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# Between social worlds and local scenes. Pattern of collaborations in francophone rap music.

Karim Hammou

« J'suis qu'un belge j'devrais faire marrer leur fils  
Limite ils m'verraient bien en feat avec Manneken Pis  
C'est l'modèle pour leur faire brasser l'fric  
Et ma pochette devrait être moi une bière et un paquet d'frites<sup>1</sup> »  
Scylla, « BX Vibes », 2012

Music making usually needs that many different people cooperate together (Becker 1988), and yet it displays very fluid forms of organisation. This paradox has led to a vast literature, improving our understanding of collective action in situations where people are not formally bound to each other through concepts such as field, world and scenes (Bottero & Crossley 2011). This paper will show how social network analysis (SNA) may enhance the analysis of these two latter concepts<sup>2</sup>.

According to Will Straw who introduced it in 1991, the notion of “local scene” describes “a cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist” in “a distinctive relationship to historical time and geographical location” (Straw 1991: 373-375). The development of studies on specific musical scenes has helped to get over some of the difficulties raised by the subcultures approach. The subculture approach often reifies and homogenises cultural practices and aesthetics. It also favours the reception of music over its production (Guibert 2012: 97). On the contrary, the notion of musical scene puts the stress on the close relations between musicians and audiences, but also on the manifoldness of commitment to musical practices “clustered around a specific geographic focus” (Bennet & Peterson 2004: 6).

As it develops, the music scenes perspective draws near to another tradition, which focus on “social worlds”. Used in a loose sense for a long time, the notion of social world was first conceptualised by Tamotsu Shibutani. The development of a social world perspective is closely related to the assumption that through “the development of rapid transportation and the media of mass communication, people who are geographically dispersed can communicate effectively [...]. Culture areas [may] overlap and [may] have lost their territorial bases” (Shibutani 1955: 566).

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<sup>1</sup> “I’m just a Belgian I should make their son laugh loudly / They would even see me featuring Manneken Pis / That their scheme to make big money / And my record sleeve got to be me a beer and a cone of fries”.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank Claire Lesacher and Séverin Guillard for their valuable advice on this work.

Through this concept, Shibutani aimed to describe forms of grouping characterized by “a culture area, the boundaries of which are set neither by territory nor by formal group membership but by the limits of effective communication” (*ibid.*). Then, identifying common communication channels is crucial to understanding any precise social world. Anselm Strauss (1992), deepens and popularise this concept of “social world”. He especially underlines the role of actual institutions, sites, technologies in the making and continuity of any social world. Leisure studies offer several valuable examples of such loose yet effective sorts of grouping, and the role of the commodification processes in these organisations (Yoder 1997).

To contrast a social world perspective and a local scene perspective, two issues may be kept in mind. First, these concepts suggest a different approach toward locality. The notion of social world has been especially designed to cope with a kind of social organisation which boundaries are not set by geography. A second issue has been debated to a greater extent, as we shall see, and relates to mass-production and the industry. At first glance, the social world perspective raises the question of asymmetry in social participation through restricted communication channels and commodification, while the local scene perspective puts the stress on appropriations and connoisseurship in face-to-face social circles.

I do not wish to oppose theoretically these concepts. Both traditions look after the contradictory trend toward the one they highlight – dynamics of deterritorialization in the case of musical scenes (Straw 1991: 374; Bennett 2004), processes of relocation in the case of social worlds (Strauss 1978; Clarke 1991). Moreover, Harris (2000) convincingly analyses the issue of commodification from a local scene perspective in the case of Metal band Sepultura, through the concept of “trans-local scene”. My aim is rather to suggest ways to evaluate degrees of “sceneness” and “social worldness”, to paraphrase Bennett & Peterson (2004: 12), through the empirical case of French-speaking rap music.

As Di Maggio (2011) underlines, SNA offers valuable tools to explore both the actual relationship between social groups or individuals, but also emic understanding of these relations. Thus, it provides empirical means to articulate culture and structure, two issues at the heart of the musical scene and social world perspectives. SNA especially offers two sets of tools. The first intends to cope with the cohesion of a group of actors and offers insight in its structural organisation. The second provides a sense of hierarchies and power relation among this group.

Both sets of tools require that we are explicit with what kind of “nodes” and “ties” are under scrutiny. The first step in using SNA should consist of clarifying the empirical facts shaped with SNA, in these study collaborations between rap artists in various francophone countries.

# **1. Using SNA to evaluate the “sceneness” of musical practices**

## **The development of Francophone rap music across the world**

Appropriation of rap music outside the United States of America began in the 1980's. By the end of the decade, several French-speaking cities across the world had a vivid local rap scene. This process of reterritorialisation and indigenisation (Bennett 2000) is well documented in the cases of Paris (Bocquet & Pierre-Adolphe 1997), Brussels (Lapiower 1997), Marseilles (Valnet 2013), Montreal (Chamberlan 2002) and there is some tracks for smaller local rap scenes in Lausanne, Lyon or Bordeaux (Hammou 2012). This literature indicates similar issues found in other parts of the world (Mitchell 2001), notably the relation between authenticity and language (Pennycook 2007). The relocation of hip-hop outside the US often leads to the use of French for a significant part of these local rap scenes, giving birth to “Francophone rap musics” in several places across the world.

Negotiating there identities with a common US source, these francophone rap scenes had nevertheless little relations with one another, even when they belonged to the same country. There was no Internet, of course, but also no TV program, no national radio station playing local rap music, no widely distributed magazine promoting its artists, and almost no records, except for the Anglo-American ones. Until 1990, there is mostly local practices – local radio shows, small venues, informal meetings, etc. The few connections between these local scenes were thus slow and sparse – they relied on people's mobility rather than steady channels of communication.

The first francophone records of rap music exemplify this mechanism. Published in 1990, compilation albums like *Rapattitude* or *Brussels Rap Convention* reunited rap artists from the same city, Paris in the first case, Brussels in the second case. The same year, the first EP albums like *Concept* by the French band IAM from Marseilles, or *Le VIe Sens* by the Swiss band Sens Unik from Lausanne didn't include the participation of any rap artist from another city than their own. All these records or tapes were published by small independent companies, and most of them were new local structures. Yet, come 1992, multinational music corporations and independent businessmen published new records which displayed a process of relocation of French-speaking rap music transcending specific cities' scenes. In French compilations *Rapattitude 2*, *Nation Rap* or Quebecker compilation *Je rap en français*, A&R men chose songs performed by rappers from different cities, initiating a logic of cooperation in tension with the “local scenes” one.

These modes of experiencing and practicing hip-hop music differ significantly. Nevertheless, “the scenes and industrial ways of making music depend on one another” (Bennett and Peterson 2004: 3). Local appropriations leaned on global and national cultural industries through the records and the video clips they produce and promote. As soon as local labels contracted deals with big record companies and international distribution system, the emerging hip-hop scene of New-York City

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became a mass product broadcasted through international channels of communication and trade (Charnas 2010) coterminous with various social worlds. Yet the national or global commercialisation of rap music also requires local milieus to sustain the pool of wannabe rap stars, and produce the flavour of authenticity, especially since the street anchorage marketing has become a prominent feature in the US and French rap music industries (Forman 2002, Hammou 2012: 194).

The line between the way local scenes may be embedded in musical industries and the very process of exploitation fostered by multinational companies proves to be blurred. Does this embeddedness result from a negotiation, even unequal, between major companies and local avant-gardes benefiting from their involvement in emerging trend in popular music? Or is it rather a shift ruled by these global corporation in the context of late cultural capitalism, which aim at increasing labour flexibility, short term project and, after all, its control over music market? Empirical cases studies suggest a more balanced view, where the status of both hypotheses may be unsettled.

The relation of musical practices toward locality appears to be less ambiguous. That's why it will be the connecting thread of this paper.

### **A case study: collaborations among French-speaking rappers**

The presence of cooperative links between people doesn't guaranty that these people share a common understanding of what they do, that they are part of the same "reference group" (Shibutani 1955). As I move away from a precise qualitative knowledge of the relationships between the actors of specific records, I need to find a more univocal and nonetheless significant indicator. That's why I choose to observe collaborations between rap artists on their LP albums, also known as "featurings". I consider that featuring is not only a track of mutual acquaintance, but also a track of a minimal mutual recognition as a practitioner of rap music (Hammou 2009). The diversity of collaborations between rap artists doesn't boil down to featurings. But this kind of collaboration represents a strong tie with respect to artistic and professional issues. It is also both retrievable in the past years and interpretable, as the initiative of the collaboration is clear enough.

My empirical study will proceed in two steps, resting on two different kinds of data.

- An extensive exploration in the history of French rap music (1980-2004), with first hand interviews, direct observations and a systematic inventory of rap albums (n = 388).
- Second hand data on francophone rap acts during the same period of time in the province of Quebec (n = 107), Belgium (n = 22), Switzerland (n = 27), Senegal, Mali, Algeria, Gabon

and Cameroon ( $n = 30^3$ ). I also find traces from thirty more rap albums, most of them from Africa, but I was unable to collect enough information to take them into account in the analysis.

I will first analyse the relation between French local rap scenes, and then I will provide an exploratory study of the relations between local scenes in global francophone rap music.

## Hypotheses

To explore the “sceneness” or “worldness” of French-speaking rap music, we need a set of indicators that contrasts these type of organisations. As the channels of communication build reference groups which are not bound by a territory, a social world pattern should be all the more patent that members of an organisation don’t share a common geographic anchorage, but also that they don’t show a clear preference for other members from the same locality, even in a diverse group. Yet, a certain kind of “sceneness” may be also associated with a weak geographic homogeneity: the trans-local scene organisation, by gathering different scenes through sparse relations, would display such pattern. Nevertheless, a trans-local scene would keep a strong tendency to privilege relations with homologous peers as regards to geographic location.

The contrast between a trans-local scene and a social world would become more marked if we pay attention to the structural properties of the organisation observed. We may expect a weak structural cohesion in the case of trans-local scene, as few brokers would reunite several cohesive local scenes. We may also expect a kind of polycentric structure, exhibiting a plurality of distinct sources of local innovations disseminating across the trans-local scene. On the contrary, a social world should possess a core / periphery structure, coterminous with the centrality pattern supported by common channels of communication. Finally, a local scene could equally be organised along a core / periphery model or along more decentralised pattern.

To sum up, we can contrast three type of organisation (local scene, trans-local scene, social world) through four continuous indicators. The structural cohesion may be analysed in SNA by following Moody and White (2003). The centre / periphery structure may be analysed by adding to this structural cohesion approach, using the k-core measure. By associating each node (each artistic unit) with a geographic attribute, we can also explore the degree of geographic homogeneity (how many nodes share a common anchorage in the network?) and the degree of geographic homophily (what proportion of the relations are tied with nodes from the same anchorage?).

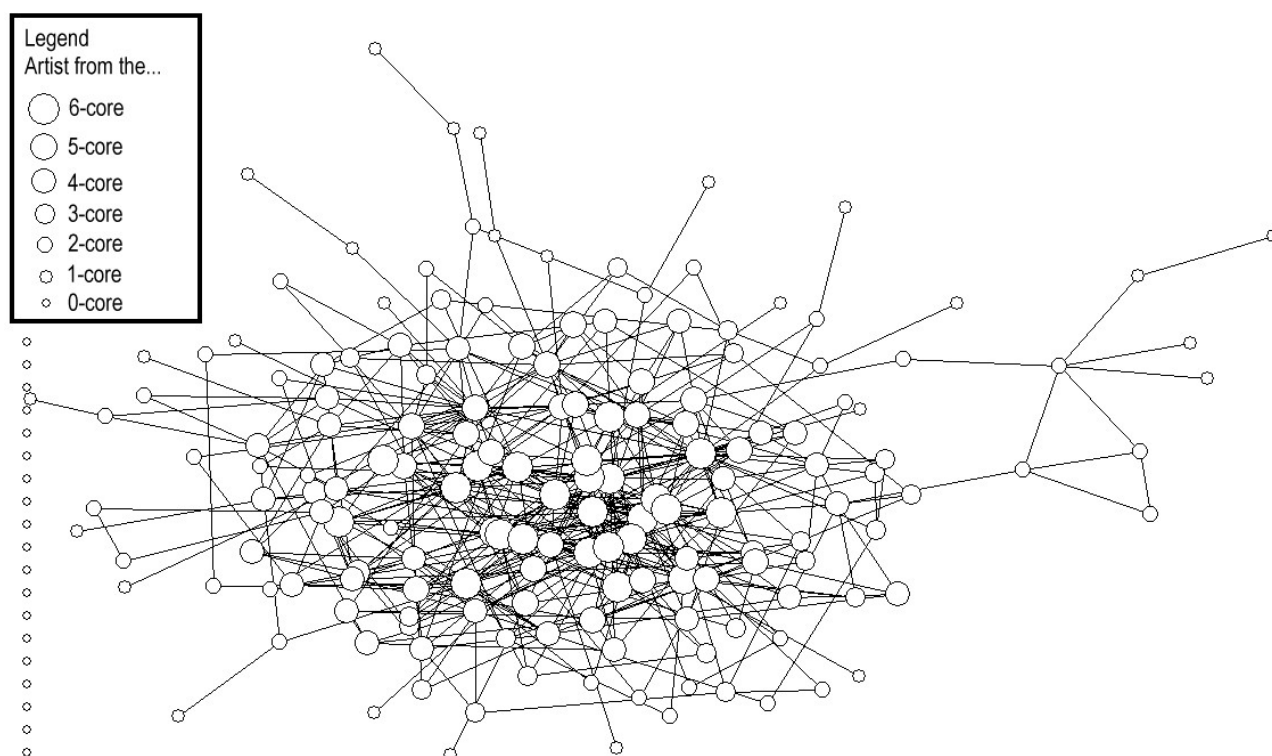
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<sup>3</sup> Some francophone. On the whole, it has been difficult to listen to rap records from Africa. I found tracks of thirty more LP records from the countries above-mentioned, and some rap acts had been recorded in Burkina-Faso, Benin, Ivory Coast and Togo, but I have been unable to take them into account.

## 2. The making of a social world of rap music in France (1990-2004)

### A core/periphery structure of collaborations put to test

Featurings between rap artists in France form a low-density network, built up by 216 artistic units and 408 ties. Nevertheless, this network only possesses one component, including 80% of the artistic units studied. The 20% remaining units don't form any alternative component – they are isolated nodes.



[Graph 1] Collaborations between rap artists in France

The main component displays a core/periphery structure, illustrated by the graphic representation of its different k-core (Seidman 1983; Everett & Borgatti 2000). There is a single 6-core at the heart of this network, and this 6-core is relatively large, gathering 40 artistic units among the 180 artistic units belonging to the main component. Less cohesive k-cores order around this 6-core, in concentric circles. There is no significant clustering pattern in this network. On the overall picture, we can underline that the main component of the network includes neither brokers nor structural hole except for its farthest periphery: some artistic units belonging to the 3, 2 or 1-core of the component are the only path to few pendant nodes.

Featurings on LP records is a very selective track of collaboration. It is unlikely that such a structure may emerge without any sort of informal collective organisation. However, we must verify if this common component is the result of two or more components artificially connected by the shift of a few artistic units between distinct sets of collaborations.

The durability of network ties is rarely taken into account by network analysts. My assumption is that featurings express a bond of mutual recognition that is neither everlasting nor just occasional. On average, French-speaking rap artists publish an album every two or three years. I will analyse featurings on successive and overlapping periods of two years. Year 1999, then, will stand for the collaborations on records published in 1998 and 1999. My aim is to avoid any artificial threshold that compartmentalised networks could drive<sup>4</sup>.

What is behind the single component that we can observe through the network analysis of featurings from 1990 to 2004? To answer this question, I will examine basic properties of the successive two-years networks of collaborations between rap artists: the number of components in each network, the number of nodes in the main component, the percentage of these nodes relatively to the sum of nodes in the overall network, and finally the size of the second largest component. This last indicator should provide a sense of the structural cohesion of each network.

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number of components in the network	3	3	5	4	2	3	3	6	5	3	2	6
Number of nodes in the main component	6	10	12	26	66	78	86	76	87	99	102	89
...in percentage of the overall network	30	50	40	45	79	83	81	74	75	76	86	80

[Table 1]

Table 1 invalidates the hypothesis of several significant components artificially connected through the shift of few artistic units over the period 1990-2004. However, contrary to the overall network of featurings, here we can observe that there is not only one component at each period. But from 1997, the main component reach more than 75% of the overall network, a size that places it far beyond the second largest component. It is also the period in which the number of artistic units involved in the network rises significantly, growing from 26 to 66.

### The dynamic of a common informal organisation

From 1993 to 2004, there is always some small components in addition to the main component. Yet, they never include more than four artistic units. They are only chains of three or four nodes, or small cliques of three. In comparison with the main component, they appear to be outlying artistic units rather than rival coalitions of rappers. Actually, table 1 suggests that collaborations in French-speaking rap music don't happen on the same basis at different moments of the period studied.

<sup>4</sup> I have also tested overlapping period of three years. It produces similar results, although it turns out to be slightly less precise.



The situation depicted on the overall network of collaborations from 1990 to 2004 merges three distinct structural situations in French-speaking rap music. First, from 1990 to 1995, only few artistic units publish an album. Moreover, they share on average less than 2 ties with each other. This weak cohesiveness gives evidence for an absence of common organisation between French-speaking rap artists. Then, from 1995 to 1999, the number of artistic units involved in the network rises, and the number of their ties rises even more significantly. In 1999, there is three times more nodes and ten times more ties in the network than in 1995. Examining the degree density in the networks prove to be fruitful. Usually, a growth in the number of nodes implies a structural trend to a decrease the degree density (Faust 2006: 204): the larger the network, the harder the connection between each node. A counter-intuitive evolution of the degree density can be observed in this second period. In an expanding network of actors, degree density remains constant in 1997 and 1999, and even grows in 1998 (Hammou 2009). In 1995-1999 a common organization for French-speaking rap artists emerges, what we could name the birth of a “(French) rap game”. Since 2000, there is a third period characterized by the relative stability of the organization, which sits in contrast to the more turbulent second period.

This dramatic shift in French rap music proceeds from three distinct social processes. The first process reflects the quantitative growth of the network. Record labels and rap crews, in other words market and artistic types of grouping, take advantage of the increasing appeal in rap music to promote new artists, especially through an intensive use of featurings. This process leads to the production of a wider network, which nevertheless doesn’t explain the systematic linkage between these new groupings. A second significant process lies in how this growing network remains cohesive. Some artists act as middlemen bridging parts of the network that would remain isolated without them. They occupy a structural hole in the overall network at one moment, similar to the role of those “organiser of literature life” described by Björn-Olav Dozo (2010) in the case of Belgian sub-field of literature. Yet, this role of middlemen is only temporary, which bring us to the third process at work. Soon after one artist has bridged emerging groupings, other artists multiply the collaborations between those relatively remote parts of the network and strengthen its cohesion. Each structural hole in the network quickly loses its specific position, which demonstrates how different French rappers are able to work together – how they share a common perspective on their environment as far as rap music is concerned.

### **Paris, the French desert... and Marseilles**

The network of collaborations between French rap artists exhibits structural properties that are not consistent with the trans-local scene hypothesis. However, the role of locality in this overall picture remains unclear. We could understand these empirical data as a social world organisation, just as

well as a local scene one. SNA is useful to test these rival hypotheses. A local scene organisation should exhibit strong cohesive cliques based on common anchorage, while a social world organisation doesn't imply any preferential ties between artists of the same geographical area.

The geographic scales that make sense for a majority of French rap artists are the neighbourhood, the city, and interestingly enough the *département*<sup>5</sup>. There is a hundred and one of them, referred to by a name and a number. The latter has been popularised by licence plate and postcode, and this number of *département* is often mentioned in French rap lyrics. *Département* offers an accurate level of geographic designation. It is meaningful for rap artists, sharp enough to distinguish different areas in the vast urban zone of Paris, and loose enough to bring together cities close to one another, in a country where cities' territory is usually very narrow<sup>6</sup>. 75% of French rap artists can be associated with a *département* through their self identification in their lyrics or record booklets.

The networks of rap artists claiming a similar local anchorage contrast with one another. We can notice three distinct local configurations:

- some disconnected sets of nodes, which is consistent with the social world perspective assumption;
- some weakly cohesive structures, gathering some isolated nodes and few small components;
- and also some strongly cohesive local cliques, which display a kind of local scene structure at the level of *département*.

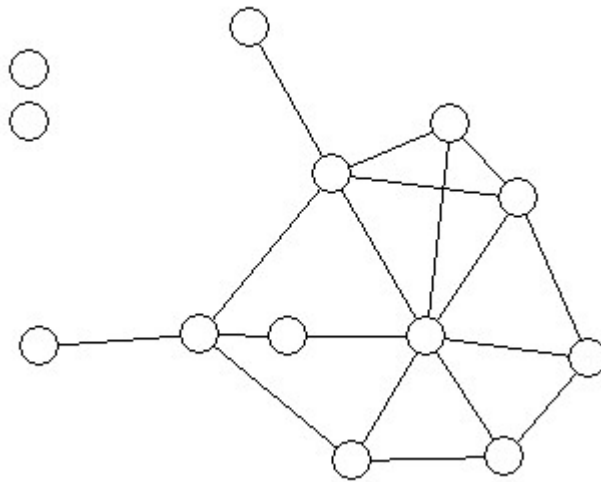
Almost each *département*, outside of the Paris' region, Île-de-France, gathers together less than five artistic units. Most of them consist of a few isolated nodes. Discographic collaborations thus show no track of any local scene, even in the cases where such scene is attested, if only at the level of hip-hop as a pluridisciplinary cultural movement. For instance, the *département* of Rhône (code 69), with the major city of Lyon, include two unconnected artistic units. Only two rap bands from this region have been able to publish at least one long play rap act from 1990 to 2004. However, many rap artists have been performing locally during this period of time (Aubert & al. 1998), and the hip hop dance achieved at the beginning of the 2000s an international recognition with hip hop companies like Pokemon Crew winning the Battle of the Year 2003 breakdance competition. There is one exception to this observation: Bouche-du-Rhône, the *département* of the city of Marseilles illustrated in Graph 2. In this *département*, the graph of local collaborations gathers two isolated

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<sup>5</sup> This administrative subdivision, larger than municipality and smaller than the region or the state, was created after the French Revolution.

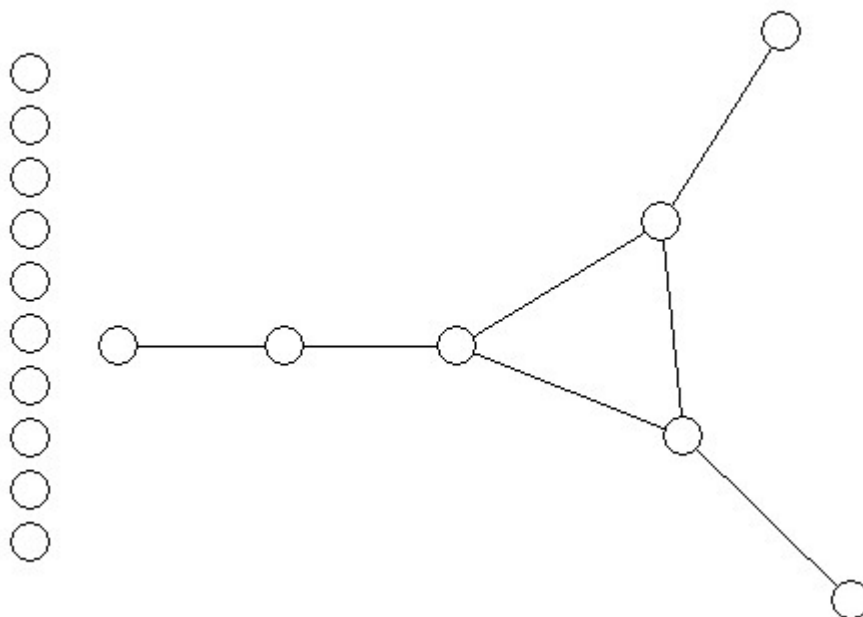
<sup>6</sup> There is more than 36 000 municipalities in France, namely more than in the whole USA and about twenty times more than in the UK

nodes and a strongly cohesive component of eleven nodes, spreading around a clique of four artistic units.



[Graph 2] Collaborations between rappers from Bouche-du-Rhône (code 13)

Other *départements* display a loose network gathering many isolated nodes and one or few small components with a low structural cohesion. This is the case of Haut-de-Seine, a *département* at the west of Paris with major cities like Boulogne-Billancourt and Nanterre, as shown in Graph 3.



[Graph 3] Collaborations between rappers from Haut-de-Seine (code 92)

Here, the main component has a kind of chain form: the removal of only one node is enough to split the component. There is also many isolated nodes, more than in the single component, which suggests a weak local autonomy of rap musicians. This structure looks like the local structure of the

other *départements* surrounding Paris, and Paris<sup>7</sup> itself. The only exception is the *département* of Val-de-Marne (94), with many isolated nodes, but also a strong cohesive quasi-clique.

In each of this three cases, the status of locally isolated nodes is significant. In the *département* of Rhône (69), the two isolated nodes become part of the main component of the overall network of French rap collaborations. These artistic units have not recorded any rap song together on their LP acts, but do collaborate with rap artists of other geographic area. In the *département* of Haut-de-Seine (92), most isolated nodes appear to be connected with other French rap artists if we considered the overall network. Only a minority of rap artists from Haut-de-Seine shows a preference for collaborating with artists of the same geographic location. In the *département* of Bouches-du-Rhône (13), on the contrary, the two isolated nodes remain isolated in the overall network of French rap collaborations. They are not only marginalized in the local network, but also in the national net of rap music. The cohesive quasi-clique of Bouches-du-Rhône, on the other hand, is tightly knit to the overall network: local and national integration goes with one another in this area.

Grasped by the LP collaborations, French *départements* “sceneness” appears inconsistent outside Paris’ region (like Rhône), and weak in most *départements* surrounding Paris (like Haut-de-Seine). Marseilles with its *département*, Bouches-du-Rhône, is the only area that shows a clear local scene structure in France. Yet, this local scene is embedded enough in the social world of French rap music to remain invisible in the overall network of collaborations. To a lesser extent, Val-de-Marne in the south of Paris combines a local scene structure which nevertheless fails to gather most of local rap artists connected. Thus, French rap collaborations’ network shows a strong “worldness”. In the early 2000s, professional French rap music is almost coterminous with a local rap scene of Ile-de-France, the region of Paris and its surrounding *départements*. Only Marseilles significantly complexifies this picture, and justifies a more accurate depiction of French rap music as a social world deeply marked by a centralist legacy. This result is not conflicting with the presence of various local scenes like in Rhône, less relying on the recording industries than on small venues and amateur practices gathering local artists and their fans. Yet, it supports the hypothesis of an asymmetry between various French local scenes and the social world of French rap music.

### **3. From structural cohesion to power relations in global Francophone rap music**

We could consider that this social world structure emerges from the kind of data gathered. Obviously, LP records are not the only way music happens, and this kind of music making may blur local anchorages. Yet, it is a significant result that the most legitimate and gainful kind of popular

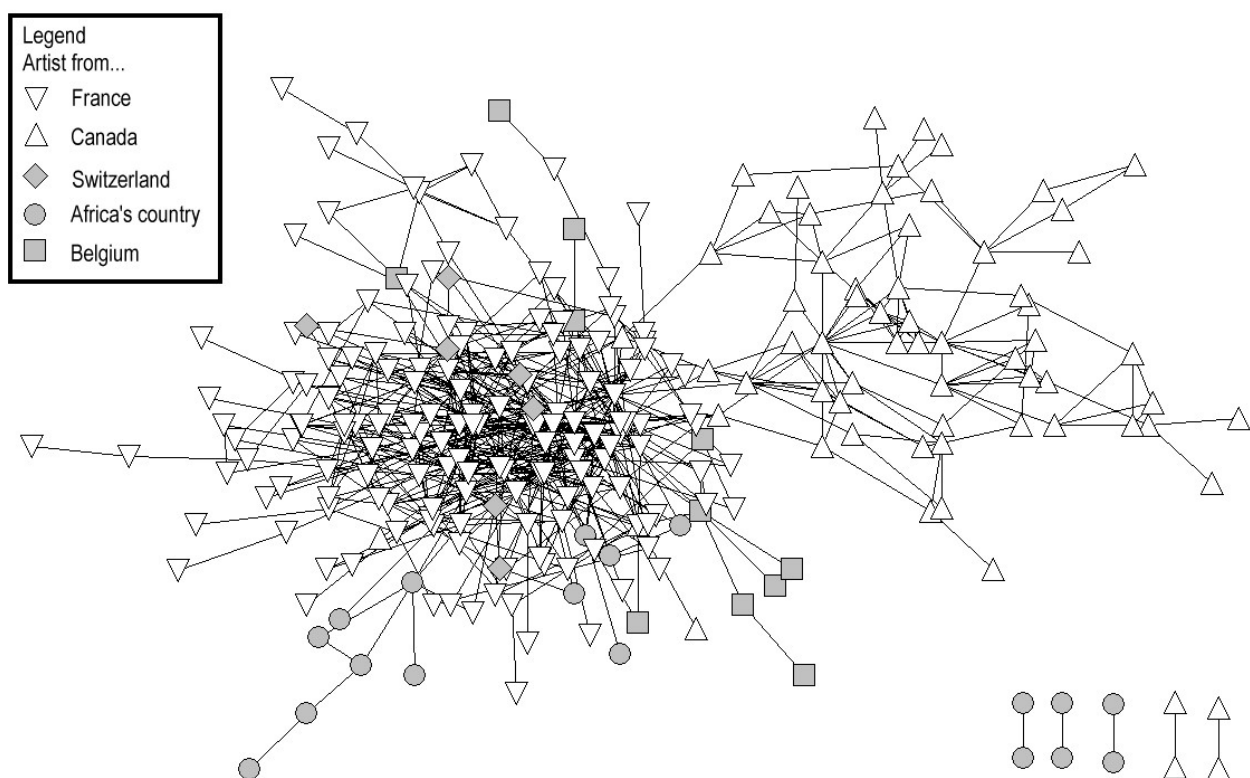
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<sup>7</sup> Paris inner city, with its two millions inhabitant is both a city and a *département*, which code number is 75.

music production in the 1990's moves away from a local or trans-local scene organization. It is all the more significant that rap music has been analysed as a type of cultural production with a strong local anchorage (Forman 2002), and that the lyrics of the French-speaking rappers support this view. Let's now explore a play of scales, considering the social world of French rap music itself as a local scene, indeed a Parisian-centred one, in the context of global hip-hop. Does the international francophone rap musics still display the same kind of organisational pattern, or does it come closer to what a trans-local scene perspective would expect? In other words, does the social world of French rap music stand in relative isolation, or is it in tight connections with other rap scenes over the world?

### **Measuring asymmetries in the French-speaking rap music network**

In France, the annual production of rap LP records has exceeded five different titles since 1993. In other French-speaking countries, such a level is only reached at the end of the 1990s in the province of Quebec in Canada, and in the middle of the 2000s in Belgium and Switzerland. The development of rap acts and hence of featurings on LP records thus concentrated in the early period of the 2000s, justifying their synchronic analysis. Nevertheless, in the network shaped by French-speaking rap artists' collaborations, France remains quantitatively predominant. More than 200 artistic units in the network are French, about 80 Quebecker, and less than 20 Belgian or Swiss. There is also little more than 20 artistic units belonging to different African countries, Senegal, Mali, Gabon and Algeria being the most significant. In each country, featurings play a significant role: from one fifth to one third of the rap songs feature different artists.



[Graph 4] Collaborations between French-speaking rappers across the world

Except from some small two nodes components, there is only one component in the network of collaborations between French-speaking rap artists. Yet, this component doesn't look like the main component of graph 1. Unlike the core / periphery structure of the collaborations between French rap artists; we observe here two sub-graphs loosely connected in the main component. On the left lies a large sub-graph with many reversed triangle, corresponding to the French artists. Few other nodes are set at its periphery: these are African (grey circles), Belgian (grey squares) and Swiss (grey diamonds) artists. On the right part of the main component, there is a subset of black nodes, which stands for rap artists from the province of Quebec.

These observations suggest two results regarding the structure of French-speaking rap music across the world. Firstly, some countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, Senegal or Algeria are subjected to the influence of French (mainly Parisian) social world of rap, as far as LP records are concerned. They take part in a social world structure but stand at its periphery. Secondly, French-speaking rappers from Quebec sustain very different relations with French rappers. The numerous ties between Quebecker artists and the fewer ties with French rappers suggest a trans-local scene structure between a strongly cohesive local scene of French-speaking Quebecker rap and the social world of French rap. To clarify this overall approach, I will analyse each country's case in more details. But I will also give a closer look at the power relation pattern between these countries through two additional indicators.

The ratio between indegree (inviting) and outdegree (being invited) can be interpreted as an evidence of appeal. If one can invite, and eventually pay to convince other artists to collaborate, one can't be ensure to receive an invitation in return. Actual invitations thus stand for public signs of respect, whether from equal peers, or from “godfathers” and “heir” in rap music. A ratio between indegree and outdegree smaller than 1 (many invitations received and few invitations given) thus denotes the prestige of the local scene considered. If this ratio is bigger than 1, it shows that many invitations given are not associated with at least as much invitations received.

Another valuable indication consist in a systematisation of the kind of reasoning on local / global relationship used in the previous section. I describe three different pattern of relations between local and global settings, by focusing especially on locally isolated nodes. We can deepen this logic by measuring the proportion of collaborations tied with artists of the same geographic location. It gives an indice of geographic homophily, or “localism”, going from 0 to 1 on the consistency of various spatial divisions. The closer to 1 this measure is, the stronger the sceneness is. Here, I will combine the level of *département* previously used in the case of France with the national level for other countries, due to the smaller number of French-speaking rap LP records outside France and the equally asymmetric French-speaking population in the different areas studied.

As we shall see, these two indicators don't correlate. Some subset of rap artists sharing a common local anchorage may be marginalized, yet independent, while other may experience both a significant centrality and a strong dependence toward the centre of the network.

### **The centre of the social world of French rap and its margins**

The centre of the French social world of rap lies in Paris and its region, Île-de-France. This area gather only 38% of the artistic units involved in the network but is responsible for 60% of the overall collaborative activity. Its cohesiveness is strong: Île-de-France as a whole displays a localism index of 0,91, yet each *département* of Île-de-France has a localism index lower than 0,4 except for Val-de-Marne (localism index of 0,73). If most *départements* of Île-de-France are closely dependant to one another, they possess various appeal. Some *départements* – Haut-de-Seine, Paris inner city, Val-de-Marne – display a strong prestige, with an indegree/outdegree ratio lower than 1. The artists of other *départements* appear to invite more often than they are invited.

*Départements* outside Île-de-France, except for Bouches-du-Rhône, and French-speaking countries outside France, except for Quebec, appear to undergo a Parisian hegemony. The French capital experiences an exceptional concentration of artists, audiences, cultural structures which leads to its centrality in most systems of cultural and artistic production (Menger 1993). In the case of French

rap music, this hegemony leans on the concentration of record companies, audiences and venues, three issues underlined by this Belgian rap artist:

“Rap music is not very strong in Belgium. [...] Rap music doesn’t have enough place. First, there is no recording company labelled as “rap”. There is no imprint, and also no money. So, without money, it’s hard to develop any artist. That’s what we have found in France: people get things moving. Rap in Belgium it is just impossible, or you have to be an indie. But even as an indie, it’s hard. There is 60% of Flemish in Belgium, 40% of Francophones. Among this 40%, half are older than forty, so not interested in rap music, so it’s difficult, there isn’t any audience. In France, we might have an audience. At the rate of fifty people each evening here, at the venue of Le Lavoir [Moderne, a Parisian venue], among 60 millions of French-speaking people, we are already in touch with a small part of it!”<sup>8</sup>

Outside Île-de-France, only one geographical area possesses a significant prestige: Bouches-du-Rhône, with the city of Marseilles. Its indegree / outdegree ratio is 0,67, which means that the artists from this area are much more often invited than they invite themselves. Bouches-du-Rhône also displays a strong autonomy. With a localism index of 0,67, artists from this area have recorded two third of their featurings with artists from the same *département*. The rest of France appears as a more (Haute-Garonne, Alpes-Maritimes) or less (Bas-Rhin, Rhône, Seine-Maritime) prestigious periphery, nevertheless always highly dependent from artists outside their *département*, that is highly dependent from the French social world of rap and its centre.

In the French-speaking countries neighbouring France, the situation also varies. Switzerland appears to possess both a low prestige and a weak autonomy. Francophone rap artists from this country invite three times more than they are invited, and 75% of their invitations are directed toward artists outside Switzerland (localism index of 0,26). On the contrary, Belgian artists display a significant autonomy, with a localism index of 0,56. If Belgium is not a very prestigious area in the French social world of rap, it has nevertheless a relatively balanced indegree/outdegree ratio of 1,41, much alike Parisian *départements* such as Essonne (code 91), Seine-Saint-Denis (93) or Seine-et-Marne (77). Yet, there is also one situation of local organisation escaping the influence of the social world of French rap: the francophone rap scene of Quebec.

### **The structural autonomy of French-speaking rap in Quebec**

The first LP records of French-speaking rap music occurred in the province of Quebec in the second half of the 1990s, with acts by artists such as KC LMNOP, Dubmatique, La Gamic or Rainmen. Most of them came from Montreal, and they chose to collaborate mostly with French rap artists:

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<sup>8</sup> James Deano, <http://www.the-bip.com/wordpress/2007/10/24/james-deano-lave-le-rap-belge-en-famille/>



IAM<sup>9</sup> and Fonky Family from Marseilles, Bouches-du-Rhône, Ménélik, Daddy Lord C, Rocca, Stomy Bugsy, 2 Bal and 2 Nèg from Paris and its neighbouring *départements*. At the end of the 1990s, these collaborations draw a picture of Quebecker French-speaking rap music which was much alike the Swiss one: a weak autonomy, and a low prestige. Actually, if many French rap artists were invited by Quebecker artists, the French artists never invited any rapper from the province of Quebec on their LP records.

Yet, this organisation seemingly peripheral to the centre of the social world of French rap soon changed. Rap artists from the urban agglomeration of Quebec City (La Constellation, Yvon Krevé, Les Ambassadeurs...) seem to have given the crucial impulse, by featuring other local rap artists. This increase in the homophily of the collaborations goes hand in hand with a promotion of *joual*, one of the most spread French slang from the province of Quebec, instead of standard French. A rapper from Limoilou, a central borough of Quebec City, expresses this evolution through his own career:

“At the beginning, we learn to rap in English, we had to learn the language correctly. It was an Anglophone culture, you listened at English music, you read English magazines. When we started to rap, it was inconceivable to do it in French. We didn’t hear much yet, we didn’t feel concerned. Stuff from France remained away from us. It touched some guys we knew, but for us, it was inconceivable, it had to be in English. When the feeling came, everybody started to switch, but with a French language from France, not *joual*, it was fake, it was strange. At some point, I thought I had to switch also, for people to better understand what I had to say, but not with the French from France or that fake accent. After eight years of work in English, I had to learn again everything, how to perform in French so it feels good. It was akin a time in the wilderness, hard to do, but I did it. I have started working hard on it since the autumn of 2003, and I have only been ready since 2006, when we launch the LP record *Les Boss du Quartier*.”<sup>10</sup>

In the middle of the 2000s, Francophone rap music from the agglomeration of Quebec City and Montreal displays a strong sceneness. This fact reflects in its localism index of 0,93, which is much alike the localism index of Île-de-France. Essentially directed toward their own local scene, francophone artists from Quebec are invited almost as often as they invite, with an indegree/outdegree ratio of 1,07: asymmetric collaboration pattern with France, born from the late 1990s, soon turned into an anecdotic part in a large majority of collaborations between French-speaking Quebecker rap artists.

From this time onward, the relation between the social world of French rap and the Quebecker francophone rap scene display a kind of trans-local scene structure. An asymmetry between these organisations remains patent. For instance, French rap artists organise venues in Quebec, while the

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<sup>9</sup> On the influence of IAM on rap artists from Quebec, see Laabidi 2012: 29.

<sup>10</sup> Webster, <http://voixdefaits.blogspot.fr/2007/09/one-two-mike-check.html>

reverse is not true<sup>11</sup>. Yet, this situation does not weight a lot in the everyday organisation of Quebecker francophone rap scene.

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Musical practices are embedded in local dynamics, global trends, and the asymmetric transactions between various spatial levels. Behind these apparent play of scales lies the uneven reach of many different going concern, some of which we label “the music industries” while we name others “small collectives [...] and volunteer labor” (Bennett & Peterson 2004: 5). Yet, there is not necessarily a difference in nature between these collective actions, and only a careful empirical investigation may settle the question.

Social network analysis provides several valuable measures to determine whether some precise musical activities such as Francophone rap music organise along practices rather decentralised and firmly rooted in a precise area (local scenes), or centralised and deterritorialized (social worlds). By evaluating degrees of “sceneness” and “worldness”, I have demonstrated how seemingly contrasted sorts of grouping may blend and change over time, and yet being described. This approach of mixed organisational pattern needs to be deepened, yet it speaks in favour of tools likely to grasp the numerous informal, blurred and shifting ways of doing (musical) things together.

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<sup>11</sup> Much alike American or British Anglophone rap artists organise venues in France, while the reverse is only exceptional.

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