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## From Radio Guarachita to *El Tieto eShow*: Bachata's Imagined Communities

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### Abstract

Bachata has used mass media throughout its history to foster a sense of inclusion and community among fans, from Radio Guarachita in the 1960s to livestreaming on social media in the twenty-first century. This article considers how the Dominican Facebook Live program, *El Tieto eShow*, continues bachata's intimate relationship with mass media through the creation and development of a virtual imagined community of bachata enthusiasts around the globe. The article explores how the cultural roots of the imagined community—the decline of sacred languages and societal high centers and the acceptance of calendrical over sacred time—contribute to this sense of group among *El Tieto eShow*'s worldwide audience. It also considers the importance of this type of virtual fan community in propagating a sense of proximity to each other and musicians.

**Keywords:** bachata; imagined communities; virtual communities; social networks; *El Tieto eShow*

### Resumen

La bachata ha utilizado los medios de comunicación masiva a través de su historia para fomentar un sentido de inclusión y comunidad entre sus seguidores, remontándose al decenio de los 1960 con Radio Guarachita hasta el streaming en directo del siglo XXI. Este artículo contempla cómo el programa dominicano *El Tieto eShow*, transmitido por Facebook Live, continúa la relación íntima de la bachata con los medios masivos por medio de la creación y el desarrollo de una comunidad imaginada virtual de aficionados de la bachata en todo el mundo. El artículo analiza cómo las raíces culturales de la comunidad imaginada—la declinación de los idiomas sagrados y los centros elevados y la aceptación del tiempo del calendario sobre el tiempo sagrado—contribuyen a este sentido de grupo entre el público mundial de *El Tieto eShow*. Considera además la importancia de este tipo de comunidad virtual de aficionados en la propagación de un sentido de cercanía de los unos con los otros y con los músicos.

**Palabras clave:** bachata; comunidades imaginadas; comunidades virtuales; redes sociales; *El Tieto eShow*

Bachata has always been adept at making the most of available forms of mass media to foster the creation of imagined communities, to use Benedict Anderson's term. Social media of the twenty-first century mark a continuation of the intimate relationship bachata has long enjoyed with fans and at the same time offer new possibilities in audience scope,

inclusion, and interaction. Although bachata was marginalized in its early years because of its associations with the Dominican lower class, the genre has persistently found its own media and means of dissemination, among them, Radio Guarachita. That station played the popular bachatas of the time and also provided a space for listeners to interact. The Dominican program *El Tieto eShow*, streamed weeknights on Facebook Live, continues this practice of inclusion on a global scale. This program showcases traditional and modern *bachateros* and invites listeners' participation through live comments, requests, messages, and greetings, in the tradition of Radio Guarachita. More than a new phenomenon, *El Tieto eShow* is another link in the chain of bachata's ability to reach the genre's fans and share artists' music with broader audiences. This article considers the imagined community created by *El Tieto eShow* on Facebook Live and how social networks represent the next inclusive step in the long-standing relationship between bachata, mass media, and fans. These findings illustrate how new media contribute to "a sense of commonality between performer and listener, and create a community among fans" (Kibby 2000, 92), regardless of their location.

### Imagined and virtual communities

Anderson's concept of the imagined community has informed our understandings of the nation as socially constructed since the original publication of his study in 1983. Anderson (1991, 18, 36, 24) argues that the foundation for this conceptualization of the nation is rooted in three factors: the decline of sacred languages as the portal to truth and the resulting rise of a common language particular to specific groups; the deteriorating belief that societies revolved around "high centres" or divinely appointed royalty; and a changing notion of temporality that replaced sacred time for "homogeneous, empty time" . . . measured by clock and calendar." These factors established the basis for imagining the nation as vernacular and historical, comprising individuals who together constitute the national body. Print media encouraged this new imaging of the nation, and the act of reading a newspaper became a type of rite, one "performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (Anderson 1991, 35).

The role of media in group identity construction is not limited to print media, and Anderson (1991, 135) addressed the potential impact of changing forms of media: "advances in communication technology, especially radio and television, give print allies unavailable a century ago. Multilingual broadcasting can conjure up the imagined community to illiterates and populations with different mother-tongues." New media and computer-mediated communication offer new possibilities to imagining communities of anonymous fellow community members "who congregate and communicate with one another in the virtual world without ever knowing more than a screen name and a vague consciousness that they are congregating in a particular online space for similar reasons" (Fox 2005, 51–52).

Rheingold (2000, xx) defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." This focus on relationships is essential to understanding virtual communities because they comprise individuals who come together with common interests and the goal of purposeful interaction (Parrish 2002, 262; Reich 2010, 689; Sá 2007, 123). Such groups can be particularly appealing "when the interest may be highly unusual or unique" (Ridings and Gefen 2004, para. 13). This commonality reflects the concept of psychological sense of community, "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another

and to the group, and a shared faith the members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). Koh and Kim (2003, 76–77, 86) identify three dimensions to the construct of sense of virtual community: membership (perceptions of belonging), influence (the sense that one contributes and makes a difference), and immersion (flow, or feeling completely invested and involved). Sense of virtual community is enhanced by the opportunities new media offer to create and produce content (Brabazon 2012, 3). Such user-produced material—text or video post, comment, emoji, reaction, or livestreaming—contributes to the construction of individual and group identity through continued interaction (Parrish 2002, 268). The social media audience is networked and is no longer “a faceless mass” but rather one that “is unidentified but contains familiar faces” (Marwick and Boyd 2011, 129) of individuals who both consume content and contribute it.

Virtual communities display the same elements that Anderson (1991) identifies as the cultural roots of the imagined nation: a common language, the decline of high centers, and homogenous, calendrical time. Members share a common language related to mutual interests, which often includes slang, emojis, and emoticons. The latter are integral to virtual communities, and in Steve Fox's study, these “virtual cues (e.g., emoticons, topics of thread, etc.) . . . became subtle cues of membership within that community” (2005, 59). Time and date stamps are common elements of new media content, and this contributes to virtual communities' recognition of calendrical time and of simultaneous participation in computer-mediated communication.

Virtual communities of fans with shared interests foster a sense of identity and a symbolic point of commonality (Kibby 2000, 94). Bennett and Booth (2015, para. 1.2) describe fandom as “an identity enacted through certain rituals” such as consuming and viewing artistic production. Virtual spaces dedicated to fan interests provide participants with a common place, experience, and identity (Kibby 2000, 94), community ties that resonate with fans regardless of their fan interest (e.g., music, sports, science fiction) (Chadborn, Edwards and Reysen 2018, 245). Language choice, and specifically the use of “we-words” (Lee et al. 2020, 2) mark group belonging and affinity. These utterances, along with group names and activities, make concrete virtual fan communities and identities (Lee et al. 2020, 2; Kibby 2000, 94). A current example of this sense of we-ness and the power of the virtual community can be found in the ARMY (Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth), the name of the global community of fans of the K-pop boy band Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS) (Dooley and Lee 2020, para. 6; Lee et al. 2020, 9). Joined by and on social media, the ARMY do more than consume BTS's music and merchandise or go to concerts; they also “perform a host of services on the band's behalf, from translating a fire hose of BTS content into English and other languages . . . to paying for advertising and running highly coordinated social media campaigns” (Dooley and Lee 2020, para. 7). Dooley and Lee (2020) affirm that investors were perhaps more interested in BTS's “highly connected ecosystem of followers” (para. 6) than even the band itself when Big Hit Entertainment began trading shares in South Korea in October 2020. The ARMY exemplifies the power of sense of community among such virtual fan groups.

As the ARMY reveals, music fans in particular may feel strong ties to virtual communities given the ways in which “the commodification of popular music following the development of recording technology inscribed a division between music producers and music consumers” (Kibby 2000, 92). This gap results in consumer alienation and isolation (Frith 1992, 50; Kibby 2000, 92). Virtual spaces dedicated to fan interests can alleviate these feelings of isolation by anchoring music consumption to a place and group. They help maintain the illusion of fans' personal nearness and connection to the musicians and lyrics that have affected them individually (Frith 1992, 74) and to other fans who share those same experiences. This is ultimately the importance of the virtual imagined community in general, and specifically, of musical virtual communities such as *El Tieto eShow*.

## Bachata and Radio Guarachita: A musical imagined community

Bachata is a Dominican guitar-based romantic music that was born in the marginalized barrios of Santo Domingo in the early 1960s. Bachata descends from bolero, a romantic music that was regionally and internationally popular in the years leading up to bachata's birth. Bolero was performed in its orchestrated form in upscale venues and by guitar-based trios in rural settings; bachata descends from the latter (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 5–6). Bolero enjoyed a solid popularity in the Dominican Republic in the years preceding the advent of bachata (Veloz Maggiolo 2009, 16), and early bachatas were covers of popular boleros performed by traditional trios. In fact, the artists doing these covers considered their music a *bolero de guitarra*, *bolero campesino*, or even simply *música de guitarra*; they did not envision it as a new genre (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 11; Sellers 2014, 22). For these aspiring musicians, what most differentiated their musical production from bolero was their instrumentation, limited to what they had available or could construct themselves and not a larger orchestra.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the word *bachata* retained its original meaning of informal gatherings and fun times together—in other words, the type of settings where musicians were playing their guitar-based covers of popular boleros (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 7; Sellers 2014, 50; Tejada 2002, 128).<sup>2</sup>

Early bachatas retained bolero's universally romantic themes and dialogic structure, with the singer addressing an unspecified second person (Knights 2000, 2). Still, the element that most distinguished bolero de guitarra from its predecessor was its artists' interpretive style. Whereas bolero was infused with nostalgia, bachata was woven with melancholy. Many of the first bachateros came to Dominican cities with the wave of campesinos who migrated following the dictator Rafael Trujillo's assassination in 1961 and the resulting relaxation of strict policies limiting internal migration. These newcomers lived in the poorest neighborhoods and found themselves among the neediest in the nation's cities. They became the target of deep-seated discrimination that viewed the campesino as unrefined and backward, a hick who had little to nothing to contribute to national progress (Derby 2009, 69; Hoffnung-Garskof 2008, 62).

Despite the discrimination they faced, these migrants made music with what they had, and they continued the rural practice of playing at parties and get-togethers (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 7; Sellers 2014, 50; Tejada 2002, 128). The lyrics and interpretive style of their bolero de guitarra reflected the harsh realities they knew of loneliness, poverty, and struggle, expressed in the vernacular of the streets (often grammatically incorrect) and their emotional singing style (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 98; Pacini Hernandez 2010, 89; Sellers 2014, 13). Musicians played in smaller, informal settings and groups consisting of a *requinto*,<sup>3</sup> a second or rhythm guitar, bass, bongos, and maracas, which were later replaced by the *güira*.<sup>4</sup> These gatherings provided a sense of continuity by linking the migrant to memories of home at the same time that they contributed to a sense of group in their new communities. Some hopeful artists began to record both bolero covers and original material, and they used their limited funds to pay out of pocket for studio time (Sellers 2014, 49). The quality of these first recordings was not the best, especially compared to merengue recordings; this poor quality contributed to some of the elite's criticism of the genre as unrefined (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 85). Artists also had to pay to press their own records, and they distributed their recordings to local jukebox owners, directly to fans, and even to radio stations in the hopes they might get airplay. Without the backing

<sup>1</sup> Gerson Corniel, interview with author, Manhattan, New York, December 9, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Tommy García, interview with author, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, August 1, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> A guitar that is higher-pitched and smaller than a standard guitar.

<sup>4</sup> Metal scraper.

of a record label, artists found themselves fulfilling a variety of roles beyond that of musician: producer, publicist, and distributor.<sup>5</sup>

Bachata's lack of access to record labels and recording opportunities was partly the result of the privileged place *merengue de orquesta* held at the time of bachata's birth. Merengue had been an extensive and long-used form of propaganda under Trujillo; in fact, over three hundred merengues were composed in his honor over the three decades of his dictatorship as contained in the *Antología musical de la era de Trujillo, 1930–1960* (Rivera González 1960). Merengue was originally a music of the countryside and was shunned by the Dominican elite. Despite a brief rise in popularity as a symbol of national pride and identity during the US Marines' eight-year occupation (1916–1924), merengue was most popular in the countryside at the time Trujillo assumed power. He took advantage of merengue's extensive popularity among the rural masses to spread propagandistic messages (Austerlitz 1997, 52). Trujillo brought bandleader Luis Alberti and his orchestra to serve as his personal ensemble and mandated they play merengue (Austerlitz 1997, 54–55). As Hutchinson (2016, 222) notes in her study of *merengue típico*, merengue de orquesta represented “modernity, the Dominican nation, and the urban context.” Although Alberti's was not the first big band to play merengue de orquesta, its dictator-ordered makeover was crucial to extending its reach (Hutchinson 2016, 222). Merengue became so central to the Dominican musical and political landscape that it was decreed the national music (Manuel, Bilby and Largey 1995, 102). In the countryside and among the lower classes, merengue típico, with its instrumentation of the accordion, *tambora*,<sup>6</sup> and güira, remained most popular, while merengue de orquesta became synonymous with progress and modernity (Austerlitz 1997, 69; Pacini Hernandez 2010, 84).

As a result of this relationship between the state and music, merengue de orquesta was, to use Anderson's term, a type of musical high center. Merengue de orquesta was firmly entrenched in Dominican daily life and, just as important, in the recording industry, which was itself limited. Trujillo “actively discouraged the development of a Dominican recording industry” and all recording was carefully regulated by the dictator's brother José Arismendi “Petán” Trujillo (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 84). Tallaj (2006, 18) remembers of merengue de orquesta, “Dominicans were culturally conditioned to like it since it was ubiquitous in the media and praised internationally as a national symbol of Dominican culture.” Hutchinson (2016, 9) further observes, “many Dominicans of all sorts disidentify with the Dominican national project, musically symbolized by mainstream (i.e., *orquesta* or popular) merengue, and that disidentification can result in adherence to other musical genres that better encapsulate nonmainstream gender, racial, or regional identities,” such as merengue típico and bachata. These genres were associated with the inhabitants of the lower-class barrios and campesinos, and this distance from the high center reduced their access to the most exclusive and largest venues, record labels, and mainstream radio stations. Bachata fans listened to their music on the jukebox in the *colmado* (corner store), informal gatherings, and bars, cabarets, and brothels.

These associations led to several insulting names the Dominican middle and upper classes used for bachata. They called it *música de guardia* with reference to the military men of low rank who tended to frequent the locales where bachata was played; another common contemptuous name was *música de cachivache*, meaning something without substance and of comparatively little worth (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 12). Bachata was also called *música de amargue*, or songs of bitterness, for its bluesy tone; this was, in fact, the name that some artists preferred.<sup>7</sup> The name *bachata* was intended as yet another insult. This word, whose original meaning from the nineteenth century referred to informal get-

<sup>5</sup> José Manuel Calderón, interview with author, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, August 2, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Two-headed drum.

<sup>7</sup> Edilio Paredes, interview with author, Manhattan, New York, December 10, 2010.

together and enjoyable times among friends (Tejeda 2002, 128) did not originally define a musical genre. Edilio Paredes recalled how the term was transformed into an invective when a prominent Dominican musician was on television on the popular *Show del mediodía*. The musician shared his heated opinions about the quality of bolero de guitarra, summing up his views by referring to it as “una bachata,” something of little value, music “of peasants, of unsophisticated people who have no manners.”<sup>8</sup> The name stuck, although at the time, most artists producing this type of music resisted the “bachata” label that had been imposed on them (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 13; Sellers 2014, 22). The constant attempts to label and define the new sound reveal the central role that names play in identity, since names “can be forced on recipients against their will” (Valentine 1998, para. 2.1). Nevertheless, claiming a label imposed from outside a group can infuse the name with pride and even defiance, turning the original insult on its head (Valentine 1998, para. 9.2). This was the case with bachata when its artists embraced the name over the years and invested it with pride.

Although a few DJs had given bachata airplay, bachateros’ access to major recording labels and mainstream radio was limited as a result of class associations; the record labels maintained their control of the market with merengue de orquesta as the high center of Dominican musical identity (Tallaj 2006, 18). The middle and upper classes rejected bachata and criticized the genre and its performers as unrefined and tasteless. Although mainstream radio stations did not play their music, fans consumed the records in their own homes, the local corner store, in bars, cabarets, and brothels, and live in small venues or fiestas. These fans represented a new and growing mass audience waiting to be tapped. Producer and radio announcer Radhamés Aracena capitalized on it.

When José Manuel Calderón recorded what would later be considered the first bachata, “¿Qué será de mí?,” in 1962, Radhamés Aracena considered bolero de guitarra to be a style with few prospects, and he discouraged Calderón (Batista Matos 2002, 11). Aracena was an astute businessperson, and with time, he recognized the growing popularity of bolero de guitarra and the substantial audience that consumed it (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 88). The Dominican sociologist and former director of the Museum of Dominican Music Tommy García points to this unique combination of a new radio station, Aracena’s business savvy, and bachata’s extensive fan base as ingredients to Radio Guarachita’s success: “What makes it popular? This businessman’s realization that it’s easier for him to compete with a new station when he already has this new massive audience inhabiting the city.”<sup>9</sup> Aracena launched a new station in 1964, dedicating it first to playing popular music. The 1965 civil war forced Aracena to take the station off the air for a time, but when he reopened the AM station in 1966, Aracena devoted Radio Guarachita to the popular bolero de guitarra (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 89–91). The station was active until shortly after Aracena’s death in the late 1990s.<sup>10</sup> By the time Aracena launched Radio Guarachita, interpretations of bolero were selling well, despite their poor production quality. Aracena broadcast these popular songs on his station, and he also recorded and produced bachata artists. He dedicated Radio Guarachita not only to playing bachata but to showcasing the music he recorded and produced (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 97). As bachatero Tony Santos recalled, “I have to admit he was a businessman. Because he looked for singers. I mean, if you took him a record, he wouldn’t play it. You had to record with him.”<sup>11</sup>

Although bachata had played on other stations, Radio Guarachita was the first dedicated to bachata, and the only one at that time.<sup>12</sup> The station rooted itself in all elements of

<sup>8</sup> Edilio Paredes, interview. All translations are the author’s.

<sup>9</sup> Tommy García, interview with author, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, August 1, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Davicito Paredes, telephone interview with author, August 7, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Santos, interview with author, Manhattan, New York, December 10, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Susana Silfa, interview with author, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, August 2, 2011.

listeners' daily lives. It became both a concrete and a symbolic bond between migrants to the cities and those who remained in the countryside. For many of those who had left the rural areas, Radio Guarachita "was their link to all they'd left behind"<sup>13</sup> Aracena promoted and facilitated interaction among listeners with song requests and by broadcasting messages to friends and family (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 92). These messages, known as *servicios públicos* (public service announcements), were especially important in maintaining ties to home during a time when the country had limited postal and telephone services (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 92).<sup>14</sup> The *servicios públicos* were often very personal; for example, a campesino who was coming to the city might let a relative or friend know he was on his way, or one traveling back to the countryside could inform his family of his return.<sup>15</sup> On Sundays, the station hosted a *programa de saludos* to allow listeners to send live greetings over the airwaves; Radio Guarachita also opened its doors to listeners so they could come in person to watch live broadcasts (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 92–93). This interactive style of programming, along with Radio Guarachita's signal strength and national reach, contributed to the construction of an imagined community among listeners spread across the Dominican nation. It fostered an awareness of others who were listening to the programming at the same time and a common language with which to express oneself. Bachata's audience strongly identified with Radio Guarachita, a station that "offered membership in a large, imaginary family" (Pacini Hernandez 1995, 93). It was a point of commonality for fans across the nation, a station with broad reach and which claimed to be bound for the future (El Puerto TV 2018).

Just as print media formed the basis for imagining the nation in the nineteenth century, Radio Guarachita fostered a sense of community among bachata artists and fans. This music of the marginalized barrios and campesinos, interpreted in their everyday language and played in small venues, on jukeboxes, and on Radio Guarachita, chipped away at the country's musical high centers. Radio Guarachita's daily and weekly programming, along with its day-specific jingles—"Hoy es martes" (Canalcaribe 2014), for example—contributed to the conceptualization of calendrical time, while the *servicios públicos* and interaction with those in the booth fostered a sense of simultaneity among geographically separated listeners. This, in addition to bachata's heritage of being played in smaller locales such as bars, get-togethers, parties, and homes, contributed to an ongoing sense of community and personal connections among fans and musicians.

Trujillo's assassination in 1961 opened both the music industry and national borders (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 86). Although bachata and merengue típico still did not enjoy access to top labels, migrants abroad carried these genres with them, and they remained symbolic of ties to home among the burgeoning transnational community (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 87). Abroad, Dominican migrants continued to play bachata at home or in small venues. The genre's bitter or bittersweet and sometimes nostalgic lyrics portrayed Dominican migrants' experiences, and young Dominican Americans also began to listen to and cover bachatas in the 1990s, eventually composing their own take on the music of their cultural roots (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 91; Sellers 2014, 90; Sellers 2017, 8–10). They blended bachata with genres such as R&B, pop, and hip-hop, and lyrics in Spanglish reflected their bilingual realities (Sellers 2014, 90; Sellers 2017, 12–18). These young musicians played at baby showers, family get-togethers, culture clubs, and local restaurants and bars, just like other bachateros before them (Sellers 2014, 91; Sellers 2017, 96). The group Aventura, for example, was a local and regional sensation before breaking into mainstream radio with "Obsesión" (Sellers 2017, 8). As Dre Hidalgo remembers from his early days as Aventura's manager, "It went from the street buzz to the clubs

<sup>13</sup> Tommy García, interview with author, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, August 1, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Tommy García, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Tommy García, interview.

and then to the radio.”<sup>16</sup> This was the beginning of a phenomenon that helped catapult bachata to the international limelight; along with the growing popularity of Dominican-American authors and Dominican stars on the baseball field, it contributed “to mainstream Dominican culture for US audiences as never before” (Thornton and Ubiera 2019, 415).

Migrants of the Dominican transnational community carried their taste for bachata and the modern bachata produced in the United States back to the Dominican Republic on visits. As Hutchinson (2016, 146) notes in the case of *merengue típico moderno*, bachata and modern bachata contribute to “identity building . . . and . . . social ties” among transnational Dominican audiences. Bachata’s growing global popularity and its popularity among migrants with greater disposable income contributed to its acceptance in the Dominican Republic (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 91–92; Sellers 2014, 14, 88; Tallaj 2006, 17). A circular movement of music among fans and producers in the Dominican Republic and the transnational community extended the growth and reach of the bachata community (Pacini Hernandez 2010, 91–92). This transnational movement of bachata contributed to the genre’s imagined community of fans by providing it a space within the Dominican music scene and contributing to a sense of simultaneous listening across geopolitical borders. Fans of specific songs and artists shared the common language of their lyrics, regardless of where or how they listened.

Ultimately, the forces that tried to relegate bachata to a second-rate status—lack of access to larger venues and labels and to mainstream broadcasting—instead cemented a sense of community among fans. Simon Frith (1992, 50) observes that “the industrialization of music means a shift from active musical production to passive pop consumption, the decline of folk or community or subculture traditions.” Fans’ more personal and accessible interaction with bachateros in smaller venues lent themselves to a sense of group proximity, of “a belief in the bonds between themselves and the performers” (Kibby 2000, 92). Radio Guarachita’s programming and servicios públicos contributed both tangibly and symbolically to listeners’ access to the bachata community, as did modern bachateros’ early web pages and later, social media (Sellers 2017, 25). *El Tieto eShow* continues this heritage of community and connection through the platform of twenty-first-century social media.

### ***El Tieto eShow***

Hannah Kazis-Taylor (2018, para. 9) observes, “Social media may have a stronger effect on identity than did previous technologies, since it creates a sense of intimate connection. Real-time footage can allow viewers to vicariously experience” events and each other’s presence. This feeling of vicariousness is especially true in the case of livestreaming due to the immediacy of the experience. The Facebook Live bachata program, *El Tieto eShow*, supports these assertions. The show is the brainchild of the Paredes family in Santo Domingo, who have formed part of the world of bachata across its history. According to bachatero and producer Davicito Paredes, the idea to host a Facebook Live show was purely accidental.<sup>17</sup> He and his brother Nano were recording with bachata star Joe Veras when Nano decided to stream their work live. A skeptic described their activities as nothing more than “un tietto de eshow”—the Dominican pronunciation for “un tiesto de eshow”—insinuating that it was a shard, a piece of trash. Undaunted, the Paredes embraced the name, complete with the spelling to reflect Dominican pronunciation, formalizing it as part of their new venture: a live show steamed over social media to serve as a platform for artists to share their music, and for fans to consume it and interact

<sup>16</sup> Dre Hidalgo, interview with author, Manhattan, New York, July 19, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Davicito Paredes, interview.



with that music and with each other. The show and related Imperio Nano and *El Tieto eShow* Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and YouTube channel became a virtual settlement (Jones 1997, para. 2.2) in which a twenty-first century community founded in bachata is imagined. The virtual community of *tietistas* moves fluidly among these spaces for information about the show and to interact with hosts, artists, and each other.

Each weeknight, Nano Paredes, cohost Manny Méndez, and Davicito Paredes in musical and production roles bring live bachata to followers around the globe, as evidenced by fans checking in with their locations. Performances have included big-name bachata artists (Héctor Acosta “El Torito,” Óptimo, and Joe Veras, for example), new artists (e.g., Randy Tu Chulito, Deivis Veras, and Rosa Lee Tu Bachatera), icons of the genre (e.g., Edilio Paredes and Ramón Isidro Cabrera “El Chivo Sin Ley”), bachateros from abroad (e.g., Grupo Extra and Andre Veloz), and even artists of other genres singing bachata, such as David Kada and Vakeró. Upcoming shows are advertised on social media (Facebook, Instagram) to build anticipation. With a push notification to alert them, fans are ready and waiting to join the livestream and to interact by liking and sharing the transmission and by posting live comments for the visiting artist, hosts, and each other.

*El Tieto eShow*'s format is loosely the same each evening: a series of prerecorded ads for local businesses and music opens the stream, followed by the live event. The show begins with Nano's greeting of “Saludos, saludos, saludos!,” followed by Manny Mendez's introduction of the guest artist. His or her performance is interspersed with reactions to some of the live comments, and always, the *saludos*—the shout-outs to those viewing the show online. Slogans and phrases that have become emblematic of this particular program are peppered throughout. Sometimes, the show takes a turn when the hosts call another artist to ask for advice or opinions, or all present philosophize about topics as diverse as the most influential bachatero, an artist's legacy, the future of the genre, or music awards ceremonies and bachata's representation in them.<sup>18</sup> A sense of history and temporality pervades these musings, with references to pillars of the bachata legacy both past and present. The special “Tieto de Vellonera” features songs from the genre's early days.<sup>19</sup> On one occasion, the program showcased the production of an entire song by the bachata star Alexandra, with a global audience watching live.<sup>20</sup> The show observes the passing of members of the Dominican musical community by paying homage to them, as in the case of the 2019 deaths of Yóskar Sarante<sup>21</sup> and Anthony Ríos<sup>22</sup> (Imperio Nano Music 2019). Often, *El Tieto eShow* concludes with the guest artist's greatest or most emblematic hit, before Nano signs off with his reminder, “Do good to all, no matter to whom [Hagan bien y no miren a quién].”<sup>23</sup> The transmission draws to a close, and the community disperses until the next episode after participating in a shared experience that transcends geographical and physical boundaries.

<sup>18</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Marx Haubey Parte 2,” Facebook video, March 20, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/161143594807031/>.

<sup>19</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo El Tieto de Vellonera,” Facebook video, January 21, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/2243907612554203/>; Davicito Paredes, “Esta noche en El Tieto eShow,” Facebook photo, January 21, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155893683616657&set=a.10150643125916657&type=3&theater>.

<sup>20</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “Grabando lo nuevo de Alexandra la Reina de la Bachata,” Facebook video, May 24, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/639426953058261/>.

<sup>21</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo Homenaje a Yóskar Sarante con Nayi Jiménez,” Facebook video, January 31, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/2201069696877626/>.

<sup>22</sup> Imperio Nano Music, “Homenaje a Anthony Rios en ‘El Tieto Eshow,’” YouTube Video, 2:01:21, April 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOcmD1R1GU>.

<sup>23</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Óptimo,” Facebook video, September 19, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/503038660175209/>.

The three elements Anderson (1991) identifies as the cultural roots of the imagined community are present in the virtual community of *El Tieto eShow*. The concept of “‘homogenous, empty time,’ in which simultaneity is . . . transverse, cross-time, marked . . . by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (Anderson 1991, 24) is a central component of the Tieto virtual community. Print, and particularly the newspaper, is a type of “mass ceremony” essential to the formation of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1991, 35). In the age of new media, livestreaming plays the same role by simultaneously joining individuals around the globe. Social media have expanded the possibilities for such connections, and as a result, the possibilities for imagined communities (Koh 2016, para. 3). Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev (2011, 1298) affirmed in their study of Twitter as an imagined community that “it is impossible for . . . [users] . . . to be on Twitter and not be aware of the other residents of this virtual place.” Participating in a Facebook group or a regularly livestreamed program such as *El Tieto eShow* emphasizes the presence of others who are doing the same. *El Tieto eShow* viewers, though not physically together, are still interacting asynchronously in the case of social media posts, reactions, or by viewing the uploaded video after a show has aired, and synchronously during the livestreamed show. This contributes to a sense of belonging, and when “geographically dispersed viewers are synchronized in time media are offering them a social experience oriented towards a shared identity” (Cui, Rui, and Su 2016, 482). Fans of *El Tieto eShow* recognize this identity, calling themselves *tietistas*. This sense of belonging and connection—of we-ness—are the glue that binds the virtual community together (Foster 1996, 29; Lee et al. 2020, 2, 9). Such feelings of immediacy and simultaneity strengthen *El Tieto eShow*’s sense of virtual community. The push notification goes out that the show is live, and users join the broadcast. Viewers can constantly monitor the number of others who have tuned in on the live counter on the screen, and they receive a notification when their Facebook friends join the broadcast. The live comments feature further heightens an understanding of simultaneity, and viewers use it to make their presence and location known, request songs and shout-outs, and to greet the hosts, musicians, and other viewers—in the tradition of Radio Guarachita’s *servicios públicos*. The live comments also serve as a type of back channel as users comment among themselves, with reactions and responses to others’ comments, and sometimes, with critiques of the performance.

The saludos are an integral part of *El Tieto eShow*, joining the artists with the show’s networked audience. These shout-outs are so important to viewers that some post a comment specifically requesting one, and the hosts reserve time at several points during each show for their and the guest artists’ shout-outs. Live comments and the saludos reinforce the sense of simultaneity, community, and proximity to artists, and in this way, a *tietista* in Nagua is conscious of sharing the same digital and temporal space with one in France, New Jersey, or Chile. This opportunity to interact and contribute to the show highlights the importance of the individual within the community and the common point shared with performers (Kibby 2000, 92). As in the case of live tweeting, the live broadcast of *El Tieto eShow* allows viewers to “find a new type of immediate connectedness” (Koh 2016, para. 11). Thus, *El Tieto eShow* solidifies “the sense of being connected to a community, being understood by its members, and being together during events culturally important for the group” (Cui, Rui, and Su 2016, 485).

These aspects of *El Tieto eShow* reinforce “how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time” (Anderson 1991, 63). With its weeknight schedule, *El Tieto eShow* functions in the same capacity as print media in creating a type of repeated ritual across calendrical time. The counter displays the number of viewers which, in turn, reiterates the sense of a community simultaneously watching the show together. The names and profile pictures displayed of other viewers are analogous to Anderson’s hypothetical newspaper reader whose certainty of the actual existence of his imagined community rests in visual corroboration when he sees others reading the same newspaper

he has read and already imagined others reading (1991, 35–36). *El Tieto eShow*'s live feed, synchronous comments, and saludos achieve this same end of bringing a shared cyberspace and common interests into clearer focus. Viewers are all watching the same show, hearing the same music and often, their own names in the shout-outs, and occupying a shared virtual space with musicians. This simultaneity of activities strengthens the sense of virtual community among viewers and their sense of a connection to artists “through the transnational circulation of popular culture” (Laguna 2019, 152).

Anderson also identifies the decline of high centers as another of the elements necessary for the imagined community of the nation. Bachata's history and *El Tieto eShow*'s own place within that continually developing story reflect a similar process. Merengue de orquesta was the musical high center at the time of bachata's advent. Despite its association with the Trujillato, Dominicans embraced merengue de orquesta as symbolic of their national identity (Tallaj 2006, 18). Radhamés Aracena offered a musical alternative with Radio Guarachita. The station provided both a physical and a sonic space in which the fans could hear each other and their music, a location where they could imagine a space for themselves within the Dominican musical landscape. *El Tieto eShow* continues this tradition of undermining the music industry's high centers by taking advantage of Facebook's livestreaming. The fact that the show is streamed live over social media via a feature any Facebook user might employ underscores the popular nature of the show. Further, the live comments and saludos foster a greater sense of proximity and access to the hosts and artists than if the show were broadcast on television and not interactive.

Vernacular language is a third essential element of the imagined community. Anderson (1991, 145) observes that San Martín's efforts to make Peruvians out of the Indigenous people by calling them Peruvians “shows that the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and that one could be ‘invited into’ the imagined community.” Christening members with the same name, as in the San Martín example, joins all in the group under a single umbrella by defining who “we” are (Lee et al. 2020, 2, 9). The community that has grown around *El Tieto eShow* is similarly able to unite participants of diverse backgrounds under the overarching name *tietistas*. The hosts' and viewers' frequent reminders to share the live feed with others reiterates the opportunity to join the community.

A common language among members of a community also contributes to trust and mutual understanding (Ray 2016, 56). Language is central to community, since group “affiliation is about more than connecting; it is about negotiating meanings within genres of language use” (Zappavigna 2012, 192). The language of social media, and particularly, of specific groups on social media, solidifies a sense of virtual community and a common identity (Ray 2016, 53). Participants in the groups and communities formed around programs such as *El Tieto eShow* find common ground in their “shared cultural vocabularies” (Laguna 2019, 152), a common language defined by the culture of the virtual community itself (Lee et al. 2020, 2; Ray 2016, 54). Viewers' language may include specific emojis, expressions, word choice, jargon, and slang, all of which foment a sense of community and mutual understanding (Ray 2016, 57). Emojis especially contribute to feelings of group membership, understanding, and solidarity (Zappavigna 2012, 76). Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev (2011, 1301) found the evolution of an accepted language served as “a key element of community formation” among Twitter users. Grădinaru (2016, 186) also notes that members of a virtual community “develop . . . conjoint discursive practices (specific expressions, jokes or rituals).” The language of bachata, and bachata itself as a language, attracts viewers from around the globe and joins them in the same appreciation of the genre (Sellers 2017, 218–219). The use of inclusive we-words and group names solidifies a sense of virtual community (Dooley and Lee 2020, para. 6; Lee et al. 2020, 2).

A common vocabulary serves as a foundation and strengthens the ties among members of the *El Tieto eShow* community on Facebook. As in the case of Facebook groups that “are

bound together by the use of a distinctive ‘cyber-language’ and set of expressions that contribute to a sense of shared identity” (Ray 2016, 55), the viewers of *El Tieto eShow* have their own linguistic identity. The dialect of the hosts and artists is Dominican Spanish, although not all who view are Dominican. Dominican word choice strengthens the bonds among fans who embrace the genre of bachata and its cultural roots. The inclusion of everyday language, the language of bachata, and community members’ own voices elevates language to a significant place in the co-creation of content and meaning. In this way, a “local identity . . . is created through a global discourse” (Sá 2007, 128). Expressions and sayings unique to bachata in general and specifically to *El Tieto eShow* also support a virtual community identity; as Ray (2016, 57) points out, “not just the culturally specific language, but also the choice of words, even slang expressions within a dialect, make the conversation more particular to its members.” Even the show’s name represents a sense of pride through its appropriation of a term originally intended to be an insult—“un tiesto de eshow.” Now, hosts and fans proudly refer to themselves as *tietistas*. This type of name claiming is part of bachata’s heritage.

But the title of the show is just the beginning. This virtual community of bachata musicians, producers, and fans has generated its own cyber-language, including sayings and expressions unique to it and, in some cases, incomprehensible outside it. One of the more colorful sayings frequently employed is the descriptor *cargado de gramínea*.<sup>24</sup> According to Davicito Paredes, the phrase uses *gramínea* and its reference to sugar cane to describe something that is exceedingly (“cargado”) sweet, nice, good, or high-quality.<sup>25</sup> On the show, an artist, song, or even the entire program might be “cargado de gramínea.” This expression has become ubiquitous among both hosts and viewers, who often employ it in their live comments. Outside of the show’s context, however, this expression is unknown. In fact, some of the guest artists have had to ask what it means. While the hosts explain in person, viewers post their own comments, and within a short time, the artist is using the expression along with everyone else. Another expression unique to the language of the *tietistas* is the name of its female fan club: *Las Mujeres que Aprietan*, a reference to the affection its members have for the show and the big hugs they give, *apretando*.<sup>26</sup> This community within a community is part of its fabric—so much so that artists dedicate songs to the fan club, and one show was devoted to the fan club president as a birthday celebration.<sup>27</sup>

Other phrases form the everyday substance of the announcers’ discourse—for example, when they promise listeners an enjoyable experience where they can “have a good time with their clothes on [*gozar con la ropa puesta*].”<sup>28</sup> Following his usual greeting, Nano Paredes introduces his cohost, Manny Méndez, each evening in the same way: “But I’m not the one to introduce tonight’s artist. That’s Manny Méndez. Let’s hear it, Manny Méndez!”<sup>29</sup> These anticipated sayings reflect the unique role each member plays within the community. In addition to Nano Paredes’s expected greeting and leave-taking, host Manny Méndez flavors the presentation with elegant expressions that the *tietistas* expect to hear.

<sup>24</sup> El Tieto eShow, “El Tieto eShow,” Facebook photo, November 23, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/eltietoeshow/photos/a.425215294247811/1086557641446903/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>25</sup> Davicito Paredes, telephone interview. *Gramineae* (*gramíneas* in Spanish) are “monocotyledonous flowering plants,” including sugar cane, belonging to the *Poaceae* family, also known as the *Gramineae* family (Britannica, s.v. “Poaceae,” <https://www.britannica.com/plant/Poaceae>). The word is from the Latin *gramineus* (Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Gramineae,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Gramineae>).

<sup>26</sup> Davicito Paredes, interview; Melina Ureña, interview with author via Facebook Messenger, January 2, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Félix Miguel en el cumpleaños de Melina Ureña,” Facebook video, January 22, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/390518168367511/>.

<sup>28</sup> El Tieto eShow, “El Tieto eShow,” November 23, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/eltietoeshow/photos/a.425215294247811/1086557641446903/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>29</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Deivis Veras,” Facebook video, February 27, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/2273074686299234/>.

Each artist is greeted as “master of this digital platform” for the evening. Méndez recognizes the artist as “an epic guest” with “renowned vocal cords,”<sup>30</sup> and proclaims bachata “the vernacular music” or “the literature of the people made into music drawn from life itself.”<sup>31</sup> Méndez reminds viewers that they are part of a viewing community that has made the show a hit: “number one on social networks.”<sup>32</sup> Méndez’s high register of speech exalts bachata, and members’ repetition of these phrases reinforces a sense of community among tietistas.

Viewers often repeat the hosts’ expressions in their live comments and accompany them with emojis common to the show’s community: the Dominican flag, a guitar, musical notes, dancers, hearts or broken hearts, and a glass to accompany calls for rum, among others. Comments remain once the show concludes and the stream is posted on Imperio Nano Music’s Facebook page. In this way, the verbal communication of the imagined community “is replaced in virtual communities by written text supplemented by forms of audio and visual communication, giving ‘online conversation . . . the ephemeral and informal feeling of a telephone conversation [and] the reach and permanence of a publication” (Parrish 2002, 264). The unique language of *El Tieto eShow*, be it spoken, posted as an announcement of an upcoming show, written in a live comment, or viewed and read later online, contributes to a shared tietista identity.

The sense of virtual community among members of *El Tieto eShow* community exhibits the three dimensions that Koh and Kim (2003, 86) identified as central to this concept: membership, influence, and immersion. Members display their perceptions of belonging to the community by identifying as tietistas and through their interactions via live comments and posts and reactions on the Facebook page. They express a belief that they can contribute to the community and make a difference in and by their live comments, reactions, emojis, and posts. Their immersion in the community, their flow, is evident in their reactions to songs, the hosts’ and artists’ comments, and their interaction both during the live feed and asynchronously on the Facebook page. The sense of virtual community joins the show’s viewers, followers, and fans in an imagined community of mutual interest in bachata.

## Conclusions

Just as Radio Guarachita provided the space for an imagined community of bachateros and their listeners across the Dominican Republic, *El Tieto eShow* has harnessed the possibilities of social media to create a virtual community of artists and fans worldwide. Participants display a sense of identity through their membership, ability to influence the community, and their immersion in its activities. The show’s popular format and use of social media undercut musical and media high centers to deliver the work of a variety of bachata artists to fans. A common cyber-language composed of music, unique expressions, and emojis unites tietistas through a shared language of fandom. Through its live, interactive format, the show contributes to the understanding of “the consumption of music as an active, incorporative practice . . . solidifying the often illusory bonds between performer and consumers” (Kibby 2000, 100). Livestreams such as *El Tieto eShow* provide a virtual yet concrete common terrain among fans and listeners who are geographically distanced; they are symbolic of an intangible community that is yet very real and capable of forming connections among listeners (Lyon 2020, 132). Such fan communities offer “symbolic links

<sup>30</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Deivis Veras.”

<sup>31</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Marino Castellanos,” Facebook video, February 21, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/591300087870948/>.

<sup>32</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con Deivis Veras.”

... to maintain a sense of commonality between performer and listener, and create a community among fans” (Kibby 2000, 92).

As this study has demonstrated, virtual communities offer spaces for social interactions and for the development of *we-ness* among community members. *El Tieto eShow* reminds us that others are listening to and probably singing along with the same songs we are as we watch, even if we do not know those individuals personally. We know they are simultaneously viewing, listening, singing; to paraphrase Anderson (1991, 145), the ties that connect us, the bonds that hold, are of “imagined sound.” *El Tieto eShow* is another chapter in bachata’s ability to discover and implement ways to connect with fans and share its artists’ musical production through the creation and strengthening of a group identity. The virtual community of *tietistas* highlights the ways in which “music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (Frith 1996, 110). When host Nano Paredes signs off with his characteristic *despedida*, *tietistas* feel he is speaking to the community in a common language. And now, as host Manny Méndez says at the conclusion of each iteration of *El Tieto eShow*, “Ladies and gentlemen, let’s draw the curtain on this imaginary stage of vernacular music.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Imperio Nano Music (@ImperioNanoMusica), “En vivo con el Solterito del Sur.” Facebook video, February 22, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ImperioNanoElTietoEshow/videos/505663553296525/>.

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