“VÁMONO”: CONSTRUCTING PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY IN THE MUSIC OF BUSCABULLA

Aidan Malanoski
The Graduate Center, CUNY
@AidanMalanoski
BACKGROUND

• Buscabulla founded in NYC by Puerto Rican-born Raquel Berrios and Luis Alfredo del Valle; returned to Puerto Rico after Hurricanes Irma and Maria
  • Most recent album Regresa is inspired by the return to Puerto Rico
  • Potentially multiple identifications
  • Potentially contested identity
BUSCABULLA’S ALBUMS

**EP I**
- Released Oct 2014
- 4 songs

**EP II**
- Released Jan 2017
- 4 songs

**Regresa**
- Released May 2020
- 11 songs
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What kinds of identity do Buscabulla construct, and what linguistic resources do they use to construct them?
• How do audiences interpret Buscabulla’s linguistic choices, and engage with the identities those choices serve to establish?
TACTICS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY
(BUCHOLTZ & HALL 2004)

• **Adequation** (the construction of “socially recognized sameness”) vs **distinction** (the construction of socially recognized difference)

• **Authentication** (“the construction of a credible or genuine identity”) vs **denaturalization** (“the production of an identity that is literally incredible or non-genuine”)

• **Authorization** (using structural power to endow an identity with legitimacy) vs **illegitimation** (withholding or withdraw such structural power)
How do Buscabulla use language in their identity work?
METHODOLOGY

• Investigation of use of two features associated with Puerto Rican Spanish in Buscabulla’s singing

• /s/-lenition
  • /s/ → [h] or Ø in the coda
  • Ex: [ˈbamono] for /ˈbamonos/ vámonos ‘let’s go’

• /d/-elision
  • /d/ → Ø /V_V
  • Ex: [pesˈcao] for /pesˈcado/ pescado ‘fish’
  • Variants identified by ear
VARIATION ACROSS ALBUMS

On *EP I*, Buscabulla’s “heads were more in Puerto Rico” (Bryan 2017)

On *EP II*, Buscabulla “wanted to capture what it’s like to be Puerto Ricans living in New York” (Bryan 2017)

“coming back [to Puerto Rico] is this weird thing between feeling that it’s your home, but also feeling like a tourist” (Macias 2020)

“when we moved back [to Puerto Rico], we wanted to distance ourselves from [the Brooklyn scene]” (Spinelli 2020)
PART II: REPRESENTATION OF BUSCABULLA’S LANGUAGE

Do listeners recognize Buscabulla’s linguistic choices?
METHODOLOGY

• Investigation of the orthographic representation of /s/-lenition and /d/-elision on Genius, a crowdsourced lyrics website (e.g. <to’> for todo)
PART III: COMMENT ANALYSIS

How do listeners respond to and engage with Buscabulla’s semiotic choices?
METHODOLOGY

- 172 comments each from the music videos for “Mío” and “Tártaro”
- Qualitative analysis of discourse in comments
“MíO”
“TÁRTARO”
THEME I: PRIDE

• More frequent (and substantial) on “Mío” than on “Tártaro”

• “Mío” presents an “us vs. them” between Puerto Rican “locals” and “wealthy Americans” (Macias 2020)

• Commentors respond to this narrative by authenticating themselves as “real” Puerto Ricans

Example

Amo el sentido de magia y esplendor capturado de esta manera en nuestra Isla. La letra es lo mejor, provocativa, cruda, bien Boricua y bien sincera. (“Mío”)

‘I love the sense of magic and splendor captured this way on our Island. The lyrics are the best, provocative, raw, very Boricua and very sincere’
THEME 2: SALUTATIONS

- **Postcard comments** more common on “Mío” than “Tártaro”
- Postcard comments from the USA only occur on “Mío”
- Establish a transnational community of Buscabulla fans
- (Re)define the “Buscabulla Fan” identity
- Distances US commentors from the colonizers

**Examples**

Saludos desde Colombia!!!! Ustedes son INCREIBLES los amoooo (“Mío”) ‘Greetings from Colombia!!!! You are INCREDIBLE I loveee you’

I love you guys!!! You make amazing art. Love from Miami 💕 (“Mío”)
THEME 3: MUSICAL DIFFERENCE

• Position Buscabulla’s music in opposition to other Puerto Rican or Latin genres

• Berrios has made a similar opposition between Buscabulla’s music and “male Latin genres” like reggaetón (Baitz 2014)

• Buscabulla’s music draws on a different image of “authentic” Puerto Ricanness that is “fresh” yet rooted in Puerto Rican history

Examples

Previo a su musica nunca hubiera imaginado este estilo de musica hecho por gente puertorriqueña (o latina en general y en español) (“Mío”)

‘Before your music I never would have imagined this style of music made by Puerto Rican people (or Latin in general and in Spanish)’
CONCLUSIONS

• Buscabulla use /s/-lenition and /d/-elision to position themselves with respect to the communities they inhabit/have inhabited
• Listeners interpret Buscabulla’s use of /d/-elision as a relevant feature of their lyrics
• Comments on Buscabulla’s videos:
  • Respond to “Mío” by positioning commenters as “authentic” Puerto Ricans
  • Create a transnational community of Buscabulla fans and define the “Buscabulla Fan” identity
  • Position Buscabulla as an “authentic” Puerto Rican band and position the commentors as “authentic” Buscabulla fans
FUTURE RESEARCH

- Interview Buscabulla?
- Comparison of Berrios’s singing with her speech
- Comparison of Berrios’s singing/speech with NYC Spanish-speaking communities
- Lexical analysis
- Discourses of incomprehension
Thank you,
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REFERENCES


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REFERENCES


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