the "Quib" and concludes with the English term "Town", which gives the name both an international and a local feel.

Before even considering the lyrics of the group, ChocQuibTown very clearly demonstrates the idea of community and family simply because of the relationships within the group and its three main members. The lead male is Tostao, whose wife Goyo accompanies him with her brother Miguel Slow, both performing and producing for the group. One can clearly identify the focus on the image of the area and its community just by the titles of their songs such as "Somos Pacificos" (there is a double meaning in this title, it can mean from the Pacific, or peaceful) and "De Donde Vengo Yo" (Where I'm From), in which they speak for and as Chocoanos. The group sings about

many issues that are relevant to the youth from Chocó and the wider Pacific region in Colombia, producing music with a traditional base of folk music, creating a fusion with a new direction of hip hop. Their music communicates the collective experiences of people in the region of Chocó, their current situation, their sufferings and their blessings. Impressively, ChocQuibTown has achieved incredible success outside the region of Chocó, Colombia and even at an international scale, meaning that the group represents the region on a global platform. They have collaborated with artists such as Tego Calderon and Calle 13 from Puerto Rico, DJ Buxxi from San Andres Island and Oxmo Puccino from Paris, France to name a few. With such a unique brand identity, it is interesting to explore how the group impacts on the perception of Chocó in other parts of the world.

3. Ethnicity, race, identity, and Chocó in Colombia

To understand the importance of ChocQuibTown's expression of identity, it is necessary to have some understanding of the complex concept of ethnicity in Colombia. As Camacho (2004) says, the concept of identity in Colombia has changed a lot in recent decades, which can be seen as we address the construction of identity:

> La concepción simplista de la identidad como un atributo esencial e inamovible, pasó a ser problematizada y redefinida a la luz de los procesos de construcción social de los sujetos individuales y colectivos, es decir, dinámica e interactivamente configurada por varias categorías identitarias, como la raza, la clase, la etnicidad, el género, la edad, la orientación sexual y el lugar (Segura, 2004).

It is essential to recognize identity as something broader than simply race alone, as this simplistic concept is recognised today as a construction created by Europeans to defend racism and subordination of black communities in the slave trade and the colonization of the Americas, Asia and Africa. The concept of race seeks to defend a biological difference between different groups of people, saying that the differences between groups are larger than those found within each community or race. Contemporary academics reject this conception

and it is argued that when we speak of identity, it is better to focus on ethnicity because that is where we can identify the different characteristics between cultures and histories that exist within one nation. In Colombia, ethnic identity plays an important role in the protection of minority groups, whose lives and rights are at risk from violence within the country. This does not mean to say that minorities are less Colombian, but attempts to defend the needs of these groups within the Colombian society.

Rivas (2013) explains that "el grupo étnico es aquel diferente o considerado diferente institucionalmente al establecido como constructor o imagen de la identidad nacional". She brings a triple definition of ethnicity consisting of social ethnicity, legislative ethnicity and political ethnicity, which serve to help us understand the importance of ethnicity in relation to minority groups in Colombia, particularly in the case of Chocó and the Pacific region.

3.1 The social ethnicity

In the first part of the definition given by Rivas (2004), social ethnicity is directly related to the identity through elements such as race, culture, religion etc. Social ethnicity forms the basis of identity and represents what it means to be part of a community. In Chocó and the rest of the Pacific, this can be heard in the sounds of currulao, levantapolvos, cumbia, and la chirimia (hornpipes). It can be tasted in the traditional dishes made with fish and banana, and found in the traditional work in the region, for instance the extraction of gold in mines. Festivals such as *San Pacho,* which is included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage prepared by the Unesco (El Tiempo, 2012), also form an essential part of social ethnicity. ChocQuibTown speaks of all these elements, among others, in their songs. In the song "Lo Nuevo", ChocQuibTown explains that their style is "mezclando el leventapolvo con el rap", and in the song "Uh la la", they continue referencing the music that inspires their rhythms: "Una fiesta, todo el día, suena a golpe de chirimía." Essentially, these fundamentals that are product of history and community are also part of the everyday life of the community. This product comes from a mixture of different histories from African, Spanish and indigenous people, in a region that has suffered from the heat of oppression, politics and tropical climate. It manifests itself in music and that is how it comes to be communicated from the local community to the rest of the world.

3.2 The legislative ethnicity

The second part of Rivas (2004) definition is the legislative ethnicity, which concerns itself with the ethnicity of its boundaries, addressing the relationship between citizenship and ethnicity. The *Ley 70* is the most important example we have in the context of black people from the Pacific coast, since it is explicit in the way it seeks to protect the rights and the identification of the Afro-Colombian born in that area. The history of Colombia is an overlap of African, indigenous and Spanish encounters, but it was not until the early 90s that the multi-ethnic character of the nation was constitutionally recognized. The Colombian Constitution of 1991 paved the way to the Ley 70 of 1993, also known as the law of black communities "que cubre, ante de todo, a las poblaciones rurales-ribereñas habitantes en la región del Pacifico" (Rivas, 2004).

Before the 1991 Constitution, the Colombian nation was regarded as a mestizo nation. Arocha (1998) has previously noted that: "Carved into the stone walls of the Spanish Language Academy building in downtown Bogotá is a golden motto: one god, one race, one tongue". The strong push behind the concept of "mestizaje" or "mixing" can be a racist one, much like that of "blanqueamento". During a United Nations visit in 2004, several minority groups complained about the dominance of the Hispano-centric culture, which emphasized a Hispanic heritage while ignoring the cultural contributions made by afrocolombian and indigenous communities, in a nation which is constitutionally recognized as multicultural (Minority Rights Group International, n.d).

The emphasis is made of the mix because a black community is not considered as having its own place in the nation or identity of the country, and mixing is seen as a way of diluting the concept of "blackness" in Colombia. More emphasis is given to the mixture of the nation's root as this attitude ignores the existence of the Afro communities in Colombia, and their collective history, culture and struggle. This exacerbates their problems, leaving them with an invisible feeling, lost in the description of the mestizo nation (Dennis, 2012).

With the recognition of the existence of a nation with diverse cultures, the Constitution must act as a form of protection for minorities, giving them

the opportunity to have a special identity and not limited under the definition of a homogeneous mestizo nation (Dennis, 2012). In theory, the Constitution grants the right to the black communities of the Pacific coast to seek collective land titles, however for this to happen, it is imperative for the community to have a level of awareness about its rights.

Many Chocoano people are ignorant of the *Ley 70* or do not fully understand what these legislative changes amount to. Without proper access to education, it is very difficult to explain or establish the rights that a minority should have. In this kind of situation, a group such as ChocQuibTown with their special platform is able to emphasize the importance of being politically conscious and informed about the politics affecting the region. We shall return to this point later in political ethnicity. In addition, the group serves as a manifestation of chocoano culture not only in their music but also in their interviews, in newspapers and on national and international channels giving a visible representation of this minority.

Speaking about the 1993 census, Wade (2008) identified what he called the "ethnic question". In the section about self-classification of race and ethnicity, there was an option for colombians to confirm that they identified themselves as members of a black community. Only 1.5% identified themselves as belonging to such community in the census results and for the next 10 years or so, there was much debate about how to rephrase the question (partly funded by IADB and the World Bank). In the 2005 census, a different question was included with a variety of "ethnic" categories: a key option for self-identification was the "black, mulatto, afrocolombian and afro descendant" category - in total 10.5% responded positively to this question. Wade (2008) argues that this "new definition" has more of a racial than an ethnic significance. He says that in the case of afrocolombians, they are identified by the ratings related to "phenotypical and genealogical labels" and not by the local communities.

The discourse of ChocQuibTown music does not follow Wade's description given to explain the difference between the two censuses. In almost all of their songs, ChocQuibTown refers to their "people" even though they do not have a definition of what this means. In their lyrics, the group belongs to a variety of communities that overlap and coexist. For example, in the song "Somos Pacificos", ChocQuibTown talks about the Pacific region, which can

be divided by the borders of the departments (Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Nariño and Chocó), and have their own capital and main towns (Pretoria is the capital of Chocó, Buenaventura is a town that is located in Valle del Cauca):

> Somos Pacífico, estamos unidos / Nos une la región / La pinta, la raza y el don del sabor
>
> Es toda una conexión / Con un corrillo Chocó, Valle, Cauca / Y mis paisanos de Nariño / Todo este repertorio me produce orgullo
>
> Hay mucha calentura en Buenaventura / Y si sos chocoano sos arrecho por cultura, ey!
>
> Unidos por siempre, por la sangre, el color / Y hasta por la tierra / No hay quien se me pierda / Con un vínculo familiar que aterra / Característico en muchos de nosotros / Que nos reconozcan por la mamá / y hasta por los rostros
>
> Étnicos, estilos que entre todos se ven / La forma de caminar / El cabello y hasta por la piel / Y dime quién me va a decir que no / Escucho hablar de San Pacho / Mi patrono allá en Quibdo, ey! "
>
> Este es Pacífico colombiano / Una raza un sector / Lleno de hermanas y hermanos.

Here, it becomes apparent that ChocQuibTown does not consider itself to be part of a community defined simply by "phenotypic" elements as Wade has said. However, these elements such as pinta, race and color are what unite the various communities that occupy and are defined by their own territories, departments, cities and villages that together form the Pacific. The concepts of "pride" and "culture" indicate that at least according to the group, identity is not as shallow as something we can see in color or physical appearance, but is something that belongs to the community and provokes emotion calling on cultural elements as addressed in social ethnicity. It is interesting to note here the use of the voseo in the lyrics "si sos chocoano sos arrecho por cultura " as this is very characteristic of the Pacific, and it is not common in other parts of the country.

Many people from the rural communities in the Pacific have had to move to different cities pushed by conflict and in search of work. It is difficult to limit the concept of identity along racial and regional lines due to several complications for definitions, plus each carries its own connotations. From all this, it becomes clear that there is no fixed definition for how one may define oneself, which makes asking questions on race or ethnicity in a census incredibly difficult. Also, it may be argued that the difference between the results in each census may not lie specifically in the wording. The first census took place in the same year that the *Ley 70* was approved and so the concept of a black community was relatively new because until then, Colombia was considered a mestizo country. Before the change of law, to recognize oneself as being part of a minority could prove problematic for an individual since their rights were not constitutionally protected. Although not all Afro-Colombians knew of changes to legislation, the black movement in Colombia went ahead with them and the presence of groups such as ChocQuibTown is evidence of this.

3.3 The political ethnicity

The last point leads to the third part of the definition by Rivas (2004). Political ethnicity is borne of the potential that ethnic and social elements give to the identity of the group, which serve to defend ethnic interests. From this point, we can understand the Afro-Colombian movement that Wouters (2001) links back to the Black Power Movement in the United States. Political ethnicity is a form of identity that can be managed to improve the progress of the community. Certain genres of music like hip hop can be used as tools of protest among others, even in the United States hip hop culture was born, there are several artists who use hip hop as a way to vocalize and promote their social or political concerns, like the Fugees, Jay Z, Immortal Technique, Talib Kweli, Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, The Roots and Common.

In the song Manos al aire, ChocQuibTown echoes the gesture used by the movement of the Black Panthers in the United States, with a raised fist. The chorus says "Revolucionario / Pon la mano en el aire / Las manos en el aire / Por lo mal establecido / La mano va en el aire". In this song, ChicQuibTown is advocating resistance against the institutional problems that are the consequences of corruption and lack of progression and protection from the

government. Interestingly, the government and media often talk about the problems in the areas of Chocó and the Pacific as problems created by the FARC, drug trafficking and crime, but the picture painted by ChocQuibTown and other groups in the region blame the government and its failure to protect the rights and safety of the people from Chocó (Ministerio del Interior, 2013).

This triple definition of ethnicity made by Rivas, give us an idea of the complex context of Chocó and the music of ChocQuibTown. Even Afro-Colombians themselves have struggled to define the terms of their own identity, but instead of saying that there are no ethnic communities in Colombia, this rather demonstrates that the distinction between and within groups is complicated, and that the identification of the individual is not in the words used to define different groups, but in the culture where ethnicity is presented in its purest form: music, customs and people's heritage. As Rivas (2004) says:

> La comunidad negra de Colombia es definida por su singularidad cultural, resultado, por un lado de un origen y una ancestralidad común en el continente africano, por el otro lado, de unas prácticas culturales tradicionales compartidas, configuradas en la experiencia histórica de una estrategia de aislamiento y construcción territorial.

4. The diaspora, African footprints

It would be a mistake to speak of black communities or afrodescendants in Colombia without analyzing the importance of their African origins and ancestry, which greatly influence the culture and music in the diaspora. As stated by Dennis (2012), African bonds form the basis for the studies of the diaspora:

> A few pioneering colombian academics began to focus on black culture in Colombia (Friedemann, 1984; Friedemann & Arocha, 1986), concentrating mostly on the Pacific coastal region, as the home of a distinctive black culture in the country, and developing the concept of Huellas Africanas (traces or imprints of Africanism). For these academics, the concept of diaspora was strongly rooted in real, historical links between African cultures and Colombia.

It is important to understand Africa not as a real, living part of identity for afrocolombians, but as a complementing factor: the concept of a heritage and a history that begins outside Colombia. According to Wade (2008), the term "Afro" for black people does not invoke Africa as a historical and cultural term real sense, but represents a space in the diaspora "which arises as much from the transformation of Africa by diaspora cultures as from the affiliation of diaspora cultures to Africa and the traces of Africa that those diaspora cultures enclose" (Gilroy, 1993). This space is fundamentally formed through music (Wade, 2008).

This is what ChocQuibTown shows exactly in their lyrics that speak explicitly of their African heritage. For example in the song El Bombo, Tosato sings the lyrics "Encima África viva mía, esta es mi herencia", and repeats the same idea in Somos Pacificos with the lyrics: " Es del Pacífico, Guapi, Timbiquí, Tumaco / El bordo Cauca / Seguimos aquí con la herencia Africana / Más fuerte que antes." The way in which the group identifies itself as African is similar to the abstract sense that Wade (2008) speaks of:

> Africa is recognized as the origin of his [Tostao's] cultural heritage, and it represents a legacy that transcends regional borders uniting black communities of the diaspora. Tostao names the Afro-Caribbean practice of Santería and the honouring of the Orisha gods-not common to black communities in Colombia- as practices and beliefs that nonetheless, fall under the black experience.

Similar trends in music and culture can be observed in other parts of the diaspora. Firstly in Cuba where there is a similar culture to the afrocolombian culture; Orishas is a famous hip hop group whose name has connotations with the practice of Santería, a syncretic religion of West African and Caribbean origin influenced by and syncretized with Roman Catholicism, which also appears in the music of ChocQuibTown. In interviews, Goyo and Tostao described the Cuban singer Celia Cruz as a huge influence on their music (Amoeba Music, n.d). In other parts of the diaspora there are similar trends in music, for example, artists Damien Marley and Nas collaborated to make an album called Distant Relatives, a project which went deep into exploring their relationship with their African heritage. Both artists have distinct identities; Nas is American and Damien Marley is Jamaican, but they share African heritage. Similarly, ChocQuibTown share this heritage and therefore share the

same cultural spaces and connections with other hip hop or rap groups (Wade, 2008). However, it is important to recognise that the lyrics in ChocQuibTown's songs are more descriptive and emotional when they speak of their territories and people in Colombia today, rather than focusing on their African history. The African heritage help give context to the current situation of the people of the diaspora, but as we have seen in the lyrics of ChocQuibTown, this does not define the afrodescendants who form the Afro-Colombian communities in the departments of the Pacific today.

El Bombo is yet another song that has provoked discussion about ChocQuibTown's place in the diasporic world of music:

> In this song therefore, ChocQuibTown is expressing their affinity for other cultural and music practices from the diaspora suggesting that, although hip hop and US black culture may be the dominant of outside influences, their identification also work through other diasporan cultural products and artefacts (Dennis, 2012).

It is interesting to consider the parallels that the group draw on and reflect upon with Africa today alongside the present situation for afrocolombians on the Pacific coast, because in many cases the history of their ancestors in Africa is reflected. The Pacific region suffers from the same blessings as many African states because it is rich in resources that many want to exploit. Speaking of Africa, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that natural resources are what fuelled regional conflicts in Africa, which is in some sense what has occurred in the Chocó (United Nations Radio, 2013). The territories of the Pacific Coast are increasingly threatened by economic development, tourism and megaprojects with directly come against the interests of illegal groups such as drug traffickers and paramilitaries (Minority Rights Group International, n.d).

The area of Chocó has suffered an extremely high level of displacement because of conflict and violence in the region, which reflects the current situation in many African states; today, there are people suffering the impact of internal civil wars fuelled by political motives. One might even draw parallels between this and the history of those Africans who were forced to leave their lands in Africa to be used as slaves in the Americas.

Many Colombians in the region are farmers and are seen as the natural custodians of the country's biodiversity (Minority Rights Group International, n.d). They count on biodiversity for their livelihood and as such, it maintains part of their cultural identity. ChocQuibTown frequently uses the phrase "mi tierra" in their lyrics and this link between land and identity is something that runs through most of their songs. For example in "Lindo cielo", Goyo sings "Cosas hermosas que he visto en mi tierra desde que nací", and the song continues with the following lyrics: "Te amo tierra mía y al mismo cielo quiero gritar y decir / que yo nunca planee no no alejarme de ti / Que cuando mis caminos / tus carreteras comienzo a dejar / me hace falta tu aire / siento que voy a regresar."

Music is a form of expression that transcends borders of countries and form international links with people who share their stories and lines of their inheritances. In the case of afrocolombians, ChocQuibTown is one of the most vocal groups, and its music has started to generate interest from bloggers, academics and international public. Whilst this may all raise the profile of the issues that Chocoanos are facing, there are some who would argue that not all of this publicity is a positive thing.

5. The implications of afrocolombian music

Although black music has always been popular in Colombia, its reputation as being provocative, sexual and vulgar music has sometimes overshadowed the talent of the musicians and has had a negative impact on the image of black music genres. Speaking about the music from Barranquilla, Wade (2008) says the music evoked sun, sea, sex, rumba and joy. Album covers normally use these images but never images of black people. Black music in Colombia (and elsewhere in the diaspora) was criticised not just for the content, but also its audience. Writing on black music such as champeta from Cartagena and the Caribbean coast of Colombia, he says:

The music and its fans are generally seen as black, and may also be seen as lower-class, vulgar, immoral, violent, sexually licentious, and noisy, although there is Little overt ethnic-racial identification with black identity as a political category, for example in the lyrics or among the fans.

The music of the Caribbean coast, mainly from Cartagena and Barranquilla, has always had more publicity in other parts of the country such as Bogotá and Medellin than music from the Pacific. Although both coasts share legacies of slavery, the culture and history of each coast is different. Music from the Pacific coast is also used to give a reflection of the people who may have knock-on effects on the inhabitants of the region.

In his work on the relationship between the traditional music of the black inhabitants of the Pacific Coast and the violence and conflict in the region, Quintero (2006) gives two main arguments that evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the images that the Pacific music has created. First, he says that the traditional music of the Afro-descendant people of the Pacific:

Existe en dos registros en tomo a la violencia actual…Hace parte de una episteme de la modernidad que supone la inferioridad cultural y moral de la gente afropacífica y que justifica por lo tanto el actual etnocidio que los obliga a salir de sus tierras, posibilitando así un proceso de desarrollo modernizador en la zona. (Quintero, 2006).

This raises an interesting point when considering the success and effects of ChocQuibTown in particular. It is easy to see the group's achievements in a simplistic way: the recognition of a group carrying the flag of their community. However, Wade and Quintero highlight problematic factors that may be raised by Afro groups if the work of ChocQuibTown is interpreted in a way that reinforces harmful stereotypes. In descriptions of daily life of Chocó, the group's lyrics sometimes portray the image of people who live for the rumba and immoral pleasures. In the song "De Donde Vengo Yo", the most popular song by the group, Slow and Tostao sing the lyrics:

Y no hay problema para tomase su botella de aguardiente / Hace días que soleados te la pasas enguayabado…

De donde vengo yo / Si mi señor / Se baila en verbena con gorra y con sol / Con raros peinados o con extensión / Critíquenme a mí o lo critico yo / Si tomo cerveza no tengo el botín / Y si tomo whisky hay chaglo y blin blin / Y si tengo oro en el cuello colgado / Hay ia iay… es porque estoy montado.

These lyrics, both light-hearted and celebratory could arguably be contributing to the cultural and moral inferiority of the afropacific people that Quintero points out. Verbena is a festival that celebrates the patron saint of a village or community; an event marked by dancing, rumba and alcohol, all the elements of a hedonistic lifestyle. Aguardiente, the traditional Colombian drink, is consumed across the country, not just in Chocó; however, frequent references to the consumption of beer and whiskey reinforce stereotypes of afrocolombian people as a community who value rumba above more profound cultural activities such as literature, politics and Catholic morality.

Quintero (2006), also expresses his concern that the emphasis made on traditional music can contribute to the idea that the Afro population in the Pacific is lagging behind other areas of the country and the world in their attitude and approach towards development, politics and economics. He says that "durante mucho tiempo y aún más hoy en día, el Pacífico ha sido caracterizado como una región carente…carente de desarrollo." Development is a complex issue in this area for the reasons we have seen, such as the exploitation of the region and its people. Although music has not played a part in creating this situation, it has the power to reinforce or break this image. The effects can be very negative if the parties concerned in Chocó try to present it as a "region devoid of development" in order to give more power to businesses, politicians and individuals who want to exploit the resources of the region over the economy. All of this threatens the rights of the region inhabitants.

On the other hand, Quintero makes a fair case for an argument in favour of traditional music in the Pacific for Chocoano people. He comments that:

La valoración de la gente afropacífica a través de la legitimación de su música y su cultura en general, como parte del panorama multicultural de Colombia, y el uso de esta música en políticas culturales estatales dirigidas a buscar una salida a la violencia en el país y la región.

This is easily visible in the music by ChocQuibTown. The reference to the gold necklace in the lyrics of De Donde Vengo Yo is of particular relevance in the context of Chocó because of the importance of gold for the community and its history. It is not simply part of the bling bling culture that is part of the stereotypical image of lady, superficial hip hop artists. The Colombian professor, Ernesto Guhl Nimtz, wrote that "El negro es desordenado, perezoso, sin cultura…por lo general, no se dedica a faenas agrícolas sino vive de la mística y brujería y la esperanza de encontrar una rica mina de oro". (Quintero, 2006). With this in mind, one can understand the deep meanings found in the song Oro by ChocQuibTown. Goyo sings:

A mi tierra llego un fulano / Llevándose todo mi oro
Vestido de blanco entero / Y con acento extranjero / Prometió a cambio de oro / Dejarme mucho dinero / El tipo de quien les hablo / Nunca más apareció / Cogió mi metal precioso / Y todo se lo llevo
Todo mi oro / Se ha acabado / Los dueños son empleados / Más pobreza ha llegado / La inocencia se ha marchado / Y de aquí no me voy / Voy / De esta tierra yo soy / Soy / Mi alma es como los ríos / Camino recorrido.

In an interview with the Colombian newspaper El Espectador, Goyo was asked if the lyrics "A mi tierra llego un fulano / llevándose todo mi oro'" was the portrayal of her people. Goyo replied: "Desde que tengo uso de razón recuerdo a mi abuela bajando a la mina. Compusimos Oro porque veíamos que mucha gente joven, como nosotros, sabe que se explora el oro del Chocó, pero no ven sus consecuencias" (El Espectador, 2011).

The song voices protest against the exploitation of the people from Chocó by those who come from other parts of the country, particularly paisas who are from the department of Antioquia, the department more economically developed and where companies and businesses that manage production in Chocó are located.

In the first part of his argument, Quintero expressed his concern about the fact that Pacific music perhaps contributed to the stereotype that "sus habitantes no tienen una ética de trabajo y acumulación capitalista ". In 2012, Goyo won the title Voice of the Year at the Colombian Shock Gold Awards for the song, which is also the title of the album. The success that the group enjoys

ties in to reverse the suggestion that there is a complete lack of ethic work with people from Chocó. The popularity of the group shows them to be an international, driven force from the Pacific coast, who have made a name for themselves with political music as well as music for pleasure (Shock, 2013).

Alongside the music produced by the group, their image also forms a very important part of the Chocoano and Pacific culture, which is made accessible to the public beyond the borders of their department and Colombia itself. ChocQuibTown was the first group to represent the Pacific and afrocolombian culture in the Latin Grammys, and also in the Anglo Grammy. In an interview in the Anglo Grammy, the group expressed:

> This Grammy nomination is very significant and brings us a step closer to our dream of placing our music and our culture on the world map. Ever since the formation of ChocQuibTown, our mission has been to introduce our culture and music, and it is wonderful to see all this happening! We also took the marimba de chonta instrument to the world stage at the Latin Grammys. The United Nations recently declared the instrument as an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity" (GRAMMY.COM, 2011).

It was the first time the traditional instrument from the region, the marimba de chonta, resonated at the Latin Grammy Awards, something that El País called a "miracle" (Peláez, 2010). The millions of people watching the presentations could hear the lyrics of the group, speaking for their community and their culture in a positive way.

6. Hip Hop

In an episode of what I have in my bag, with Amoeba Music, Goyo and Tostao chose some of the artists and albums that served as their inspiration (Amoeba Music, n.d). The contents of their bag was an eclectic mix that started with the 80s hip hop, reggae and salsa. Among them, they gave examples from Funk Master Flex, Missy Elliott, Def Jam Records in the United States, Los Nemus del Pacifico in Colombia, Celia Cruz from Cuba, Peter Tosh Jamaican who wrote the song Get Up Stand Up with Bob Marley, Fela Kuti of Nigeria,

Project One and Gob Gotcha that are Colombian groups living in the United States. All this shows the diversity of the music in the diaspora, which shows who ChocQuibTown belongs to and draws where the get inspiration from.

When music is influenced in such a way, some may question how authentic it is to a culture, and whether or not it simply seeks to replicate an already existing approach to identity. Jordan criticizes research by Wade, Arocha, and Asher and others, saying they tend to address the issue of the Afro-Colombian identity:

> Using various analytical frames that include the roles of popular cultural forms, modernity as a contextual frame, and the importance of transnational cultural flows. A common critique in these scholars' work suggests that certain practices that signify "Blackness" or "African" identity and culture in Colombia, according to the contemporary socio-political sense of both designations, should be read as new rather than historically grounded cultural practices. According to these critiques, the signification of Blackness or African identity in Colombia replicates the cultural production of other external Black populations and, therefore bears all of the limitations of an imitative culture. If this logic is valid, youth in Cali, Colombia, who use hip hop to make statements about their socio-political conditions could not be said to have created a cultural product, but instead are reproducing the cultural products of the Black youth experiences in the United States. One, however, could contend that hip hop itself is a re-creation in that its producers have borrowed from several cultural traditions within and outside of the U.S. context. Therefore the adaptation of hip hop by Colombian youth follows the recombinant strategies that have produced the wide range of Black popular cultures that are common throughout the Americas" (Jordan, 2013).

Tony Mitchell (2011) also expresses a similar point when he says :

> In its initial stages, appropriation of rap and hip hop outside the USA often mimicked US models, but in most countries where rap has taken root, hip hop scenes have rapidly developed from an adoption to an adaptation of US musical forms and idioms which has involved the incorporation of local linguistic and musical features (Rop Grenius, n.d).

The closest example of music makers to ChocQuibTown in the United States is the Fugees, which also consists of two men and a woman. The singers Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean were a couple like Goyo and Tostao and there are several elements in ChocQuibTown that reflect certain aspects of the Fugees. ChocQuibTown has a song called Uh La La, while the Fugees released a song called Fu-gee-la in which the chorus goes "Oooh la la la / It's the way that we rock when we're doing our thing / Oooh la la la / It's the natural LA that the Refugees bring ". The choir of Uh La La is simple but reflects the sounds of Fu-gee-la : "Uh uh lala la lalalala". Although the songs are similar, Jordan raises an important point when he says that "hip hop itself is a re-creation in that its producers have borrowed from several cultural traditions within and outside of the U.S. context" because the music and lyrics Fu-gee-la samples depart from the songs "Ooo La La La" by Teena Marie, and "If loving you is wrong I do not want to be right" by Ramsey Lewis (Rap Genious, n.d).

There is no doubt that American artists have influenced the music of many urban artists like ChocQuibTown, but it would be wrong to describe them as a group of imitation because their rhythms and lyrics have many references and influences from Pacific culture. Hip hop music in the United States uses several elements for inspiration and creation in an organic process that uses several elements of different genres and sampling or sample from other songs to do something again. ChocQuibTown follows the same method when creating their own music, incorporating elements of traditional music, chirimia, levantapolvo with urban sounds inspired by the music of Latin American reggaeton and hip hop. In an interview with a national newspaper, El Espectador, Goyo said "muchos teníamos familiares que trabajaban en Panamá y nos traían música y videos que grababan de canales gringos como el Black Entertainment Television. Buenaventura es un Estados Unidos chiquito, hasta se habla en Spanglish" (El Espectador, 2011).

Today there are many Latin artists not only from Colombia, who have ties to the United States such as Shakira, Marc Anthony, and Romeo Santos. These are just a few examples of commercial artists who have been very successful in their own countries, in Latino communities in Los Angeles, New York and Miami, and internationally. ChocQuibTown is signed to National Records, a record label in the United States who works a lot with Latino artists. Hip hop from ChocoQuibTown is Colombian in spirit, with the influence of American hip hop, an expression of a local community on a global scale. In

an interview with a national newspaper, El País, the group talked about their success outside of Colombia and said, "Estar en la India fue una cosa de otro mundo. Es increíble la conexión que logras con la música, traspasando barreras idiomáticas." (Peláez, 2010).

Hip hop started as an urban form of artistic expression and there are various intentions and objectives that motivate different hip hop artists. While independent artists like Immortal Technique use hip hop as a tool to vocalize their opinions on important issues in their communities, there are many artists known as NWA, Dr Dre and Eminem who have been criticized for the content of their songs that supposedly encourage street culture, crime, weapons and drug use. Colombia is trying to lose the image that it has, in reference to the drug cartels that became famous during the days of Pablo Escobar, the most recognized icon in Colombian history. ChocQuibTown is active in denouncing criminal activity and promoting positive behaviour within relationships between family, friends and the wider community.

This proves to be a difficult task when, as the hip hop genre, moves to the mainstream and becomes commercialised. Dennis describes the difficulties:

Where does one draw the line between calling attention to and denouncing these social ills, on one hand, and marketing them by means of a culture industry that has glamorized the dangerous or "outlaw forms" that seem to be overflowing in Colombia, on the other? (Dennis, 2012).

Compared to other artists like Flaco Flow and Choco Melanin, who achieved popularity with a song about police brutality and the murder of a policeman, ChocQuibTown is much less aggressive in communicating their political points. Using culture as the core of their music is a very effective way to communicate their political opinions because they involve the public, inviting them to witness the celebration and pride of the community. In "De donde vengo yo", we can see a perfect example of this in the following lyrics :

Acá tomamos agua de coco/Lavamos moto/ Todo el que no quiere andar en rapi moto/Carretera destapada pa' viajar / No plata pa' comer hey… pero si pa' chupar/Característica general alegría total/Invisibilidad nacional e internacional/Auto-discriminación sin razón/Racismo

inminente mucha corrupción/Monte culebra / Máquina de guerra / Desplazamientos por intereses en la tierra /Su tienda de pescado / Agua por todo lado / Se represa / Que ni el Discovery ha explotado / Hay minas llenas de oro y platino/ Reyes en la biodiversidad / Bochinche entre todos los vecinos / Y en deporte ni hablar.

In these lyrics ChocQuibTown alludes to the invisibility of the area of Chocó when saying "ni el Discovery ha explotado", speaking about the Discovery Channel. The video for the song now appears on the National Geographic website (National Geographic, n.d). In a constructive and positive way the group makes music about their concerns, culture, politics and people to traditional rhythms and sounds from their region creating something new that catches the attention of people all over the world. In many ways, ChocQuibTown encapsulates the essence of the intent of *Ley 70*. They stand to be counted as an integral part of the nation, not as a force against or apart from Colombia, but as a force contributing something of value to Colombian culture.

7. Conclusions

The new generation from Chocó and the Pacific region in Colombia needs to learn what it means to be Black, Afro, Chocoano or Pacífico in a country that has only recognized their existence and rights as a minority in the last 20 years. ChocQuibTown articulates this in their music, which provides an outlet for those communities that do not usually have a voice. It has done so by encompassing the main elements that help them to define themselves as Colombian and within that, part of an Afro-Colombian collective in the Pacific region of the country.

It will be interesting to assess whether ChocQuibTown's success can open doors to more artists who seek to address social political issues regarding race and identity in Colombia, now that they have people's attention. They have succeeded in raising awareness of their culture and daily struggles, but more time is needed to see whether they can affect real activism or change with their music.

The music has been greatly influenced by other struggles in the African diaspora that are more developed in their coherence and conception of history and identity, such as that of the African-American communities in the United States however, this takes nothing away from the unique sound, message and relevance of the group as afrocolombian.

The group has achieved much success in the name of their region, its people, and for their country. The song Somos Pacificos ends with the lyrics spoken by Tostao: "Porque Colombia es más que coca, marihuana y café." Clearly what ChocQuibTown tries to teach the world is the diversity of talent and culture that is part of the Colombian culture.

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