Rap, R&B, Afro-Caribbean Music and Race
In France and the Mediterranean (Race FM)

Context:
The first edition of the Flammes ceremony celebrated rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean music, which were styles previously invisibilized or downplayed by the traditional Victoires de la musique ceremony. Why did a specific ceremony need to be created for these musical styles, which are among the most popular in France, to be duly fêté? Furthermore, to use Frederick Douglass's expression popularized by sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, the "color line" separating white and racialized artists also appeared at the San Remo festival (Giuliani et.al, 2016), confirming the discomfort of Italian cultural media institutions in the face of a diversity that demands a rethinking of national identity. And yet, a number of racialized musicians rooted in these styles are topping the charts in France and around the Mediterranean. Aya Nakamura has been the most streamed French-speaking artist in the world for several years now. Soolking, who mixes rap, R&B and raï, has 7.5 million monthly listeners on Spotify (Taillandier 2020). It therefore seems essential to examine the relationship of these musical genres to contemporary societies around the Mediterranean, and in particular their relationship to the social construction of "race". These questions have been posed since the late 1970s, notably by the then burgeoning cultural studies movement. Following the pioneering work of Dick Hebdige (1976), British feminists such as Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar emphasized the importance of taking the racial question into account in the aesthetic, economic and political analysis of popular cultures (1981). This work, which has since been extended by a growing body of research (Rose 1994, Collins 2006), needs to be updated, particularly as regards rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean music as it is expressed in France and in a Mediterranean space stretching, in the context of this conference, from the Straits of Gibraltar to Sicily, and from France to Tunisia. The relationship to race will be examined from four main angles: theory, artist analysis, reception and institutional relations.

Objectives

Theoretical aspects
From a theoretical standpoint, at least since the advent of cultural studies, there has been a desire to move away from the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School and, from a hierarchical standpoint that placed noble or classical cultures, considered legitimate, above popular cultures (Djevadzadeh, 2021). However, new debates emerged in the 1990s, such as that between Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser (Butler 1998; Fraser 1998). With them, we might ask whether the analysis of racial issues through these musical genres is flawed by a lack of grounding in material reality (Fraser), or whether, on the contrary, dealing with race through the prism of these cultural objects allows us to tackle ideational and material issues head-on (Butler). Are the gender, racial and class discrimination that are expressed in popular music ultimately conditioned by the capitalist paradigm in which they exist - or not? Conversely, we will be looking at the political impact of these cultural objects on questions of race, which are themselves often intertwined with other "identity" issues. Proposals may extend these questions or propose new ones.
Artist analysis

A certain amount of progress has been made in France, for example, in taking into account rap's relationship to race (Hammou 2013; Aterianus-Owanga and Sonnette-Manougian 2022). Karim Hammou and Kaoutar Harchi, for example, have taken an interest in "what race does to artists and what artists, in turn, do with what race has done to them" (Hammou and Harchi 2020), focusing on rap and literature. We thus invite proposals that will seek to complement this research concerning rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean music in a perimeter stretching from France to Morocco, and from Spain to Tunisia, and including all countries in this zone. The aim is to examine the specific treatments reserved for one style rather than another, and their respective ways of commenting on the racial tensions at work in the countries concerned.

Reception

The reception of this music - and what it says about young and old people's relationship with race - also remains to be explored. As Stuart Hall (1984) put it, popular cultures are "spaces of consent and resistance", where meanings may well be "short-circuited". In other words, artists, critics and fans can have highly divergent, even contradictory, readings of representations of race in these musical genres, as hip-hop feminists have already suggested (Morgan 1999). Secondly, the proposals may question the ways in which the new vectors of musical consumption (streaming on Youtube or Spotify, TikTok etc...) influence or not the interpretation of the artists' message. In other words, are anti-racist political demands, decolonial messages and critiques of oppressive systems amplified or diluted? Are they disseminated in unexpected ways or redirected to a niche audience, thus limiting their visibility? In addition, it will be interesting to continue the work begun by Julian Boyadjian on musical tastes and question how "color line" and "class line" do or do not predetermine the predilection for certain artists belonging to these musical genres (Boyadjian 2019).

Relationship to institutions

Finally, a number of studies are beginning to focus on the relationship between institutions and rap music. Rap's relationship with the American, British and French legal systems has been the subject of pioneering work highlighting the racial discrimination faced by rappers (Nielsen and Dennis 2019, Fatsis 2019, Carinos Vasquez 2022). This work could be brought into dialogue with similar research concerning the rest of the geographical area considered here, or confronted with similar work on R&B and Afro-Caribbean music. The relationship of educational institutions with these musical styles also remains largely unexplored through the prism of race in this space (Souyri 2022). The therapeutic use of these musical genres in schools, cultural workshops or hospitals will be a privileged angle of questioning. A vast literature exists in the United States on hip hop in these institutional contexts but work of similar scope remains to be done on R&B and Afro-Caribbean music in France and the Mediterranean area considered here.

Whether they function as an "opium of the people" or as a force for consciousness-raising, these genres may reinforce racial stereotypes (see Collins 1990's concept of "controlling images"), or on the contrary they could offer spaces for identification and self-definition (Bobo, 1995). From a diachronic perspective, our proposals will seek to show what these musical styles are doing or have done to race, and in return, what race is doing to them in the Mediterranean space, by bringing to light often antithetical currents within the same genres, the same works and sometimes the same audiences. Using a variety of cross-disciplinary tools ranging from musicology and history to the sociology of culture, cultural studies, critical
pedagogy, postcolonial studies and black studies, we will seek to account for the "fluctuating" signifier of race (Hall 2021) in the context of these musical genres, for which the notion of "hybridity of identities and cultures" (Appadurai 1990, and Bhabha 1994) is particularly operative.

Although this list is not exhaustive, we are particularly interested in the following subjects as they relate to rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean music around the Mediterranean, in a perimeter stretching from France to Morocco, and from Spain to Tunisia:

- **Representations and expressions of race**
  - Forms of activism among musicians and their audiences
  - Tensions and convergences between the anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-capitalist discourses of musicians and their audiences
  - Representation of the color line (Frederick Douglass), double consciousness (W.E.B Du Bois) and other hermeneutic concepts of "race" in musicians' works and discourses
  - The notion of national identity among rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean musicians and their audiences

- **Interpretation and reception of messages**
  - Visibilization and invisibilization of anti-racist discourse or discourse on race in the music media
  - Evolution of the reception of anti-racist messages and considerations of race according to the age of the audience
  - Hermeneutic debates on race among musicians

- **Institutions and rap, R&B and Afro-Caribbean music**
  - The legal system in relation to musicians and their audiences (criminalization, racist bias, etc.)
  - Educational institutions, anti-racist pedagogy and teachers confronted with Afro-Caribbean rap and R&B music and their audiences
  - Therapy for stress caused by micro-aggressions and racist attacks by this music in hospitals, schools or cultural venues
  - Racism in the music industry

**Timetable**

Proposals should be sent by March 20th 2024 to the following three addresses:

- Emilie.souyri@univ-cotedazur.fr (Emilie Souyri, LIRCES, Université Côte d'Azur)
- S.federico@phd.uniss.it (Sara Federico, università degli studi di Sassari)

They should take the form of an abstract (800 words maximum) with 5 keywords and a short bibliography. The research problem, objectives and methodology should be clearly stated.

Authors should include their full contact details (status, institution and e-mail address).

Proposals for articles, and then the articles written, will be subject to a double anonymous scientific appraisal.

The detailed timetable is as follows (please adhere strictly to the deadlines):
- February 15, 2024: submission of article proposals by authors. **Extended to March 20.**
- March 30, 2024: return to authors for acceptance or motivated refusal.
- June 30, 2024: complete articles received (between 30 and 40,000 characters including spaces).
- October 15, 2024: return of evaluations and possible request for rewriting.
- December 15, 2024: receipt of final articles.
- April 2025: publication and distribution of articles.

**Bibliography**


Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture; with a New Preface by the Author*. Routledge, 2012.


Souyri, Émilie. « Ils nous croivent* ilétrique* mais on est magnifique : pour une pédagogie hip hop en France ». *L’école à travers la culture pop*, édité par Antoine Derobertmasure et al., Mardaga Supérieur, 2022, p. 511-32.