


Research Article

# Travelling Tropical Gangstas from France: An Analysis of Hardcore French Rappers Who Reenforce Their Hypermasculinity by Filming Music Videos in Medellín and Rio De Janeiro

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## Abstract

Since the nascent stage of French hip-hop music, Gangsta-style rappers have emphasised their toughness and hypermasculinity by producing videos in disenfranchised areas in France. These types of self-characterisations in French rap play a vital role in reinforcing an artist's reputational strength and are a method for establishing their personally styled brand. The interplay that connects a community with hip-hop constitutes two essential frameworks that shape and facilitate the Alpha Male viewpoint of many global rap artists. In recent years, several of the most popular French hardcore rappers are abandoning their longstanding rubric of filming in socio-economically challenged areas of France by travelling to locations overseas where they can create new narratives of auto-fortitude. By choosing to produce videos in faraway global locales, French hip-hop artists are realising the visual power that these foreign locations enable them in terms of re-branding their reputations. This is particularly true when rap consumers can associate or stereotype certain international locations with crime and deviance. In this sense, Brazil and Colombia have become favoured destinations for the production of music videos. Videoclips filmed in these two countries feature thematic cynosures of vice where rappers can position themselves as kingpins. These presentations are intentionally produced in zones that viewers might recognise from newsclips, programmes, or popular films. Socio-economically challenged places like the comunas of Medellín and Rio de Janeiro's favelas give French hip-hop artists new stylistic techniques to bolster their self-narratives. This enables them to exude toughness in manners not available to them at home, such as cosplaying real-life gangsters and flaunting firearms in videos. This study deconstructs hypermasculine demonstrations as exhibited in several commercially popular music French hip-hop videos that were produced in Brazil and Colombia by examining the reasonings and contrasts of these narratives. For the hardcore rappers who produce content overseas, the choice to create videoclips in disenfranchised areas in those countries is fully intentional. The more an artist embraces a stereotypically provocative visual image with which viewers can identify based on these locations, the more fortuitous they seem, even when these same filmic destinations are negatively fetishised or misrepresented in the process. As hypermasculinity and male posturing continue to be an important components in hip-hop, it is likely that rappers from France will increasingly choose global locations where they will have the ability to bolster their self-narratives of virility in outrageously fictitious manners.

## Keywords

Brazil, Colombia, Favelas, French Hip-hop, French Rap, French Rappers, Hardcore Rap, Hypermasculinity in Hip-hop, Gangsta Rap, Medellín, Rap Français, Rio De Janeiro

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## 1. Introduction

No matter their country of origin, hip-hop artists and the music videos they create solidify one's connections to a specific spatial construct to establish the desired auto-reputation of the rapper. As technology becomes more important in contemporary society, image means everything for these artists. This is especially true in the hip-hop industry where rappers seek to exhibit success and strength whilst at the same time keeping themselves grounded in "the hood." From the early days of rap music in the United States, artists have utilised different techniques of male posturing in rap videos as to contrive a framework for their spatial viability. Thus, auto-presentations such as these are hardly contemporary in hip-hop culture. The decision to shoot music videos in marginalised communities has been a recurring motif in rap music. In fact, the localised interplay connecting community and hip-hop constitutes two essential frameworks that shape and facilitate the hypermasculine viewpoint of rap artists. This means that all visual presentations are extremely important when advancing this sort of portrayal.

French rappers have a long legacy of producing music videos in disenfranchised areas of France. However, in recent years several popular rappers have abandoned this rubric by travelling overseas to create videoclips. This choice is intentional. To film videos in these foreign places gives hip-hop artists new strategies and techniques to create polished storylines; one where they can establish their toughness in unique manners not available to them at home. In making this decision to create videos in faraway locales, French rappers are realising and capturing the visual power that overseas locations give them in terms of re-branding their reputational fortitude as being stoutly resilient [42, 44]. To this end, two cities have been repeatedly featured in numerous videos made by the most popular artists in French-language hip-hop: The Colombian city of Medellín and Brazil's Rio de Janeiro. Rappers have been increasingly travelling to Colombia and Brazil to create visual content that serves to reinforce hypermasculine violent tropes in ways rarely shown in music videos produced in France. Videoclips filmed in Brazil and Colombia by French hip-hop artists feature thematic cynosures of vice, and they are intentionally produced in zones that viewers would recognise as being socioeconomically challenged. These types of shot-on-location productions provide hardcore artists a newer and more global type of street cred that boosts and emboldens their auto-characterisations, which fortifies their overall robust and unassailable showmanship in the hip-hop game (or what one might label as "rizz" in contemporary vernacular). The use of Medellín and Rio de Janeiro as geographical filmic inspirations along with their visually appealing backdrops that are stereotypically or realistically linked to violence and drug trafficking allows French rappers to (re)present themselves as contemporary drug kingpins or successful gang leaders.

Over the past six years, numerous videoclips have been screened in Medellín by popular French hip-hop artists, several of which feature the highest-grossing Francophone rapper of all time: Booba. The success of these Colombian-based music videos demonstrates the power of using a foreign backdrop as a setting for a storyline. However, creating a video at locations throughout the former stomping grounds of Pablo Escobar is not the only place where a rapper can demonstrate their fortitude and masculine virility. Rio de Janeiro's shantytowns are also a visually attractive choice destination for French hip-hop artists. As one of the most touristed cities in the world with a stunning landscape that mixes mountains, water, beaches, and *Carnaval*, Brazil's most famous city is recognisable to almost everyone. Yet, Rio de Janeiro is also a place that is both realistically and stereotypically associated with high crime and police violence, much of which occurs in the hundreds of disenfranchised communities spread across the city's vast mountainous footprint. As such, prominent French hip-hop artists have also added the streets of Brazil's most famous city to their repertoire of visual productions.

In the case of music videos produced in either Rio de Janeiro or Medellín, topics of vice are the focal point and primary subject matter. Not only that, several of these hip-hop artists film themselves posing with various weapons that are banned in France. The more a hardcore artist embraces a stereotypically provocative image on camera, the more fortuitous they are to their consumers and industry rivals. This brief study deconstructs a handful of commercially popular music videos that were fabricated, created, and filmed in Brazil and Colombia by prominent French hip-hop artists by examining some of the contrasts of these presentations. Although these videoclips of *le rap français* are produced in colourful locales with extensive storylines, the true subject matter of the songs the videos that support them often has nothing to do with either Colombia or Brazil. Put another way, despite the aggressive posing in these clips, the genuine themes and lyrics of the rappers' songs bear no connection to the cities or countries being showcased on screen. Thus, places like Medellín and Rio de Janeiro are being fetishised in negative ways, which gives viewers an unrealistic portrait of these cities. To grasp the thematic motivations of these French rappers who aim to enhance their self-promotion by selecting Brazil and Colombia as settings for their music videos, it is essential to recognise how these locations are evolving and being transformed positively for residents and visitors alike.

## 2. Medellín's Miracle

Few places on Earth have reinvigorated themselves in the same way from which Medellín has emerged from the tu-

multuous years of its past. Throughout the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Medellín was statistically ranked as the most dangerous city in the world and the entire country of Colombia was associated with violence [33, 34]. The perpetual instability of that era stemmed from a complex conflict involving various rival factions connected to cocaine and the narcotics trade. Amongst the many players involved in the movement of drugs from Colombia to the world, no one was more notorious than Pablo Escobar and his Medellín Cartel, a group that dominated a significant portion of the global commerce of cocaine. After receiving much pressure from the American government in the early-1980s, Colombian authorities relentlessly pursued him and other involved narcotics organisations, which in turn generated more violence. Furthermore, additional nefarious groups also sought to take down the powerful Medellín Cartel. Rival cartels from Cali as well as various right-wing paramilitaries throughout Colombia all fought for control. Together, violence and terrorism increased substantially in areas controlled by the duelling narcotic networks [13, 11]. After years of instability, in 1993 Escobar was eventually killed by the Colombian military with assistance from the United States Drug and Enforcement Agency. Since then, the networks that consolidated control of the narcotics trade within Colombia have kept a lower profile in terms of action and visibility [11]. Forward from the end of the 1990s, Colombia has undergone a remarkable transformation, with Medellín leading the way [4, 33]. The former hometown of “*El Patrón*” that once led the world in violence is now recognised as a hub of innovation. This metamorphosis has led to an increase in Colombia’s appeal as a favoured tourist destination for international travellers [13, 5]. Moreover, this shift represents a remarkable turnaround from the barbarities of the past. During the peak of instability of the Escobar era, Medellín experienced thousands of homicides each year. However, this number has since decreased to a few hundred annually [8, 9, 13]. Although not perfect, when compared to other places in Latin America and the United States, Medellín’s crime rate is at or below other cities of similar or greater size. There are several reasons for this astonishing reversal, starting with the diligent work of a coalition of civic leaders, urban planners, local academics, and especially *Paisas* of all socioeconomic classes [34, 33, 38]. Following the conclusion of the tumultuous era dominated by Colombia’s cartels, numerous municipal investments in Medellín’s most underprivileged sectors have continued unabated. In the last twenty years alone, successive local administrations have invested significant financial resources into the impoverished neighbourhoods that ascend the mountainous areas surrounding the city [8, 9, 13, 38]. Projects such as these have encouraged the swift development of various facilities, which includes green spaces, parks, schools, libraries, playgrounds, and clinics. As a result of these daring investments in disenfranchised areas once synonymous with lawlessness, crime rates in Medellín have significantly decreased and a vibrant artis-

tic community has emerged in some quarters [38]. In addition to constructing Colombia’s only rapid transit system (the *máro de Medellín*), municipal authorities proposed an innovative concept; one that was initially exclusive to Medellín: The development of multiple cable car lines that extended from the bottom of the Aburrá Valley all the way up to the city’s highest impoverished *comunas* [33].<sup>1</sup> This Alpine-like transport known as “*metroable*” connect the metro system situated at the valley’s base with the city’s most underprivileged neighbourhoods. This remarkable project has decreased travel and commuting durations for residents of disadvantaged communities by 90% and citizens of these impoverished sectors now have access to shopping, employment, and entertainment in ways not seen before this investment. Medellín’s transformation further underlines that residents of mountainside *comunas* now feel valued as an equal part of the city [4, 9]. Prior to these innovative changes, affluent and impoverished citizens of Medellín rarely interacted with one another [47, 50]. Today, upscale shopping centres, dining establishments, and various social venues situated in the valley’s lower region are accessible and available to all residents. Medellín’s evolution has also resulted in another benefit: A growth in international tourism. Whereas it may have been unthinkable to consider visiting anywhere in Colombia during the 1990s, Medellín has since become a very popular destination for global travellers and tourist revenue now represents a major economic boost to municipal coffers [9]. When writing about the increasing appeal of Medellín, one researcher denotes how that the city experiences unprecedented levels of annual visitors that continues to grow annually, which in turn significantly enhances the local economy [54]. This illustrates how Medellín has emerged to become one of the world’s most sought-after travel destinations [38, 5]. Moreover, the number of tourists and the associated revenue brought in by their spending surged by 50% over a five-year period (2014-2019) with approximately 1.2 million international travellers visiting the city in 2019 alone [54]. That number increases each year. Tourism in Medellín directly supports more than 300,000 local employment opportunities and it accounts for over 8% of the city’s GDP [5]. In addition to tourist revenue that increases with each new year, the swift transformation of Medellín has been highlighted by various international media sources. As such, the city has received over forty international awards in recent years, such as being named the “Most Innovative City” to the “World’s Smartest,” amongst other accolades [13, 5, 39]. Nevertheless, the lingering stigma from the cartel era of previous decades persists thanks to numerous films and popular internet series that often glorify and focus on stereotypes of the past. A good example of this type of presentation is the popular Netflix series entitled “*Narcos*,” as well as additional movies and programmes that feature Pablo Escobar and other

<sup>1</sup> *Comunas* are the various municipal districts in Colombian cities. However, the context of Medellín, the word “*comunas*” is often employed by locals to represent areas of the city with socioeconomic challenges.

individuals from that tumultuous era [19].

### 3. Rio and Favela Chic

Rio de Janeiro is one of the world's most recognisable cities due to its remarkable geographic features and picturesque beaches, bays, mountains, and inlets. For visitors, the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, the sounds of Samba beats, a beautiful waterfront location, and colourful *Carnaval* celebrations lend to the alluring mystique of the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Marvelous City). Yet at the same time, Rio de Janeiro is also known for its numerous shantytown slums that are known as “*favelas*,” of which there are over 1000 located in the city alone. In fact, millions of “*Cariocas*” (as residents are known) reside in these disenfranchised communes across each of Rio's various geographic zones. This means that favelas are also a living, breathing, equal part of the metropolis of the *Marvellous City* just like its famous beaches.

Favelas first came to be in the latter years of the 1800s after Brazil transitioned from an Empire to a Republic when slavery was officially abolished. As the global Industrial Revolution intensified, the economic output and commercial stature of Brazil's two largest cities (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) grew in importance. Many former slaves, along with working-class Brazilians from the agricultural northeastern region and elsewhere in Brazil migrated to the big cities for work. Upon arrival, neither of which had enough adequate housing or manageable land to accommodate the new arrivals [51, 14-16, 24, 45]. As this burgeoning underclass of new residents continued to grow, various rudimentary squatter settlements started to appear in locations wherever possible, even in areas not zoned or ready for development (i.e. low-lying areas, ascending mountainsides, etc). These communities soon increased in number, after which residents of many of them banded together as to form various citizen associations known as *associações de moradores* [14-16, 1]. Each of these community organisations served as a liaison between favelas and the municipal government. As well, the localised groups would step in when the city failed to address concerns, which meant attempting to provide sanitation, water delivery, and later electrification of their communities [51, 30, 55, 53].

For decades, the city government paid little attention to the growing shantytowns until Rio's general population also started to grow substantially, which created the need for more housing for middle and upper-class residents. During the 1940s, then-mayor Henrique Dodsworth committed to eradicating the dozens of favelas in Rio de Janeiro [14-16]. One of the concerns of his administration was that the lack of sewage and adequate plumbing in favelas was not only endangering the lives of their residents, but all Cariocas. Similar to many politicians of the day, Mayor Dodsworth did not see favelas as sustainable places of residence in a modern city. The mayor and other politicians sought to demolish the

dozens of shantytowns spread across Rio de Janeiro [14-16]. To do that, temporary housing projects were created to house displaced favela residents, but they proved to be unpopular. As eradication slowly continued and residents were moved, real estate developers eyed the location of many of Rio's favelas with great interest due to their spatial and geographic placement [24, 35, 55]. Many favelas sit alongside the most affluent areas of the city, whilst others offer sweeping vistas and postcard views of the ocean and picturesque bays. Because the land on which many favelas are located is extremely lucrative, developers increasingly lobbied the city government to expedite their eradication and removal. During the 1960s, the forced demolition of favelas intensified, and residents of these communities were relocated to areas that were then located on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, such as the Zona Norte and the Zona Oeste (North and West Zones, respectively). Yet, despite these removals and relocations, Rio de Janeiro remained a magnet for workers. Even with the massive eradication of favelas, there was still not enough housing to accommodate the sheer number of people arriving to Rio for employment. Therefore, as older shantytowns were demolished and re-developed into modern up-scale housing for the middle-class, new favelas were subsequently created elsewhere. No matter the forced removals, some of the larger favela communities in Rio de Janeiro organised their residents well enough to resist demolition completely.

Over the following decades, the population living in Rio's shantytowns increased continuously during the most intense years of the eradication period since the demolition of favelas in other zones did not address the underlying causes of the city's housing scarcity [14-16, 45]. Eventually, as Brazil started reinstated democracy after years of military rule in the 1980s, officials in Rio de Janeiro abandoned eradication as an official municipal policy and strategy after realising that demolition and forced relocation were not practical solutions to the favela problem [45]. By then, residents of favelas had endured serious violations to their human rights because they were punished for being impoverished and living in these marginalised communities. Moreover, the city government's treatment of them as municipal outcasts often accelerated their removal or intensified stereotypes about favela residents [14-16, 55, 53]. That said, some positive changes occurred as the eradication period ended. Two companies that were supported by both favela residents and the municipal authorities helped to analyse the structural living situation in the crowded shantytowns to improve infrastructure to make favelas safer and cleaner living spaces [45, 14-16].

However, even after this positive step forward, other challenges appeared, many of which remain to this day. As the global narcotics trade grew substantially during the 1980s, it was not only Medellín that was affected. Due to its status as a busy port city, Rio de Janeiro soon emerged to be one of the major transit points for cocaine and other drugs to be exported around the world by Colombia's cartels [45, 30, 24].



Added to that, a growing local market for these narcotic substances was worth millions of dollars and various gang local and national factions fought to gain control. As domestic demand in Brazil increased, so did the violence that was associated with it. The result of this was that the homicide rate in Rio de Janeiro's favelas rivalled Medellín's at the time. Furthermore, it was during this era in Brazil that the police and military began to increase their pursuit of gangs and drug traffickers in truculently combative manners, often by acting with total impunity when interventions were conducted inside of disenfranchised zones across the country. The result of this is that residents of Rio's favelas must navigate living with warring gang factions and heavy-handed interventions by the security apparatus of the State to survive [14-16].

However, similar to Medellín's transformation, some of Rio's favelas have redefined themselves positively in recent years [35, 55, 53, 24]. Forward from the 1990s, city and state governments in Rio de Janeiro funded a new security initiative that aimed to pacify favelas and clear them of gang control via an official initiative known as the *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (Police Pacifying Programme, or UPP). The aim of the UPP is to retake control of troublesome areas from the gangs and consolidate leadership into the hands of community organisations that will work closely with the city government. Over the past decade, several of Rio's most lawless favelas have been calmed, including the largest one in all of Brazil (Rocinha). In the decades prior to the creation of government-funded initiative such as the UPP, development and municipal cooperation in the favelas was problematic due to both the presence of gang factions and the aforementioned aggressive police operations [30, 1]. This meant that few projects related to any sort of community improvement were able to occur. UPP initiatives have made a difference in community building and empowerment. In other words, by better connecting Rio's most vulnerable areas to necessary municipal services and to the city government, favela residents feel more valued and have agency [53, 24]. Yet, at the same time, violence remains a constant reality in many favelas across the city. Moreover, ongoing criminal activity and drug trafficking could nullify the positive changes that have occurred in favelas, as outrageous stereotypes about them and their residents remain [14-16].

As denoted earlier, one thing that makes Rio de Janeiro's impoverished areas quite unique from other world cities is their unique placement within the municipal space. Perhaps when one thinks of disenfranchised ghettos or sections of other world cities, those areas are typically assumed to be visually or geographically separated from the wealthy sectors. Indeed, this is the case with Medellín's comunas. There, the poorest sectors are grouped together over a footprint that extends many kilometres, usually facing or across from each other along the steep mountainsides that form the Aburrá Valley in one vast section of the city's environs. This is not the case in Rio de Janeiro. In fact, many of Rio's numerous favelas are squeezed in-between, behind, or next to some of

the city's poshest neighbourhoods and districts. Yet, like the structural placement of Medellín's comunas, many of the favelas of Rio are built upwards on the hills and mountains of the *Marvellous City*. It is this distinctive geographic oddity where communities where people from vastly different socioeconomic groups directly border one another [49-51]. One example of this type of unique placement where posh and poverty come into contact is can be seen right at Rio's most famous beach: Copacabana. Along that coastline and immediately behind some of the most expensive real estate in all of Brazil (e.g. the crowded high-rises along the ocean-front) one can find large favelas located on each of three small mountains that loom over the beaches below.

No matter their location, many residents of both Rio's favelas and Medellín's comunas suffer from a plethora of socioeconomic or structural issues. Amongst them are inadequate or non-existent municipal services of all sorts, a lower educational retention rate, a high percentage of teen pregnancies, a lack of adequate or properly zoned or built housing, and limited shopping opportunities [20]. That said, the comunas in Medellín and the favelas in Rio de Janeiro are most known for their numerous safety issues because of gang activity. In terms of the latter, most favelas of Rio de Janeiro are controlled by one (or more) gangs, each of whom rules over their territory like a personal fiefdom. In Medellín, comunas are controlled by "*combos*" (gangs) and local neighbourhood disputes are typically discussed with them instead of the police or municipal government [20]. In many favelas and comunas, well-organised street gangs control many facets of daily life. This means that these groups often monitor all activity in their territory, and they will forcefully resist any attempts to pacify their dominance. In many cases, the local police in both cities are reluctant to intervene unless necessary.

In the case of Rio de Janeiro exclusively, there are several favelas where the police refuse to enter at all [55, 53, 14-16]. Yet at times, attempts are made to propitiate or pacify these areas. For example, if a favela has been targeted for what is known locally as an *operação* (security operation carried out by the State) police and military personnel will move into a favela heavily armed, often shooting and behaving in ways one might encounter within an intense war zone in a faraway country. That sort of aggressive entrance by the authorities is made even more dangerous for residents because the gang in control of the favela being intervened will frequently react with equal vigour (and gangs are also heavily armed). Casualties are frequently the result of these security operations. Each year, dozens of people are killed in these sorts of interventions, including civilians caught in the crossfire during operations in favelas.

#### 4. Stereotyping Spatial Constructs

In some ways, Medellín's comunas and Rio's favelas share something in common with disenfranchised areas

found in cities and countries across the world, in the sense that they are assumed to be the forgotten zones or the urbanised poor. In other words, places to be avoided at all costs. Research on this subject suggests that Brazilians and Colombians themselves are quite critical of *comunas* and *favelas*, even though many essential workers who provide important services in those cities reside in these areas [20, 30]. However, negative stereotypes are slowly dissipating. Increasingly, Rio's *favelas* and Medellín's *comunas* are re-imaging themselves as viable tourist or artistic destinations.

Whether it is the case of Colombian *comuna* exposure via programmes like "Narcos," or by Medellín's winning international recognition for innovation, or due to Rio's *favela* vistas, the unique spatial constructs of these forgotten zones have been repeatedly featured in movies and music videos. Consequently, this makes them more globally recognisable. In fact, many people around the world were introduced to Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* by the King of Pop himself (Michael Jackson). In 1995, Jackson filmed the music video for his hit song "They don't care about us" in Rio's Santa Marta *favela*. The videoclip for this track shows the famous artist singing and prancing in the colourful narrow alleyways of that *favela* whilst being supported by residents who are dancing alongside him. The song's title is fitting for the attitudes and opinions that some may have when they think of socioeconomically downtrodden areas in the Global South, despite any positive attributes or contributions of the people living in these places. Another notable example of how the international community was introduced to Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* was the 2002 film "*Cidade de Deus*" (City of God), a movie that won numerous prizes and accolades from critics across the world [35, 53, 30, 1]. The film is set in the *favela* that shares the same name as its title, and it follows the lives of several characters over the course of two decades as they navigate the contours of poverty and gang life. The movie was so successful internationally, something interesting and unexpected came out of it: A demand by international tourists to view *favela* life first-hand via organised tours of those spaces [14-16]. For some, the idea that tourists would seek to tour socio-economically challenged areas of Rio de Janeiro that are stereotypically or realistically associated with gangs, drugs, and crime might sound a bit unusual as a vacation option. Yet, these types of tours into the city's most notorious zones have been quite successful and more options are added with each new year. These days, brochures promoting visits to Rio's vulnerable areas can be found in the lobbies of many hostels and hotels across the *Marvellous City* as various operators compete for new business. Many of these visits into the *favelas* are organised by small companies made up by residents in conjunction with the police and/or local gangs in charge of the visited zones. Some researchers argue that tour operators sell the idea of visiting Rio's disenfranchised neighbourhoods in the sense that *favelas* represent a sort of mysterious place for those people who do not live in these neighbourhoods, including Brazilian non-residents [51,

14-16, 45, 30, 36]. Therefore, tours into these areas offer to show visitors the real life of those residential spaces. The same can be said when tourists seek to visit Medellín's colourful *Comuna 13* in the San Javier district. For both Brazilians and Colombians, *comunas* and *favelas* are either dismissed or ignored by the middle and upper classes as "no-go" zones whilst at the same time being praised by hipsters and tourists as the real and authentic hub of art and culture [36]. When analysing Rio, one researcher maintains that *favela* tours ultimately mystify these zones whilst also attempting to demystify them [14-16]. Tourist companies capitalise on this duelling dichotomy as they promote their business. To denote one example, visitors to a *favela* may feel like they are somehow breaching a type of dangerous binary from within the confines of a safe, protected, and officially sanctioned tour [53, 24]. This duality is necessary to produce the commodified zone for those who "dare" visit it. Thus, *favela* and *comuna* tours are appealing and well-liked by tourists because of the sense of inaccessibility, opacity, and danger that pervades these locations. Any organised visits to these quarters must also demonstrate the *favela*'s unexpected safety as to present a positively transformed image of the visited spaces. Thus, a sort of personifying or humanising a *comuna* or *favela* occurs after it has been first objectified as a commodity. This means that image is part of the fetishism of the place [14-16]. This means that the *favela* or *comuna* shown during a tour is therefore transformed into a place with human qualities throughout the visits because operators focus on the morality, entrepreneurship, bravery, resistance, resilience, art, and overall organisation of the residents living there. Yet, despite these sanctioned tours and/or any positive changes made in Rio's *favelas* or Medellín's *comunas*, stereotypes about these spaces endure (especially for people overseas). That is part of the attraction of these zones, however negative. It is precisely this type of presentation that grabs the attention of hypermasculine Gangsta-style hip-hop artists from overseas.

## 5. Alpha Masculinity and French Hip-Hop

Since the nascent stage of rap music, hip-hop artists have sought to portray themselves as a typical Alpha male from the "hood" whose involvement in, or ties to violence are glorified and used as a marker of one's authentic and genuine experience [40, 29, 37]. Exaggerated types of male virility such as this helps to perpetuate one's rigid and resilient hardcore image to rap's consumers. For rappers, this type of auto-presentation gives them dominance against their subordinates in the industry [29, 28, 48]. This type of rigid masculinity is analysed by one investigator who posits that at times, men from disenfranchised communities of colour create, sensationalise, and "explicitly racialise ghetto stories" with an aim to emphasise one's fortitude vis-à-vis other males

[26]. This behaviour is done to dismiss any accusations of being weak. Rappers frequently copy this street-level mindset excessively [25, 27, 23]. Another researcher argues that "Hip-hop masculinity is a concept that defines itself against femininity" or other ways that males might be viewed as feebly delicate Beta men [37]. By presenting oneself as being aggressive, this can enhance one's reputation since this is necessary component for hardcore hip-hop artists to be regarded as genuine in the industry [52, 28, 48]. In other words, the ultimate quest for true street authenticity remains focused on an auto-definition of an Alpha-style toughness that rejects anything that appears to be Beta-style feminine [52, 28]. However, this kind of misogyny and braggadocious masculine energy is just one way that hardcore rappers portray themselves as virulent. Street cred is further reinforced by placing heavy emphasis on one's hypermasculinity. This is often demonstrated by violent allusions in song lyrics or similar imagery in music videos that emphasize the use or promotion of illegal drugs and/or the possession of various weapons [31]. This kind of self-presentation is a significant and recurring theme that rappers employ to establish their authenticity in comparison to their industry competitors and to advance a brand or image [6, 7, 41].

In terms of hip-hop in France, artists primarily come from communities that are demographically majority-minority in their ethnocultural demographics. Yet, unlike rappers in the United States who are frequently defined by American contours with respect to ethnicity, the French context lacks any purely racial component that could contribute to the development of one's *quartier* (or "hood") authenticity. That is, one's race is not emphasised or utilised as the primary means of identification by rappers in France. Because most artists in the French hip-hop industry come from the "*cités*," (housing estates or "projects") or other disenfranchised areas, the actual spatial community from which artists in France hail already derives their street cred. In France, rappers are not exclusively concerned with their race as an identifier. Rather, the fact that they were raised in (or still reside in) underrepresented neighbourhoods of the nation already racialises them as the other [22]. The origins of a rapper's spatial construct in France is significant in this regard because it gives them and other marginalised youth the authenticity they require. To strengthen their membership and authenticity as representatives of these communities, artists frequently position themselves in the socioeconomically disadvantaged *cités* in their music videos. Additionally, by filming themselves in these locations, this allows these rappers to take a fortuitous stance against their industry rivals and even the French government [22, 21]. This type of oppositional spatial element against mainstream society helps rappers design and delineate their personal narratives as they wish.

One of the most prevalent themes in rap music is the idea of the "diss," which means defeating opponents in a rhymed manner with a strong bass backbeat or by portraying oneself as "hard" in a music video [29, 48]. The very nature of in-

sulting and battling via rhymes is at the foundation of hip-hop's formation on the streets of the Bronx in New York City. For gang members at that time, rapping emerged as a new form of linguistic dominance to use against competitors during linguistic street battles. This legacy of rhymed combativeness has been a major part of the sound for decades and it remains intact in the industry to this day. In the rap game, whenever an artist can "diss" or minimise one's rivals, those aggressive presentations strengthen the basis of one's overall masculinity [46]. In other words, one's image means everything because hip-hop culture and rapping are steeped in rivalry, vanity, bragging, and arrogance [29, 48]. When studying the subject of Black masculinity, Belle (2014: 294) argues that aggressive lyrics provide rappers a "trope of authenticity" for males to "determine who the real man is" [3]. Tough posturing in videoclips gives rappers other means in which to solidify one's reputation vis-à-vis their adversaries. Since the hip-hop and music video production evolved simultaneously, artists soon realised that a polished presentation was crucial to the process of creating one's sense of self [18]. Videoclips are one of the most significant promotional tools available in a rapper's arsenal.

French hip-hop artists interact with one another in a variety of combative ways as one may observe in music videos produced by American rap. For years, "Gangsta" style French rappers have produced videos filled with violent images, both stereotypical and real. Many of these types of aggressive visual presentations receive heavy airplay on radio and music television programmes/stations in France, which serves to augment the popularity of the artist. For example, the thematic matter shown in these videos often features the type of deviance assumed to be a part of a criminal underworld. Visual presentations such as these frequently feature images from the streets showing rappers *dissing* their rivals in scenes showing them with drugs, firearms, in unpleasant encounters with the police, in altercations, and more. The purpose of these videos is to show how the rapper (or rappers) who is the main character of the song can overcome any obstacles in their path. Furthermore, to set themselves apart from their competitors and the different tiers of the French State apparatus (i.e. politicians, police, teachers, etc), hardcore rappers in France are also perpetuating and fetishising stereotypes of life in the country's marginalised communities. Hammou (2014) labels the sorts of visual narratives that centre on deviance as a sort of "margin marketing" where negative opinions assigned to Black and Arab youths are being mobilised and embraced by rap music as a form of commercialism to bolster one's image and sell records [22]. French hip-hop artists aim to market themselves as societal outsiders as to bolster their street credibility [10]. Additionally, by focusing on themes of deviance, delinquency, negativity, a distrust in society (etc), a rapper's reputation increasingly solidifies. This happens because toughness as framed by one's spatial construct means everything for many French rappers [22]. It is for this very reason that Medellín and Rio

de Janeiro have become appealing locations for the most well-known hardcore hip-hop artists in France to develop original plots for their music videos. In other words, these “Gangsta” artists from Europe have found exciting new globally recognisable locations in the Global South where they can strengthen and reaffirm their toughness and vitality in bombastically visually stimulating ways.

## 6. Cosplaying Pablo in Colombia

In recent years, numerous French rappers have concluded that focusing solely on problems that occur in the disenfranchised suburbs of Paris may no longer be as visually striking as incorporating an exciting and fresh element into their auto-repertoire and self-presentation. As a result of its violent past and its appearance in television shows and films, Medellín and other locations in Colombia have emerged as being desirable locations for music production where rappers can emphasise fictional depictions of criminality in their videos. By making this choice, videoclips made by French hip-hop artists are emulating, imitating, and intentionally paying homage to the Colombian drug kingpins of the past.

Music clips filmed in Colombia by rappers from France usually feature slick storylines with long establishing shots that focus on the disenfranchised comunas and their residents, which in many cases includes real local gang members. Various narco-trafficking themes are also omnipresent in these narratives, mostly shown in exaggerated and stereotypically dramatic ways. The purpose of these visual presentations is to allow these rappers to mimic the cartels' historical behaviour in ways that are not possible for them to do if filming videoclips in France.

Niska, a hardcore artist who has achieved great success on music charts across the Francophone world was the first rapper from France to travel to Colombia to start the trend of making videos in that country. The first well-known music video shot in Medellín was the clip for the song “Medellín,” which was released in 2018. The song and its accompanying videoclip cover several topics, such as drug use and trafficking, deviant behaviour, the general gloom of people residing in an impoverished neighbourhood, and the breakdown of a family because of criminal activity. Scenes in the music video compare the violence in Colombia to the life on the streets of disenfranchised areas of France; all of which only use the actual city of Medellín as a negative lyrical analogous metaphor. This song's music video contrasts scenes of an impoverished comuna barrio in the mountains far above Medellín with scenes of life in an unnamed *cité* around Paris. Despite being filmed on location, the Colombian city is not mentioned in the song's lyrics at all, aside from the track's title and metaphorically using it as an analogy, as shown in this line: “It's the jungle, in our streets it's [similar to Escobar's] Medellín. In the corners we sell dope, [even] my English teacher takes lines. Leave me in my delirium (i.e. here in this space).” In other words, the song's lyrics compare life in the

French *cité* to what the rapper perceives to be life on the streets of Medellín as a means in which to discuss the deterioration of society in France. The videoclip was shot almost entirely on location in Medellín, even though the song's subject matter is limited to life in France from the perspective of residing in a marginalised community there that is imagined to be rife with crime and deviance. Even though the actual/realistic thematic matter of this track only concerns vice occurring in a downtrodden Paris suburb, Niska is featured in multiple scenes that showcase a more aberrant version of Medellín, one that reflects life as it existed in Colombia during the Escobar era. High-calibre weapons are an important part of the rapper's presentation. This has historical context in rap videoclips. When analysing weapons shown in music videos, Dyson and Hurt (2011: 359) discusses the presentations of guns in visual presentations as being a “central part of the iconography of the ghetto,” and later states that arms are a violent means “by which space is divided, and status is assigned” [12]. Other scenes of the video show Niska consulting with gang members, evading the police, and confronting his enemies in various manners. Women are shown in objectively ridiculously misogynous ways. For example, one scene in the video presents Niska overseeing the production of cocaine that is being prepared and mixed in a laboratory by skimpily dressed women in bikinis. Not only is this representation sensationalist and unrealistic, but this also egregiously inaccurate portrayal of women feeds the fantasy of the male gaze by reinforcing outrageously sexist tropes. Furthermore, the plot of this music video not only reinforces preconceived notions about Medellín as to portray the song's protagonist as a strong, potential leader in the global underworld, it also places women in a sexually subservient role where their existence is solely to satisfy the misogynistic or sexually exploitative purposes of kingpins and strongmen. Despite the colourful visual narrative on their screens, viewers might not realize that the actual city Medellín has nothing to do with the song's actual lyrics or true thematic content, apart from the song title and a single analogous reference.

After the success of Niska's music video, others in France's hip-hop industry travelled to Colombia to film videos of their own. One of those artists who has a history of creating videos overseas was none other than Booba, the most successful rapper in French history. In French hip-hop, it is said that whatever Booba does, the industry follows, which means that his decision to shoot music videos in Colombia would certainly be imitated and emulated by others. Themes featured in Booba's songs have always been of the hardcore variety and his videoclips frequently present him in a similar fashion. To project his hypermasculine image of toughness and obstinacy, Booba frequently exchanges barbs with his rivals in the entertainment industry, and he is an expert at creating music videos whose aim is to solidify his “Gangsta” reputation. In many of his music videos, Booba is often shown posing with guns, drugs, engaging in criminal activity, evading police, and directing various under-



world-style operations. Posturing in aggressive ways is a common feature in hardcore style videos. This type of antagonistic and combative posing enables rappers to challenge to all authority confronting them [32]. One scholar describes the violent lyrics and imagery employed by rappers as something that “aggrandises the gun as a symbol of macho power, a cure for all disputes” [29]. The majority of Booba’s videoclips are frequently set in the forgotten and disenfranchised suburbs of Paris and they often employ stylistic techniques that reinforce themes of vice, which includes using black and white filming to bolster violent plots and arranging camera angles to best showcase his strength and decisiveness [21]. There is a very good reason why Booba would also choose Medellín as the setting for his videos. The vibrant streets of the Andean city support and represent a good thematic fit as to bolster his intended image as the head of the French hip-hop scene as “*El Patrón*.”

Booba’s first analogous affiliation with Pablo Escobar is seen in the music video “Madrina,” a song co-rapped with Maes (a burgeoning artist supported and produced by Booba). This song and its music video are based on the true story of a notorious member of the *Cartel de Medellín* named Griselda Blanco. In real life, Blanco was renowned for her acumen in the cartel’s cocaine trade, but she was also one of the group’s most vicious members, being personally responsible for the murders of numerous individuals. The music video for “Madrina” is full of nostalgic imagery that pays homage to this bygone era. Throughout the clip, viewers observe several real-life filmed images from Escobar’s home videos that he and his associates made in the 1980s when he was at the height of his power. For instance, in the first scene, a small plane lands on a distant airstrip, and Booba and Maes get out and hop into a white jeep driven by the cartel’s Madrina. Astute viewers will be able to identify the parallels that this imagery co-opts from Pablo Escobar’s own recordings, as well as those from sequences in well-known movies and streaming series that showcase the kingpin’s life at that time. As the videoclip progresses, one can see a variety of scenes from an opulent mansion that resembles the *Hacienda Napoles*, which was one of Escobar’s numerous luxurious estates. During the sequences at the upscale home featured in the music video, Booba and the “Madrina” are observed conversing while they examine a processing lab that (once again) showcases skimpily attired women in bikinis who are working on getting cocaine ready for distribution. Additionally, further scenes show Booba and Maes talking about possible agreements with the “Madrina” to form a collaboration on drug distribution. Additional images from the visual presentation of this song are taken from other well-known home videos made by Escobar’s inner circle that feature cartel associates riding on motorcycles. The pair of French rappers in the music video for “Madrina” mimic those earlier realistic scenes exactly as they were filmed in the 1980s. As the song moves forward, the sexual tension between Maes and the Madrina eventually reaches a crescendo at the end of

the video clip. When the latter two are left alone in a bedroom, the cartel’s Madrina is eventually handcuffed to her bed by Maes, who deceives her into believing they were going to have sex (this ruse enables him to make a quick getaway with kilos of cocaine). In the next and final chapter in this visual story, Booba and Maes make their getaway with those kilograms and more cash taken from the fictitious cartel at the end of the song. As was the case in Niska’s song and video, neither Medellín, nor Colombia are mentioned at all in the song’s actual lyrics whatsoever. Moreover, the only reference to the word *Madrina* appears in the track’s refrain (“the Madrina wants a ring on her finger”).

Another videoclip shot entirely in a Medellín features Booba and Dala (yet another one of his protégés) is the commercially successful song entitled “Baby.” This music video features numerous themes that are reminiscent of different cocaine traffickers from the past and present. Throughout the clip, the two rapper-protagonists who portray drug kingpins are continuously being pursued by Colombian authorities. Almost every criminal stereotype imaginable is shown in this video. At one point, while the main characters are having fun at an exotic-dancing establishment, police break in and arrest them right away. However, a dishonest officer swiftly frees the two by revealing himself through a tattoo of a scorpion, which indicates his affiliation with the fictional cartel that Booba leads. Additional scenes feature Booba and Dala rapping in a poor barrio community as their Colombian entourage of women and henchmen move to the beats along with them. The music video also shows multiple images of both rappers wielding AK-47 semi-automatic rifles, which they display to intimidate their opponents. Subsequent scenes in the song depict the rappers escaping capture once more in a truck that speeds up and down the steep hills of the comuna while the police aggressively pursue them. Other scenes of the video repeat these same presentations in various locales in and around Medellín. To the dismay of the security forces commander who appears often in the clip, the two main characters in “Baby” continue to avoid capture as the police pursue them. The video ends with Booba and Dala posing once more in a barrio neighbourhood as they are brandishing a variety of automatic weapons in a hostile manner. Regarding the song’s realistic subject matter, the city of Medellín is not mentioned in the actual words of the track. Even though the lyrics make no mention of neither Colombia, nor Medellín at all, the on-site visual analogy of placing rappers there to qualify or establish their hypermasculine fortitude is solidified.

In addition to Booba, several other prominent artists in French hip-hop have filmed videos in Medellín. The presentation for Sean’s song “Hiver” (featuring Azuul Smith) is another video clip that adheres to this pre-established model of using the Andean city as the visual location to create a storyline. However, unlike the previously mentioned examples, no firearms or drugs of any kind are depicted in this video. Nevertheless, “Hiver” does feature the same visual

motifs found in other videos shot in Medellín, such as aerial views of the barrios along the mountainside, the rapper standing on a street or soccer field covered in graffiti, images of marginalised urban life of various kinds, and so on. As is the usual case for French hip-hop videos filmed in Colombia, the song's lyrics do not mention the city at all (the subject matter of "Hiver" refers to the struggles of growing up), so any association with Medellín, like the previously mentioned videos, only exists for visual type posturing purposes.

The song "Mozart" by LMB is also noteworthy. The visual presentation for this specific track begins with a broad view of Medellín before cutting to LMB rapping in one of the city's poor communities. To prove his legitimacy, LMB aggressively rhymes in several impoverished parts of the city throughout the clip for "Mozart." This follows the pre-established scheme that all rappers employ when creating narratives in Medellín. One significant difference between this video and the others is that LMB's clip focuses more on a narrative and does not feature any visible weapons.

In yet another music video, the rapper Bakhaw mimics the same imagery used by his contemporaries in his presentation for the song "Vraie Colombienne," which is set at a finca in the highlands above Medellín. Although neither Medellín, nor Colombia are mentioned in this song's lyrics (as is always the case), the song's title and refrain, "Vraie Colombienne," refer to cocaine and its distribution as it relates to France and within a French *cité*. The visuals from the song's videoclip featured overseas in Colombia are for analogous purposes only.

Most French rap videos shot in Colombia feature Medellín as the central visual attraction. However, other areas of the country are selected as well, such as the city of Cali. In addition to Medellín, the vicious but more businesslike *Cartel de Cali* was another significant cocaine distributor during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly following Pablo Escobar's downfall. For this reason, Cali serves as the filming location for Georgio's song "Miroir." The storyline for this music video features a young Colombian boy who seeks revenge for the murder of a friend. This videoclip uses the impoverished comunas of Cali as the spatial background of the visual presentation, echoing the other videos shot in Medellín. Cali was also selected by Kalash (another of Booba's protégés) for the music video for his song "Rouge et Bleu." This song's visuals include vibrant pictures from several Afro-Colombian *pueblitos* along the Pacific coast. However, the actual lyrics of "Rouge et Bleu," (similar to the other songs from this study that were previously mentioned), do not allude to anything that is displayed to viewers on screen.

Videoclips have been produced in the popular Caribbean coastal city of Cartagena, which remains a favourite holiday destination of middle and upper-class Colombians. As such, it is there where the rapper Hornet La Frappe filmed the music video for his song "Rolls." Additional videos also feature

Cartagena as a backdrop. In one such narrative, the rapper Naps reuses several scenes from the well-known 1980s gangster movie "Scarface" in the song "On est fait pour ça." Furthermore, the coastal city was selected by artist Alonzo for the music video for his song "Feu d'artifice," whose plot mimics and imitates the exact storylines created by other artists. In a different song called "International," rapper L'Algérino delivers a line that might have come from any of the previously mentioned tracks and video clips: "I prefer my savings account, a roadblock, the police." We're going to wage war on them like Pablo." As he raps these lines, scenes are continuously switching between images from Medellín and Cartagena. The majority of themes found in music videos shot in Cartagena revolve around the protagonist's financial success, which is always highlighted via images that alternate between shots of luxurious homes and beaches as the protagonist (played by the French rapper in question) is often accompanied by beautiful women and avoiding capture by the police.

## 7. Favela-Fabulous Rap

Colombia is not the only place where hip-hop artists from France choose to create storylines with tough narratives that take advantage of the discursive infrastructure of disenfranchised areas that are fetishised in bombastic ways. As with the case of Medellín and elsewhere in Colombia, hip-hop artists are increasingly choosing to produce visual narratives in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

Because the French hip-hop industry is one of imitation and emulation, whenever a major artist comes up with a stylistic or creative idea, others soon follow. This is particularly the case each time that Booba creates his musical and visual content. In his song "Tombé pour elle," (Fallen for her), the self-nicknamed *Duc de Boulogne* filmed an entire video in a favela that happens to be above the postcard setting that is the inner bay of Rio de Janeiro. The location chosen for this music video is in a favela that overlooks the famous geological karst *Pão de Açúcar* (Sugarloaf Mountain). Establishing shots of this clip show the beaches of Copacabana, Ipanema, Botafogo, and Flamengo juxtaposed with classic visuals from elsewhere in the city. This particular favela is one of the pacified zones because of the UPP initiatives discussed earlier. Moreover, this crowded working-class hill of *asfaltos* (cement homes in favelas) is now home to several hostels where tourists can stay during their visit and experience "favela life" whilst enjoying some of the best views of the city. This makes for an ideal background for a music video. Much of the clip's storyline focuses on Booba rapping inside of the favela, atop homes alongside both his gang and fictional family. Several scenes feature money and narcotics. As is often the case with videos created in Brazil by French rappers, children playing soccer on a cement favela field is also presented to viewers. The secondary protagonists of the video are children who are enticed by gang members to engage

in robberies despite also being protected from harm by Booba. Other scenes of the videoclip features the rapper riding a motorcycle along some of the coastal highways of the city. In one such instance, he races back to the favela to save his young son from harm from a gang member. The video closes with several shots of various vistas of Rio, such as aerial shorts of beaches, the downtown skyline, and images of Carnaval. Finally, as is sometimes seen in music videos produced by Booba, the colours of Sénégal's flag appear in the background throughout the clip (shown as urban art). Despite the colourful imagery featured in the video for "Tombé pour elle," the song's actual lyrics make no mention of Rio de Janeiro or Brazil at all.

Another rapper who chose to produce a video in a favela is Gambino in his song entitled "Rio de Janeiro." This music video opens with scenes at Copacabana Beach before the rapper enters the Rocinha favela located in the Zona Sul of Rio de Janeiro. Once there, viewers are shown drug dealing and the exchange of massive amounts of money, people playing card games (etc), as Gambino is captured strolling the colourful alleyways and rapping atop houses with ocean vistas in the background. Later in the video, the rapper is shown in front of the heavily-touristed *Escadaria Selarón* (Selarón Staircase) in the popular Lapa neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro. Aside from Gambino, the secondary protagonist throughout the video is a young Afro-Brazilian boy who is shown running various errands and picking up cash. Presumably, this secondary story refers to children in favelas who are groomed by the gangs for eventual service when they become older. Unlike the songs filmed in Medellín and elsewhere in Colombia, the lyrics of this track make some mention of the spatial construct that is being filmed, although the on-screen images do not necessarily correspond with what the rapper is saying. Lines from the song refer to Rio as a peaceful place of refuge that is located far from the drama of a French *cité*. In the song, Gambino mentions that he is "bored" with his network, "sitting on a chair" in a building where there "is dealing" whilst also lamenting that there are "civilians who want to run after me." The desire to create a new life in the exotic location of Brazil is further emphasised in the song's refrain when the rapper states "La cous', le monde, on prend tout jusqu'à Rio, Le cous' s'met bien sous p'êto, Vodka, Tropic, Arrah les civs, j'suis plus là là j'ai plus de réseau, Rio, Rio, Rio de Janeiro" (Cousin, people, we take everything to Rio, The neck goes well with weed, Vodka, Tropic, Arrah civs, I'm not here anymore, I no longer have a network, Rio, Rio, Rio de Janeiro). Further lyrics echo these sentiments as Gambino envisions a new and more profitable life in the Carioca city.

Gambino's other music video shot in Rio de Janeiro is the clip for his song "Palmiers ou Favelas" (Palm trees or favelas). Compared to the rapper's music video for the track "Rio de Janeiro," this visual presentation was made with a much lower budget. The backdrop for the videoclip is the Rocinha favela, but most of the storyline alternates between a young

man running errands within narrow corridors, a small girl watching television in a small room, or Gambino rapping atop a hill or on a beach in Rio's Zona Sul. The biggest start of this visual presentation is the drone that shows aerials from the city. In terms of lyrical content, Rio de Janeiro is only mentioned once. Instead, the words "Rio" and the song's repetitive refrain of "palmiers ou favelas" merely act as metaphors for general life in an unnamed disenfranchised area that could be anywhere in France.

Interestingly, the word "favela" is increasingly being used in French hip-hop as an analogous synonym for socio-economically challenged areas (i.e. "the hood"). There are at least four different additional rap songs that incorporate that word into the title with countless others employing the term in general lyrics. However, not a single one of these tracks is set in Rio de Janeiro or anywhere else in Brazil. The song "Favéla" by Naza (featuring Leto) is exclusively filmed in France and it features fancy cars and an example of some well-placed product placement that seems a bit unusual for a hardcore rap music video (in this case, a company that makes raspberry vodka spring water). Although neither the visual presentation, nor the song's actual lyrics make any references to Brazil at all (aside from the title). However, Rio's famous disenfranchised zones are somewhat represented. For example, the musical rhythm of the song does feature what is known as *funk Carioca* or *proibidão* style beats that real-life favela DJs play at large scale parties and gatherings.

Other songs that have the word "favela" as the solitary title include one track by Naps (featuring Soolking) and the artist Ben é The lyrics of both songs, as well as their accompanying videos make no references to Brazil. In the case of Ben é's song, viewers only see images and stories that focus on an unnamed French *cité*. As for the music video produced by Naps, this presentation centres its storyline in Marseille, which is typical for rappers based in the Mediterranean city. That said, perhaps as another nod to true favela life in Rio de Janeiro, both songs do feature *funk Carioca proibidão* beats from start to finish. Finally, a hardcore hip-hop artist in France is named Q. E. Favelas and he enjoyed a moderate hit with his single and music video entitled "Guerilla" amongst several other releases. Yet, despite the rapper's name, none of his content has anything to do with favelas or Brazil either. That said, the name "favela" does seem to have certain panache in French hip-hop wordplay since several rappers use the term liberally as a synonym for vice in their lyrics and music videos.

## 8. The Break-down

Every French rapper who makes music videos in Colombia and Brazil uses the same thematic and visual approaches regardless of the location: situational and spatial placement, the display of weapons and drugs, the portrayal of women as subservient to men in various ways, and presentations that depict the police as either violent or corrupt. There are simi-

larities between videos produced in Medellín, Rio de Janeiro, Cartagena, and Cali in that almost none of the actual lyrical content of the songs being represented refers to any of the cities depicted in the visual presentations. In other words, these French hip-hop artists' music videos lack realistic, modern depictions of these geographic areas. Rather, these rappers package and rebrand their stories by focusing on criminality tropes and various hypermasculine platitudes of violence related to vice as a kind of metaphorical analogy of fortitude and success.

To emphasise a hypermasculine viewpoint and posture, a variety of stereotypes are employed by the French artists who shoot their video clips in Brazil and Colombia. The visual representations used by rappers aim to reinforce negative stereotypes of crime and vice for viewers who are not familiar with the two countries, or whose views are shaped by movies or television shows that depict the bloody period of the Colombian cartels or the violence of Rio's favelas. Presentations such as these defy reality and erode any gains Colombia and Brazil have made to move forward. As previously mentioned, hip-hop artists regardless of origin or language frequently imitate cultural stereotypes that reiterate and underline an overly aggressive definition of masculinity; one where men are supposed to project a tougher, harder image whilst also presenting themselves as financially (and at times, criminally) astute enough to compete with their rivals [48, 26, 2]. This means that the approaches and visual theses used by French rappers in both Medellín and Rio de Janeiro are not new to the hip-hop game. Rap artists have been portraying themselves as "hard" to get respect from other men since the beginning of the genre. Belle (2014: 289) discusses how rappers frequently promote a cliché "Gangsta" mentality by exploiting stereotypes as to "play into the gaze of the White mainstream imagination in order to make profit" [3]. Although municipal authorities and citizens alike in both Medellín and Rio de Janeiro have assiduously laboured over the last 20 years to diminish, dissipate, and eliminate stereotypes associated with crime and mayhem (as evidenced by its unrelenting civic innovation and significant municipal investment in its underprivileged areas), negative perceptions of both cities remain prevalent amongst foreigners, much to the chagrin of local politicians and residents [14-17, 1].

In the case of Medellín, tour companies in that city attract a constant flow of younger "narco-tourists" from all over the world due to the ongoing exaltation of its most notorious criminal resident (i.e. Pablo Escobar). Once regarded as dangerous no-go areas, some parts of the Medellín are now well-liked tourist destinations. That said, municipal officials remain unimpressed, as they keep putting pressure on local tour companies to stop these kinds of activities and market the city more realistically to visitors. Paradoxically, the favela tours of Rio de Janeiro's most notorious zones remain a popular fixture for visitors, even if the local tourist board of the *Marvellous City* neglects to promote them in their brochures and other materials.

Upon examining every music video shot in Brazil and Colombia, nary one presents these areas in a positive or confident manner. In actuality, the only "Medellín" or "Rio de Janeiro" that viewers see and consume in these videoclips are places that represent crime and deviance, both of which are bolstered by the clichéd notions of financial success that entails, promotes, and demands violence. The predominant subject matter shown in these visual presentations usually only addresses issues related to immorality and criminality. Repetitively omnipresent subjects shown feature drug dealing, eluding or resisting the police, inciting or responding to violence, the tragedy of gang life, and other related thematic tropes. Several of the music videos filmed in Colombia outright mimic Pablo Escobar almost identically by imitating actual scenes from his personal home video collection.

Additionally, not a single video clip created by French rappers remotely addresses any positive themes about either Brazil or Colombia aside from being associated with vice. In each video and no matter the song, viewers are stereotypically led to believe that these locations are enmeshed in violence and greed. Medellín's posh neighbourhoods and the city's celebrated innovative initiatives are completely absent. As for Rio de Janeiro, the city is only shown as a place enveloped with the rigours of favela life. French rappers have made the deliberate decision to present Brazil and Colombia in manners that service to increase negativity as this narrative best suits the interest of the individual artists who seeks to solidify their street cred. All of this is an essential strategy for these hardcore artists to maintain and strengthen their imagined street cred despite the immense financial success their popularity affords them. Put another way, a French "Gangsta" rapper's success in the industry depends on how well they project an image of toughness, indestructibility, and resilience. This is necessary even after these artists have achieved substantial financial stature in the music and entertainment business. One of the best examples of this necessity comes from the very first line of the song the song "Madrina" by Maes and Booba when the rapper states "J'suis toujours au quartier, moula cellophané. J' récupère le rain-té, j'ai ves-qui les condés. Armé comme à Palerme, dangereux" (I'm still from the hood, cellophane wrapped [like weed]. I recover the terrain, watching the cops. Armed like in Palermo, dangerous).

The use of violence and posing in visually aggressive ways in videos by rappers in France and other countries is not new. These same hardcore artists regularly use socioeconomically disadvantaged areas in France to produce music videoclips that explore similar themes occurring in socioeconomically challenged areas at home. French rappers posing in the darkened courtyards of visually degraded, high-rise housing estates are a common sight in many music videos whilst others might show artists rapping in graffiti-filled and dark *métro* stations in Paris and/or in locales that might be associated with problems and deviance. However, any further attempts to establish street cred in France by filming in a



*cit é* may no longer be deemed as successful (i.e. tough) enough for any of these hip-hop artists who previously positioned and presented themselves in so-called "dangerous" areas to develop and cultivate their image.

Conceivably, and perhaps owing to a continual fascination of Pablo Escobar or favela criminals, Medellín and Rio de Janeiro present far better and more efficient settings for one to construct their auto-portrayal than merely videos screened in the limited confines of the courtyards and hallways of a French *cité* (the usual background location for hardcore videos). In addition, videos showing the artists rapping alongside actual or imagined gang members in scenes with Rio's favelas with their famous beaches in the background and/or Medellín's bustling, colourful comunas have strikingly distinctive architecture that creates visually appealing landscapes that with which many viewers are familiar. This enigma is further heightened by the fact that several music videos filmed in both countries feature French rappers wielding sophisticated automatic weapons that are uncommon in French-shot footage. Other scenes in videos shot in the two South American cities include presentations that showcase and display drugs, and in some cases fictional cocaine labs (often outrageously depicted in a wildly stereotypical manner with women workers wearing bikinis), as well as luxurious homes, substantial sums of money, and a number of stereotypical fictive encounters with the police (who are always shown on screen as being corrupt). The constant presentation of various guns in many of these videoclips is an integral part of one's self-presentation. When discussing weapons in marginalised communities, Lena (2011: 468) posits that firearms are a symbol of control in an "upside down" visual society where the oppressed become powerful [32]. In this case of French hardcore-style rappers, the use of weapons in music videos filmed in both Brazil and Colombia gives emphasis to this argument. Although any hip-hop artist could fictionally display and flaunt firearms such as an AK-47 or other automatic weapons in a music video filmed in a disenfranchised Paris suburb, its thematic use in Medellín or Rio de Janeiro promulgates a more vigorous thesis statement to establish one's fortitude. Viewers of French rappers' music videos set in Brazil and Colombia may believe that semi-automatic firearms are *de rigueur* and frequently seen in those places due to the ongoing stereotypes about that are perpetuated by television shows and movies. Moreover, since the shown weapons in these videoclips are all banned in France but are used extensively in the Brazilian and Colombian underworlds shown in movies (etc), this adds to the rapper's mystique. Concerning those hip-hop artists who film in the gritty sectors or in a luxurious residences shown outside of them, these on-screen analogies boost one's street authenticity.

These hardcore artists from France fully intend the deliberate cogency of filming music videos in poor neighbourhoods while mimicking Brazilian or Colombian gangsters. This means that rappers can exhibit total dominance more

successfully and powerfully by fictionally interacting (in videos) with these South American countries in their narratives. Although the use of violent imagery to exhibit male virility has been a part of French hip-hop video production for decades, it has never been done so consistently in a locations outside of France. That is, until now.

## 9. Conclusion

Hardcore French hip-hop artists have long used music videos to promote themes of violence and criminal activity (or the perception of it) as a means of expressing and legitimising their masculinity. For rappers, to possess a forceful attitude or to be seen engaging in aggressive self-posturing in videoclip represent important ways where they can situate themselves and invigorate the narrative they seek to portray. Rap music has always contained examples of violent oppositional posturing and hypermasculinity and this behaviour. It is important to denote that this is not exclusive to hip-hop culture. In recent years, political leaders all over the world have been increasingly employing and promoting their own self-presentations of toughness by emphasising their (hyper)masculine resolve whenever they want to gain or hold onto power and/or establish control [43]. French hip-hop artists are aware of this trend as well. By making the choice to film in Medellín's comunas or Rio de Janeiro's tough favelas, rappers from France are creating and making powerful and eye-catching visual statements. These artists intentionally use these locations to build their reputations as fortuitous leaders of vice. So-called dangerous zones are selected because they represent attractive analogies that solidify a rapper's own resilient "Gangsta" style identity to their viewers around the world. However, at the same time, these foreign hip-hop artists are ignoring or dismissing the past terrorism committed by Colombia's drug lords and the present and continued violence of Rio's warring gangs. Therefore, the actual brutal and authentic narcissistic masculinity of real narcotraffickers or gangbangers is imitated and fictionally co-opted by rap artists to form the rubric of their self-identification. This is occurring even though as foreigners to these spaces, their true, authentic, and realistic connection to these locations is completely non-existent.

Nevertheless, the art of self-presentation has become even more crucial in the social media age. Because today's technological consumer is more global-savvy, outrageous auto-depictions have become even a more essential component of hip-hop. This is why Brazil and Colombia have become a far more attractive visual landscapes for French rap artists. From a spatial point of view, both countries represent an effective visual tactical space where artists and their viewers can understand the discernible and perceptible metaphors being shown on screen. This is noteworthy for a few reasons. First, these optics matter more than the actual lyrics of the tracks being supported by their music videos since in nearly all cases, the words of the songs have nothing to do with

their filmic locations. Furthermore, the fact that none of the artists who shoot videos in the marginalised sections of Medellín, Rio de Janeiro or elsewhere are native to any of these locations is completely inconsequential and not of interest to consumers. None of that matters to the producers, the artists, or the fans. The goal of these productions is to connect rappers to the stereotypical imagery of location. Rappers are commercially and artistically cognisant enough to understand that by associating themselves with the criminal elements of Medellín and Rio de Janeiro, their toughness is automatically gained. In other words, Brazil and Colombia only exist to reinforce a French rapper's hypermasculine strength through a sensationalised fictional plot in an exotic and location, regardless of the true history behind these places or any positive changes that have occurred in recent years. Consequently, as place like Medellín and Rio de Janeiro have made two steps forward, a French hip-hop artists reinforce stereotypes that move these countries several steps backward. Although rappers from France and the music videos they create should not be considered as official ambassadors/examples for the locations where they film, perhaps what is lost in translation is whether viewers are able to distinguish fact from fiction. No matter, the production of videos that focus on so-called Alpha male virility and a man's toughness vis-à-vis his Beta rivals is unlikely to change in the near future due to a growing number of braggadocious world leaders, a growing number of hypermasculine internet influencers, and various male style icons in pop culture who are also currently promoting this type of mentality.

Moreover, due to the popularity of male politicians, podcasters, and internet celebrities who encourage and advocate certain hypermasculine images of men, aggressive male posturing and positioning as "Alphas" will continue to be attractive behaviours that many young men seek to emulate. This is especially true in wealthy countries where adolescent teenage boys and younger men are influenced by various podcasters and political figures. Therefore, areas thought to be "no-go zones" around the world will continue to be fixtures in French rap music, even though what consumers see on screen does not represent the reality of place or space. These locations are favoured because of their perceived sense of inaccessibility, their opacity, and the perceived sense of danger for those unfamiliar with them. As such, the fetish-style of vice-type marketing of these spaces in French hip-hop will continue to amplify the laddish persona of rappers. This means that in French hip-hop, places like Medellín and Rio de Janeiro only exist to reinforce unrealistic and bombastic hypermasculine tropes.

## Ethics Declaration

*Not applicable.*

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Scooter Pégram is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Biography

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