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Intersectional youth condition: The experience of Afromix CB in Bogotá, Colombia

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from doctoral research that addresses, from an intersectional approach, how youth condition is configured in the Afromix CB collective, composed of Afro-descendant young people in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia. The objective was to identify manifestations of intersections between youth condition, gender, ethnicity, and social class in participants' everyday experiences. A qualitative hermeneutic-interpretative approach was employed through participant observation (face-to-face and virtual). Seven young people participated, whose experiences reveal that territory, dance, and self-management become spaces of re-existence and identity affirmation. Results show structural tensions and organizational processes that contribute to youth and intersectionality studies. It is concluded that cultural practices based on dance help to reconfigure senses of belonging and agency in urban marginality contexts.

Keywords

Youth condition; intersectionality; Afro-descendant youth; territoriality; re-existence; dance.

Thesaurus

UNESCO Thesaurus, Social Sciences.

Key Points

- Dance enables a group of Afro-descendant youth from Ciudad Bolivar to confront racism and poverty and to feel free and proud of who they are.
- Difficulties do not occur in isolation. Being young, Black, poor and living on the outskirts combine to produce different experiences for them.
- When the group was on the brink of dissolving, it was the young people themselves who kept it going.

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La condición juvenil en clave interseccional: la experiencia de Afromix CB, Bogotá

Resumen

Este artículo presenta hallazgos de una investigación doctoral que aborda, desde un enfoque interseccional, cómo se configura la condición juvenil en el colectivo Afromix CB, conformado por jóvenes afrodescendientes de Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia. El objetivo fue identificar las manifestaciones de las intersecciones entre la condición juvenil, el género, la etnia y la clase social en las experiencias cotidianas de los participantes. Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo hermenéutico-interpretativo mediante observación participante (presencial y virtual). Participaron siete jóvenes, cuyas vivencias revelan que el territorio, la danza y la autogestión se convierten en espacios de re-existencia y afirmación identitaria. Los resultados evidencian tensiones estructurales y procesos organizativos que aportan a los estudios de juventud e interseccionalidad. Se concluye que la práctica cultural basada en el baile permite reconfigurar sentidos de pertenencia y agencia en contextos de marginalidad urbana.

Palabras clave

Condición juvenil; interseccionalidad; jóvenes afrodescendientes; territorialidad; re-existencia; danza.

Condição juvenil interseccional: a experiência do Afromix CB em Bogotá, Colômbia

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta achados de uma pesquisa doutoral que aborda, desde uma abordagem interseccional, como se configura a condição juvenil no coletivo Afromix CB, conformado por jovens afrodescendentes em Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colômbia. O objetivo foi identificar as manifestações das intersecções entre condição juvenil, gênero, etnia e classe social nas experiências cotidianas dos participantes. Empregou-se uma abordagem qualitativa hermenêutico-interpretativa mediante observação participante (presencial e virtual). Participaram sete jovens, cujas vivências revelam que o território, a dança e a autogestão se convertem em espaços de re-existência e afirmação identitária. Os resultados evidenciam tensões estruturais e processos organizativos que contribuem aos estudos de juventude e interseccionalidade. Conclui-se que a prática cultural baseada na dança permite reconfigurar sentidos de pertencimento e agência em contextos de marginalidade urbana.

Palavras-chave

Condição juvenil; interseccionalidade; jovens afrodescendentes; territorialidade; re-existência; dança.

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Introduction

Addressing intersectional youth condition is essential in contemporary youth studies because the relationship between youth condition, gender, ethnicity and social class determines the life experiences of youth in marginal urban territories. This means experiences like those of Afromix CB, an arts collective composed of seven Afro-descendant young people (five women and two men, 16 to 20 years old) from Ciudad Bolivar, one of the most precarious areas with the highest poverty rates in the city of Bogota, Colombia (Secretaría de Salud de Bogotá, 2024).

Afromix CB was formed in 2020 on the initiative of "Profe Andrea,"[1] who identified an interest in dance among a group of Afro-descendant young people who were participating in Christmas novenas she had organized with support from the Ilona publishing house and the District Environment Secretariat. The group lives in Unidad de Planeamiento Zonal [Area Planning Unit] 68, "El Tesoro", in the Ciudad Bolivar district, which is an area characterized by widespread economic precariousness, deficient housing and transportation, and higher rates of violence (Riley, 2022). For this reason, members of the group face difficult conditions, including different acts of discrimination for being low-income Afro-descendant youth living in a marginalized and stigmatized area of Bogota. Despite these structural conditions, in dance they have found a form of re-existence and resistance to exclusion, using art as a tool to spread awareness of their experiences and to reconfigure their territoriality.

As a theoretical-conceptual framework, first we need to understand the ideas of *resistance* and *re-existence*, since these two concepts facilitate understanding the ways in which youth in precarious circumstances face the adverse conditions affecting their lives. Resistance, in this context, manifests as a repertoire of situated practices whose

[1] Andrea Castro is a social communications professional from the Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia, Colombia. She has been an area youth promoter, popular educator and social leader in the Ciudad Bolivar district. Her role as a trainer and support person has been essential at different points along the Afromix CB collective journey. The young people affectionately call her "Profe Andrea" [Teacher Andrea].

meaning arises from the social relationships, territories and specific moments in which they occur (Muñoz, 2011). Through it, the young men and women create their own game, strengthen their identity processes and reaffirm their youth condition in the face of a society that imposes univocal pathways on them (Muñoz & Pineda, 2018).

On the other hand, re-existence means going beyond opposition and oppression, referring instead to the invention of new ways of life based on the memories, territories, aesthetics and knowledge of historically marginalized communities (Albán, 2009; Walsh, 2013). Actions such as dancing, gathering together, sharing and persisting can be read as expressions of re-existence that defy hegemonic logics based on the everyday, the artistic and the emotional (Rovira-Rubio, et al., 2023).

In Latin American youth studies literature, youth condition unites resistance and re-existence, where the body plays a central role as an inherent component. Authors such as Urteaga and Saenz (2012) have recognized that

> the body continues to be one of the territories in which hegemonic systems exert greater pressure; even when it is also configured as a location based on which each actor may exercise their capacity for agency by deploying a set of resources and knowledge stemming from desire, pleasure or imagination that enables their desertion, opposition and/or rejection of adult and peer impositions. [In this way they configure both] their own processes of marginalization and exclusion (…) as well as identification with others. (p. 17)

This has made it possible to understand young people as agents of transformation and not only as subjects in transition to adulthood. Along these lines, Reguillo (2010) understands youth condition as a dynamic process in which the cultural and structural frameworks by which institutions define the limits of what it means to be young converge, along with the capacity for agency that the youth themselves deploy to negotiate, resist and redefine the conditions imposed on them within those frameworks. For his part, Valenzuela (2009) mentions that youth condition becomes meaningful when it is situated within its specific social context and is defined in contrast with that which is not considered youthful. These concepts transcend the biological idea of adolescence and make it possible to analyze youth as a relational category defined by social interaction.

In terms of intersectionality, recent literature identifies the limits of the gender category when it is used in isolation, without considering other kinds of oppression. This critique has been articulated primarily by non-hegemonic feminisms that question the universalization of experiences based on North American and European contexts. Inter-

sectionality arises as a theoretical-methodological approach that enables addressing the intertwined relationships among gender, ethnicity-race and social class, without establishing hierarchies among these categories (Crenshaw, 2020; Prata et al., 2025; Viveros, 2023). In this study, this approach guides the construction of the young people's intersectional consciousness, the reading of their experiences and the articulation of emerging categories, paying attention to the way that gender, ethnicity-race, class and youth condition are intertwined in each experience.

The intersectional approach is relevant in the Latin American context, where researchers such as Gonzales (1983) and Carneiro (2005) have shown how Eurocentric feminism has not been equally liberating for all women, especially not for Black women and Indigenous women of the Americas. In Colombia, Viveros (2023) notes that racism creates gender hierarchies that subordinate racialized women, while classism sustains elite privilege. In line with the above, various Latin American youth researchers (Muñoz, 2011; Nateras, 2019; Reguillo, 2010; Valenzuela, 2009, 2019) agree that the majority of youth in the region live in contexts characterized by precariousness, disillusionment and violence, which intensify the inequity they live in along lines of gender, ethnicity and social class.

The gap identified in the current literature stems from the lack of studies adopting an intersectional approach (Delgado, 2023; Restrepo, 2023; Silva et al., 2025 & Pires et al., 2026) to analyze Afro-descendant youth collectives in marginalized urban contexts in Colombia, where the categories of gender, ethnicity, social class and youth condition are interwoven with specific experiences of agency, re-existence and cultural resistance. In order to bridge this gap, this article shares the results of research developed with the Afromix CB collective in Bogota. The goal was to identify how the intersectional configuration of youth condition manifested among the collective's members. To do so, face-to-face and virtual ethnographic contact was conducted, attempting to answer the following question: How do the intersections among ethnicity, gender, social class and youth condition manifest in the collective action of Afromix CB members in the context of Ciudad Bolivar, Bogota?

Method

This study falls under qualitative research based on a hermeneutic-interpretive paradigm, an approach that meets the need to reconstruct and understand the social reality of the young, Afro-descendant men and women in Afromix CB, using inductive

methods (Herrera, 2023; Vasilachis, 2006). The qualitative approach is particularly relevant for this analysis because it is interested in the participants' subjective perspectives, their histories and their experiences, providing interpretive tools that enable understanding the meanings they develop in their specific context.

For the study, participant observation was used as the main technique for recording narratives and information. This phase was conducted with the seven members of the group who participated every time they attended meetings throughout the observed period.

The face-to-face strategy involved periodic visits to the collective's rehearsals at the home of Profe Andrea, on average twice a month, from March 2024 to March 2025. Eleven face-to-face observation meetings were held, the majority during 3- to 4-hour rehearsals, along with three at public events and performances that each lasted more than 4 hours. The virtual strategy, via video calls, made it possible to maintain contact when the face-to-face meetings could not be held; it involved four sessions lasting from 30 minutes to one hour. Both strategies used field diaries, photographs, videos and recordings of the videoconferences as recording tools. Furthermore, informal conversations in everyday spaces (trips on public transportation, moments of sharing food, social activities) provided valuable information on the collective's history and the members' school and family experiences, as well as regarding their individual and group expectations.

All the meetings were approved by the participants using informed consent forms (for those over 18) and informed assent forms (for those under 18), where the purpose of the study and the details of their participation were named. The objectives, scope and possible risks of the research, as well as their rights and guarantees as participants, including their right to withdraw at any time with no repercussions, were also described. Likewise, express authorization to record observations and video calls was requested, and their approval was obtained for revealing their identity using images. This procedure met the ethical commitment to ensure both transparency and respect towards the participants.

The analysis process followed the three essential moments proposed by Rodriguez et al. (1996): 1) data reduction; 2) data display and transformation; and 3) drawing and verifying conclusions. In the reduction phase, an aware, reiterative reading of the gathered material (field notes, photographs, recordings and videos) was conducted and then organized into an analysis matrix. Based on this process, recurring themes were identified and grouped into emerging categories whose construction was guided by the intersectional approach: from the start, reading of the material paid attention to how gender,

ethnicity-race, class and youth condition are interwoven in each experience. These categories served as the basis for the following step.

In the display and transformation phase, the data were organized into time-based matrices that made it possible to visualize the group's evolution in four key moments: experimentation (2020–2023), consolidation (first semester 2024), transition (second semester 2024) and reconfiguration (early 2025). These matrices facilitated understanding of the interactions between categories and experiences. Finally, in the drawing conclusions phase, interpretation of the categories constructed based on the intersectional approach was further analyzed, paying attention to how youth condition, gender, ethnicity and social class are interwoven in specific experiences of discrimination, resistance and re-existence through dance in a context of territorial marginalization.

Results

Analysis of the observations revealed significant patterns in terms of the intersectional configuration of youth condition in the Afromix CB collective. The wealth of data obtained made it possible to identify how the categories of *gender*, *ethnicity*, *social class* and *youth condition* function not in isolation but rather as intertwined in specific experiences that shape both group actions and the members' individual trajectories.

The main findings are presented below organized into four analytical axes: time-based transformations and tensions in the collective, territory as a structuring factor, intersectional manifestations in Afromix CB, and dance as a space for re-existence.

Transformations and tensions in the collective

Afromix CB's trajectory has been neither static nor linear; rather, the analysis helped reveal a time-based evolution marked by significant changes in its internal dynamics. We identified four phases during the time shared with the group, which we call: experimentation, consolidation, transition and reconfiguration. Afromix CB arose in 2020 on the initiative of a few Afro-descendant youth from the area, who attended the novenas organized by Profe Andrea. Along with other youth who danced to the rhythm of the music during the event, she took the first step towards creating this collective. In 2021 and 2022, after each performance the group grew in recognition from the community and in terms of the number of participants. In addition, an educational center managed by a religious community offered them spaces for their rehearsals, as well as support for

food. However, in late 2023, some problems with that community forced the group of young people to go in a new direction. This is why they went back to rehearsing in parks and on the street, until they got in touch with Profe Andrea; starting in 2024, they reorganized and consolidated what is now Afromix CB.

During the consolidation phase, which occurred over the first half of 2024, there was a high level of participation and motivation shared among the members. During this period, in which we had the opportunity to meet the group, one of the young people commented: "We dance to music that we like, we make the mixes. Profe helps us make the mixes and, after studying, we come to rehearse" (field diary, February 24, 2024).

The rhythms that they dance are exótico,[2] afrohouse, champeta, mapalé and salsa, among others. The group's activities include performances at different events, such as at the Escuela Superior de Administración Pública [Advanced School of Public Administration] during the discussion titled "Reflections on Afro-Colombian identity: analysis of progress and challenges for educational inclusion." Likewise, they support community actions like the invitation from La Loma CB[3] to teach dance to children and to participate in recreational activities. This period was characterized by remarkable cohesion in the group, reflected in evident enthusiasm and commitment at each meeting and at public performances, as well as in the group's stability. During this phase, the members regularly emphasized the importance they placed on belonging to the group, using words such as "We like to do what we do" (field diary, February 24, 2024)—in other words, dancing and enjoying the ability to do so—and, simultaneously, they highlighted the joy and satisfaction derived from the shared artistic effort.

However, towards the second half of 2024, the group entered a transitional phase characterized by a decrease in participation and the emergence of internal tensions. Specific conflicts began to be seen, including episodes of arguments with verbal attacks witnessed in the observed interactions. These tensions noticeably affected the group dynamics. For example, there were significant disagreements with a group member for her lack of attendance at rehearsals and her never-ending excuses for avoiding the

[2] *Ritmo exótico* is a genre of music originating in the Chocó department. It mixes Pacific, urban and Afro-Caribbean sounds. It emerged out of popular celebrations and local DJs, but it was consolidated by the Los Dioses del Ritmo group, who gave structure to the genre. According to Kapkin (2024), more than a musical genre, ritmo exótico is a cultural expression reflecting identity, pleasure and resistance of youth from Chocó.

[3] La Loma CB is a collective that uses alternative media and the creation of arts spaces to promote places for meeting and learning using the arts and culture from a gender-based perspective (La Loma CB, 2017, § 1).

group's commitments. At one meeting this young woman said: "It's that I've been really sick, that's why I haven't been able to come to rehearse with the group"; to which another member replied: "Right, you always have an excuse for not rehearsing; how irresponsible!" (field diary, July 3, 2024). These situations led to a weakening of internal relations and created moments of splintering. Further, factors like the impending graduation of four group members, uncertainty regarding the immediate future, and pressure stemming from family responsibilities began to negatively affect the group's spirit and created an environment of collective uncertainty. As a result, what was read in the internal dynamics as a lack of personal commitment is better understood in the framework of their conditions: home and family obligations, distributed by gender and exacerbated by precariousness, filter down into the group's life and create tensions for the young women's ongoing participation.

Then, in early 2025, a phase of group reconfiguration was observed, characterized by the consolidation of a smaller core group: the group dropped from seven members to five deeply committed young people, as expressed at the meeting held on March 3, 2025: "We know that we four are those who always come and attend," to which another female member added: "And also Santi,[4] who goes to the performances and comes to rehearsal" (field diary, March 3, 2025). These young women took on the task of actively adapting to the group's new circumstances, despite the drop in numbers and the persistence of certain internal tensions; they displayed a remarkable capacity for reorganizing and they even managed to promote their own initiatives seeking to maintain the group's sustainability and vitality. These efforts were seen in specific actions such as the collective acquisition of equipment (a loudspeaker) and the search for new, different places for rehearsing (like La Joya park or the homes of some members), coordinating a significant effort to sustain and revitalize the group's conformation as a collective.

In this context of reconfiguration, participant observation in the virtual mode (over group calls on WhatsApp) became a key alternative when logistical difficulties hampered face-to-face meetings. These sessions made it possible to maintain ties to the collective, converse about the changes affecting the group, and offer a space where the young women openly expressed their perceptions of the transformations they were experiencing.

In terms of internal relationship structure, a complex fabric of interpersonal ties was revealed, in which some people stood out as central and key to connections. Profe

[4] Pseudonym for one of the youth in Afromix CB.

Andrea clearly emerged as a reference person and mentor whose presence was critical for maintaining certain internal stability. In parallel, the role of other female members was visible, as they fulfilled essential roles as mediators or in promoting cohesion at moments of tension. Once, one of the women said to another: "I talk to everyone, just like I talk to you. I talk to her, I don't ignore anyone because I'm not like that" (field diary, March 3, 2025); she thus showed impartiality in light of certain conflicts between two Afromix CB members. Likewise, the influence of specific affective relationships among members was seen, which had direct impact on group dynamics and on the organization of subgroups. This web of relationships revealed the internal diversity and different ways in which members managed conflicts and negotiated their roles in the group.

Another aspect identified was the transition to emerging forms of self-management in the collective. Initially, the group displayed significant dependence on Profe Andrea as a reference person, in both logistical and emotional terms. However, over time they began to take on responsibilities that she had previously held, such as managing social media, actively seeking alternative spaces for rehearsal, and organizing public performances, a request made by the Profe during the December 12, 2024, meeting. These changes suggest a meaningful process towards greater self-management and show an evolution aiming at reorganization of the collective and empowering the young men and women as agents of their group and individual trajectories in Afromix CB.

In this way, the transformations observed in Afromix CB show the fluid nature of youth collectives, in which internal tensions, changes in members' circumstances and structural pressures coexist with a noteworthy capacity for collective adaptation and reinvention.

Territoriality as a determining factor

The youth condition of the Afromix CB group members is permeated by the territorial limitations inherent to Ciudad Bolivar, a district located in the far south of Bogota. This geographic location involves a range of everyday situations that have a significant impact on their individual and group experiences.

The analysis showed that one of the territorial factors most limiting participation in Afromix CB is the excessive time required to get from the Arabia neighborhood to other parts of Bogota. The peripheral location of this sector, combined with deficiencies in road infrastructure and in public transportation, leads to commutes of several hours for

group members, which affects their attendance at both rehearsals and other activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1

View from Arabia neighborhood, where Afromix CB youth transit through



Note. Photograph by Henry David Quintero López. © Quintero, 2024.

This is particularly visible in the case of two young people who, after gaining access to higher education through government programs, face daily commutes of up to five hours between their homes and their places of study, located in faraway sectors of Ciudad Bolivar. This time and physical exertion overload shows how territorial and socioeconomic inequality limit their possibilities for urban mobility. On a video call, two members connected from an Integrated Public Transportation System bus, and one of the girls commented: "Profe, this is what we face daily; two and a half hours to go to classes and the same to get home. Sometimes we get back at eight thirty or nine at night, depending on the traffic" (field diary, February 24, 2025). However, both young women accept these difficulties as part of their search for social mobility, seeing education as a key mechanism for their own future and their families' well-being.

Likewise, the precarious infrastructure of their surroundings exacerbates daily limitations. Many streets in the area are still unpaved, such that they become rivers during rainstorms, which significantly complicates their mobility and the development of activities scheduled by the collective. This happened on the day we took the loudspeaker they purchased to the house of one of the young women for rehearsal. On this occasion,

one of the girls used her cell phone to record a river of water flowing down the street while she said: "Here comes the river, guys [laughter]" (field diary, March 9, 2025). To these physical difficulties we can add the growing complexity of finding rehearsal spaces, which forces the group to constantly improvise among members' homes or nearby parks.

These findings confirm that territory, far from being a neutral setting, acts as a structural factor that does not work in isolation: territorial precariousness is connected to the condition of class, to ethnic-racial identity and to youth condition. Living in a peripheral area like the "El Tesoro" Area Planning Unit, a territory where Afro-descendant and impoverished populations are concentrated (Subred Integrada de Servicios de Salud Sur ESE, 2017), shows how spatial inequality is also the expression of racialized city management, conditioning the everyday experience and participation of Afromix CB members (Figure 2).

However, territory is not just a setting for marginalization: the Arabia neighborhood and Ciudad Bolivar also emerge as settings where the young men and women deploy alternative practices for building identity and youth agency, transforming adverse conditions into opportunities for cultural resistance and re-existence, as shall be seen below.

Figure 2

Unpaved street infrastructure in El Tesoro



Note. One female member of Afromix CB walks along an unpaved street in bad condition, similar to many others in Ciudad Bolivar where the young people must transit. Photograph by Henry David Quintero López. © Quintero, 2024.

Intersectional manifestations

The analysis documents experiences differentiated by the overlap of axes defined for the intersectional study: youth condition, gender, ethnicity and social class. These categories operate simultaneously in the daily life of Afromix CB members, and they lead to specific situations of discrimination, exclusion and negotiation of identities that affect their individual and group trajectories.

In the first meeting held with the group, the young people commented that in the past, Afromix CB was composed of more members. However, several decided to withdraw due to comments from people at the educational center where they rehearsed. Regarding this situation, one of the young women commented: "If something went missing, they said it was us. If there was a problem, they always blamed us because we are Black" (field diary, February 24, 2024). This context of stigmatization led to the group shrinking, resulting in the current conformation of Afromix CB. In light of this difficulty, they requested support from Profe Andrea, who offered them a space in the garage of her home, which she adapted so that they could continue rehearsing.

In addition, different situations of discrimination faced by the male members of the group have been identified. In informal conversations and moments of direct observation, they expressed having experienced explicit forms of racial profiling, particularly by the police. For example, on walking through the Lucero Bajo neighborhood and passing by a group of police officers, one of the young men said:

> Profe, they just see me with my cell phone and right away they frisk me. They always stop me to frisk me, even if I'm talking to my Mom or just chatting. Just for having a cell phone, the police see me with it and they frisk me. (Field diary, December 12, 2024)

Thus, having a cell phone turns these young men into an object of police suspicion due to their condition: the same act would be unremarkable in a body that reads as adult, White or from a well-off sector. Frisking affects a body produced at the crossroads of youth, masculinity, Blackness and territorial precariousness, where these axes inter-

sect and convert a young Afro-descendant man from the outskirts into a permanent suspect.[5]

In tandem, narratives emerged where they commented how their participation in Afromix CB operates as an alternative in light of the risks of their environment. In this regard, a young man said during a conversation on public transportation:

> Afromix saved me from going down a bad path. Many of my friends from school joined gangs or are, you know, on the corner selling stuff, you know what I mean. I really preferred dancing with Afromix; this kept me, Profe, from going down that path. (Field diary, August 3, 2024)

This experience reflects how the collective is a protective environment, where they actively negotiate the conditions imposed by the context, enabling an escape route from the constant threats of criminality and exclusion, in this case of young Afro-descendant men in precarious conditions.

The same axes axes that run through the lives of the men in the group operate differently for the women. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, class and youth condition does not distribute oppressions by assigned gender but rather produces differentiated experiences depending on how the conditions combine in each path. Among the members, this convergence is seen in the expectations stemming from the roles traditionally prescribed for women, which creates tensions in their daily life. During a meeting in late 2024 to celebrate their graduation from school, four members openly displayed their concern due to the uncertainty of their near future. These worries were linked to the imperative need to contribute economically to their households, take on family responsibilities and fulfill the domestic chores assigned to their gender, issues that intensified the complexity of their lives.

Another significant situation was shared during a rehearsal before a performance. During the session, Profe Andrea commented that she had included a scene showing an experience of discrimination experienced by a young woman in the group during her years at school. In the school, when the Afro-descendant girl filed complaints against unjust

[5] Stigmatization that has been present in other parts of Colombia, as in the case of Anderson Arboleda, a young Afro-Colombian man murdered in 2020 by a police officer in Puerto Tejada, Cauca, and who became a symbol of institutional violence and racism in Colombia. His death led to multiple complaints of the abuses that young Afro-descendant men face. As mentioned by Hernandez (2020), this case shows how the dynamics of racial exclusion operate not only in everyday relationships, but also through institutions such as public security forces, exacerbating social inequalities in the country.

situations, she was ignored by her teacher. Profe Andrea commented: "When she was a girl, if she complained about the things being done to her, the teacher didn't pay attention. But, when she lost her temper and the complaints came from a White girl, the teacher took her to the Coordinator's office" (field diary, October 19, 2024). In this testimony what renders the Afro-descendant girl's voice unheard is the way her Blackness intersects with her condition as a girl facing an adult authority and her belonging to a public school context. The same complaint, in the mouth of a White girl, does receive an institutional response. One of the members confirmed this experience: "Profe, this happens all the time. Just because we are Black they blame us for everything. That's what happened where we used to rehearse" (field diary, October 19, 2024). Discrimination functions at the point where ethnicity, gender, youth condition and class are mutually produced and they determine whose words are listened to and whose are not.

These experiences reveal that youth condition cannot be understood in isolation nor as uniform: within it, multiple inequalities are intertwined where gender, ethnicity, social class and territoriality come together. This approach enriches understanding of the context surrounding Afromix CB, because it reveals both the structural tensions affecting the collective and the everyday experiences of young, Afro-descendant men and women in economic precariousness.

Dance as a space for re-existence

In Afromix CB, dance emerges as a central resource in the everyday life of its members, transcending the merely artistic to become an authentic mechanism of resistance and re-existence in the face of the adverse environmental conditions. Observations and informal conversations revealed that the young people saw dance as an essential medium for facing the social and economic difficulties inherent to the territory they inhabit. In this sense, the practice of dance implies not only a recreational response, but also an emotional and social strategy for surviving situations marked by discrimination, material precariousness and the constant tensions of their everyday reality.

Dance becomes for these young men and women a privileged space for freedom and expressing their identity. In different moments of observation, they emphasized the deep feeling of freedom they experienced when dancing, summed up in phrases like "We feel free when we can dance. We forget the problems we have" (field diary, February 24, 2024). This feeling is in contrast to the multiple daily limitations and enables them to reclaim their identities as Afro-descendant youth. Through the body and artistic move-

ment, they are able to redefine their individual and collective experiences, which makes it possible to construct forms of agency against an adverse, hostile environment.

Further, the collective operates as a powerful mutual support network that provides a valuable sense of belonging and strengthens the affective ties among its members. Regarding this situation, in one of the meetings one of the young men mentioned: "My mom wants to send me to Chocó [...], but I don't want to go there. If you go there, you don't come back. I want to continue in Afromix, I want to keep rehearsing. I don't want to go there" (Field diary, September 18, 2024).

During the informal conversations there was a recurring reference to the group in terms of family. The young men and women indicated how Afromix CB has enabled them to build relationships of closeness, solidarity and mutual understanding, essential elements for facing the shared challenges. This internal cohesion is clearly reflected in the group dynamic and is visible in the continuity and persistence of the collective's main core, even at critical moments where external and internal factors make it difficult for them to continue.

Likewise, it is important to emphasize that being part of the group acts as an alternative in the face of risks present in the environment, such as gang activity, small-scale drug trafficking and other types of crime. In this aspect, the conversation with group members revealed how dance not only offers a refuge from these situations but also constitutes a choice when faced with contexts that lead young people from their environment down risky paths. This is because—given the absence of alternative options for free time, collective well-being and survival in Ciudad Bolivar—a significant number of Afro youth decide to make choices in which crime or para-legality enables them to deal with life.

One of the cultural resistance actions documented in the process was the creation of a collective mural, product of the collaboration between Afromix CB, Afrokids CB[6] and La Loma CB, whose message is: "Being young shouldn't cost us our lives" (Figure 3).

[6] Afrokids CB acts as a seed bed that enables Afromix CB to incorporate new members and be nourished by its own accumulated experience in the Arabia neighborhood and the Ciudad Bolivar district.

Figure 3

Mural painted by Afromix CB, Afrokids CB and members of La Loma CB in the Arabia neighborhood



Note. Photograph by Henry David Quintero López. © Quintero, 2024.

The artist Carlos[7] accompanied and facilitated the creative process to its conclusion. The unveiling, on October 19, 2024, was held on a community involvement day that included activities for reflecting on the importance of these cultural exhibits in the community, dance performances and a general rehearsal for a performance scheduled for the following day. This work of art is a clear display of how the young men and women of the area were feeling; they express that their youth condition, far from protecting them, leaves them vulnerable to a range of threats. Thus, the mural became a call to the community to recognize, respect and grant agency to the youth in both the district and the country. It is also an example of re-appropriation and transformation of the territory: from a place of exclusion and violence into a form of communicative mediation that connects actors, feelings, bodies and messages of cultural resistance.

Thus, dance in Afromix CB is much more than an artistic practice; it is an essential element that facilitates concrete processes of cultural, emotional and social resistance. In this way it is configured as a space for collective re-existence in the face of multiple adversities that these young people confront daily.

The findings certainly reveal how the youth condition in Afromix CB is shaped by interrelated dimensions: the internal transformations speak to adaptive processes characterized by negotiations and group reinventions; territoriality acts as a structural

[7] You can visit his Instagram account at @mamarracho_87.

conditioner that configures participation and everyday life; the intersections of gender, ethnicity and class create specific tensions in internal relationships and individual trajectories; and dance is established as a space for collective re-existence that connects cultural resistance, affective ties and redefinition of the territory.

Discussion

The findings show that the youth condition in Afromix CB is configured as an intersectional experience where gender, ethnicity, social class and territoriality are woven together, creating situated forms of agency and re-existence. Thus, this study contributes to the field of intersectional studies in Latin America, bringing to light the creative and organizational potential of racialized youth in precarious conditions, strengthening understanding of youth condition as a category that is also constructed at the margins of society.

This evidence enters into dialog with the theoretical proposals developed in the study's conceptual framework, especially those that address youth condition from an intersectional Latin American perspective. The idea of youth condition as a relational, malleable category permeated by variables such as class, ethnicity, gender and territory (Becher, 2021; Margulis, 2001; Nateras, 2019; Reguillo, 2010) is not limited to describing the young men and women of Afromix CB; rather, it is expressed through concrete situations. When four members, on graduating from high school, express their concern for contributing economically at home and taking on domestic chores assigned to their gender, youth appears as the moment when the condition of being a woman, a young person, Afro-descendant and in precarious conditions are connected in one single experience: the future pre-determined for young women. Youth condition is thus configured in constant negotiation with systems of oppression that work not in isolation, but jointly.

In this sense, the findings concur with the proposals of Lins (2023), Nateras (2019) and Reguillo (2010), who understand youth condition as a framework of discourses, social mandates and practices that determine what it means to be young in a given context. But it is also where young subjects resist and re-write those narratives. When a member states that "Afromix saved me from going down a bad path," participation in the collective is seen to be a concrete form of re-existence that goes beyond simple resistance in an adverse environment. This materializes through the invention of an alternative life path that challenges the hegemonic ideas stigmatizing young, Afro-descendant men and women and proscribing their subjectivities by their gender, ethnicity and class.

In addition, the group's internal trajectories made it possible to observe what Delgado (2023), Ernesto and Nateras-Dominguez (2023) and Valenzuela (2015) have identified as manifestations of precariousness, disillusionment and risk of symbolic youthcide (juvenicidio; Feixa et al., 2026). In this context, youthcide can be analyzed from an intersectional perspective recognizing the specific ways that dehumanize racialized young bodies (Santana-Perlaza, 2025). However, faced with these adverse contexts, Afromix CB members activate practices of collective action that align with proposals by Aguilar-Forero (2021) and Muñoz (2011) on young men and women as sociocultural agents who, based on their aesthetics and languages, produce new types of citizenship and resistance. The emergence of a self-managed structure, types of internal organization and the persistence of the group show forms of agency exercised in collective.

However, this study's findings also enable us to establish distances and nuances in regard to prior studies. Unlike studies like those by Delgado (2023) and Lins (2023) that analyze the intersection between gender, class and youth condition in individual trajectories, this research shifts the focus towards collective dynamics, showing that the group action produces types of re-existence that are different from the individual. Likewise, while works like those by Restrepo (2023) and Silva et al. (2025) address experiences of Afro-descendant youth primarily from structures of exclusion, this study shows how these same structural conditions are collectively transformed in practices of agency through dance.

For their part, the analyses performed from the intersectional perspective document how connections between gender, class and ethnicity in the experiences of the young men and women in the collective materialize. These experiences continue the critiques proposed by Viveros (2023) in terms of the limits of hegemonic feminism for understanding the complexity of oppressions lived by impoverished, racialized young women.

The group's reconfiguration into a core sustained mainly by women (four women and one man) suggests that the work of sustaining the collective, of mediating conflicts and of reorganizing it after the crises falls principally to the young women. They not only face domestic expectations assigned outside the group but also take on care and cohesion chores that ensure its continuity. Along these lines, Silva et al. (2025) show how racialized women become subjects that sustain the collective struggle and redefine pain in action; in Afromix CB, they are the ones who sustain the collective's very existence.

In addition to the readings presented in the findings, the analysis made it possible to discern alternate interpretations that enrich understanding of the Afromix CB youth

collective. A first idea is the need to understand that dance, more than an aesthetic or artistic practice, is a disruptive device connecting body, memory and territory. This is expressed in the way they occupy public space through dance, as well as in the resignifying of the places in which they rehearse or perform, displaying types of agency that help them reinvent themselves and confront the limitations of the territory. The use of houses, streets, parks and other spaces not originally intended for practicing dance is a strategy that redefines territoriality.

Regarding the value assigned to education, the young men and women of Afromix CB still see it as a mechanism for social mobility, which contrasts to some degree with other studies that document how fewer and fewer young people see education as a way of attaining upward social mobility (González-González & Cisneros-Cohernour, 2025; Pires et al., 2026). The phenomenon presents a worrying trend in Colombia, where 43% of young people decide not to go to university, a number more than 11 percentage points higher than the world average (Deloitte, 2025, as cited in Saavedra, 2025).

Another element that appears is the role of virtuality in the group's reconfiguration. The use of digital platforms as spaces for communication, visibility and internal reorganization opens up the possibility of exploring how the digital world acts as an extension of the group's corporal territory, as it offers other ways of meeting in digital spaces. It also signals possibilities for future exploration of how the digital world affects self-management, group identity and the spread of aesthetic and social activism discourses (Alegría-Morán, 2025; Di Napoli, 2021; Gómez, 2023).

Likewise, the possibility arises of reading the collective's experience in terms of temporality, given that the youth condition is presented as fragmented and contingent. Situations characterized by educational transitions, family tensions and changes in the possibility of participation speak of a youth condition that develops in the midst of intermittences, discontinuities and constant reformulations. This invites us to recast the idea of a youth project, not as a linear or cumulative progression, but rather as a series of situated decisions, permeated by an intensified present that, as noted by Valenzuela (2009), characterizes the young men and women who have been deprived of a promising future. In this context, it is relevant to explore the conceptual transition of a youth project towards the concept of youth trajectory, which enables a more flexible, situated understanding of youth experiences.

Among the main strengths, the closeness with the collective during field work is noteworthy. Recurring participation in everyday activities and the development of

bonds of trust enabled a genuine appreciation of their experiences, narratives and internal tensions. This made it possible to capture not only explicit discourses, but also gestures, silences and practices that reveal deep feelings of belonging, conflict and agency. Likewise, the exploratory and flexible nature of the methodological design facilitated the emergence of categories based on the experience itself, enabling a situated reading of the intersectional axes that run through the group members' lives.

Another relevant aspect was the combination of face-to-face and virtual spaces, which facilitated observation of dynamics outside the physical meeting space. This strategy can be seen as a promising methodological alternative for addressing youth experiences in contemporary urban contexts, where social life develops simultaneously on multiple planes.

However, it is essential to recognize both the scope and the limits of the study, understanding that these do not decrease the value of the work put forth, but rather offer input for its critical exploration.

First, we recognize that the analysis was conducted based on face-to-face and virtual participant observation; thus, it is relevant to incorporate other field techniques that enable a deeper dive into the experiences of the young men and women. Although the conversations contributed valuable input, the range of data collection tools needs to be expanded to capture, in greater depth, the feelings that the participants attribute to their experiences.

Another limitation was the changing nature of the collective. The instability of participation and lack of constancy among participants imposes challenges for following individual trajectories, as well as for the consolidation of a continuous perspective. This situation requires a methodological design that allows for ongoing adaptation without losing analytical depth, especially in the face of possible dissolutions, reconfigurations or the distancing of some group members.

The findings presented are not intended to be applied generally; rather, they offer a situated reading of a particular experience. However, some of the key analytics (such as the connection between intersectionality, territory and collective youth action) can be relevant for research with Afro-descendant collectives in other marginalized urban contexts in Latin America that share similar structural conditions: territorial precariousness, racial stigmatization, and cultural practices as re-existence mechanisms. In the area of public policies, this study can lead to concrete implications, as its findings suggest the

need to design cultural and youth strategies in territories like Ciudad Bolivar, that recognize artistic collectives as agents with inherent organizing capacity.

Finally, as researchers from outside the territory and the collective, our presence could have influenced certain answers or behaviors, especially in the early stages of field work. Nonetheless, the process of reflection developed during this time enabled us to assume an ethical posture of listening and co-construction of knowledge, which can be reinforced in new investigative exercises with this collective, including more spaces for participation, dialogue and collaboration.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Open Research Data

This paper does not provide public access to the original research data. The material consists of participant observation records, photographs, and videos of identifiable young people, some of whom were minors at the time of the fieldwork. The informed consent and assent forms signed by participants authorize the research use of this material, but not its open dissemination.

Open Research Materials

The research materials have not been deposited in a public repository.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used.