

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

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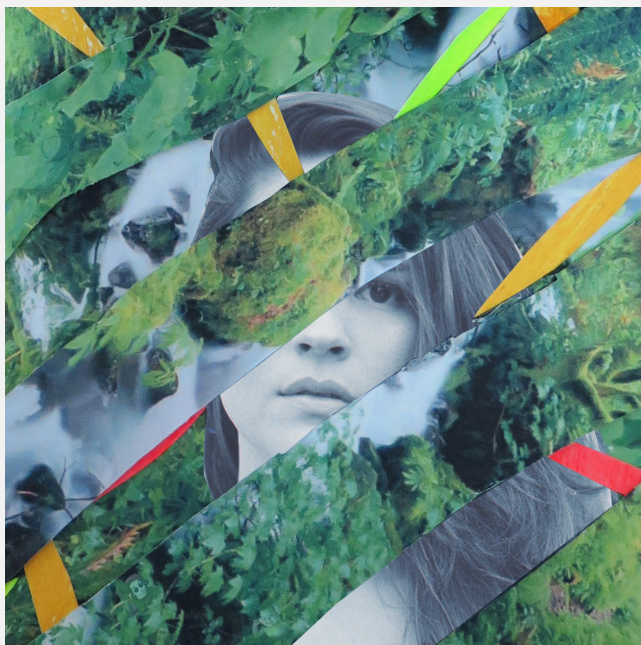
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BACKGROUND

- 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)

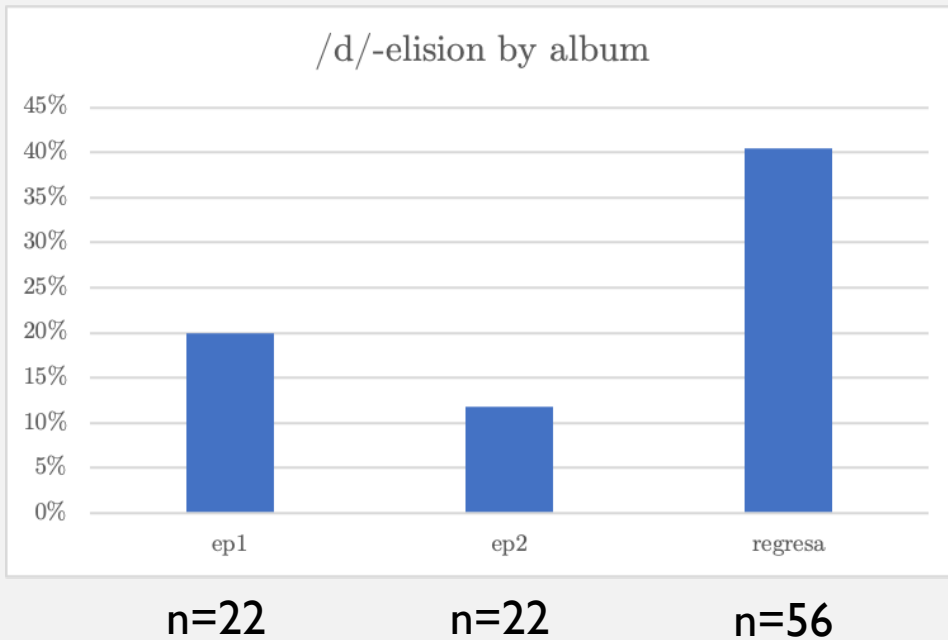
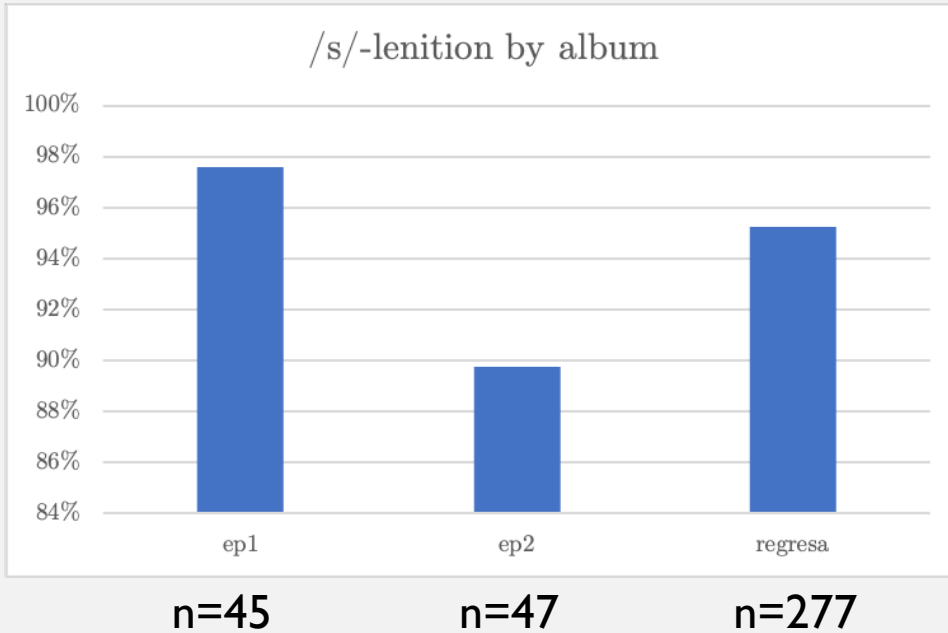
PART I: VARIATION IN BUSCABULLA'S SINGING

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 ∅ in the coda
 - Ex: ['bamono] for /'bamonos/ *vámonos* 'let's go'
- **/d/-elision**
 - /d/ → ∅ /V_V
 - Ex: [pes'cao] for /pes'cado/ *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)

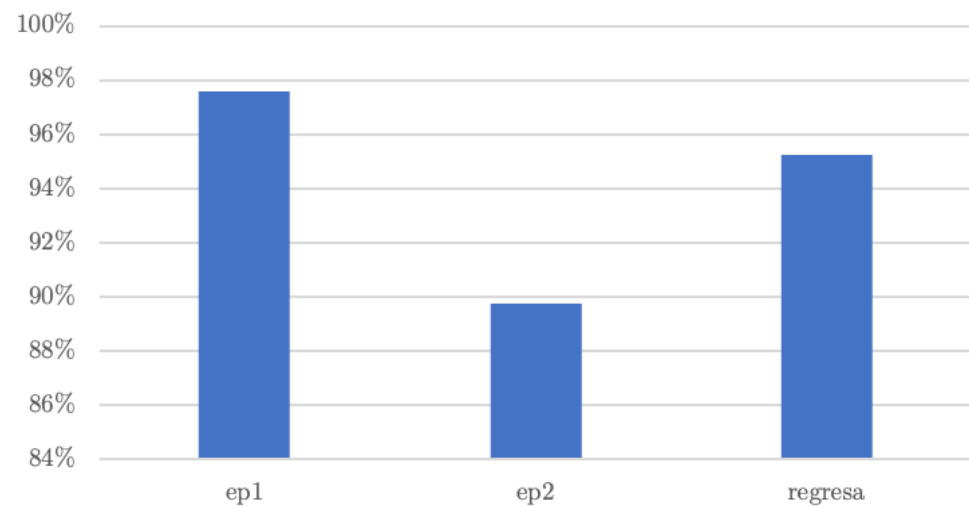
PART II: REPRESENTATION OF BUSCABULLA'S LANGUAGE

Do listeners recognize Buscabulla's linguistic choices?

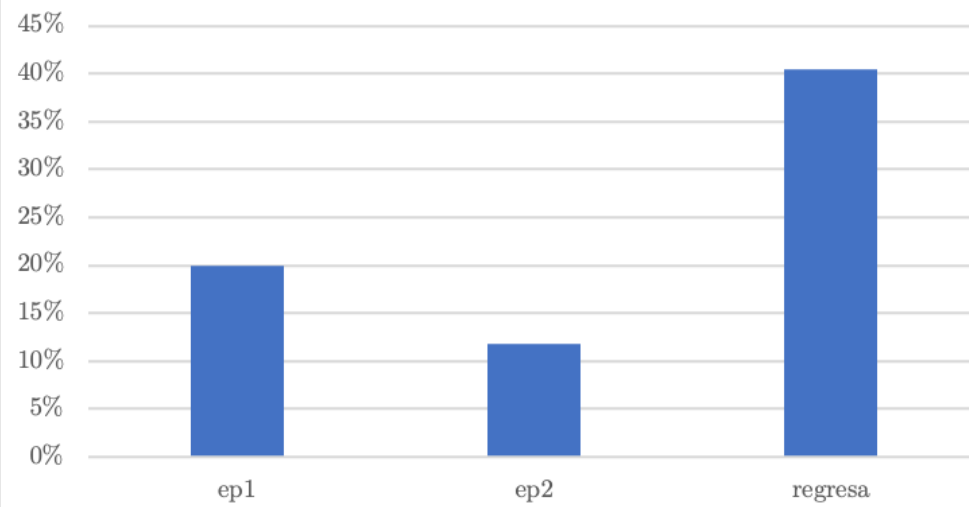
METHODOLOGY

- Investigation of the *orthographic representation* of /s/-lenition and /d/-elision on Genius, a crowdsourced lyrics website (e.g. <to'> for *todo*)

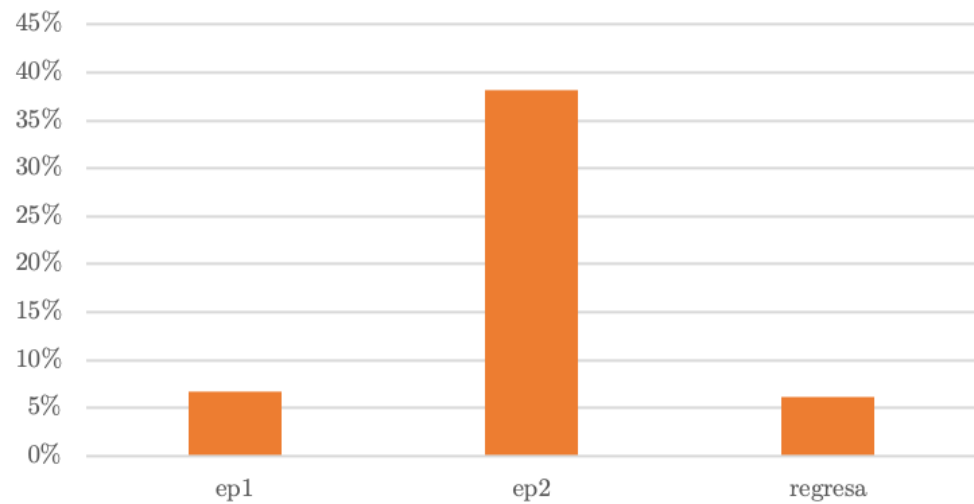
/s/-lenition by album



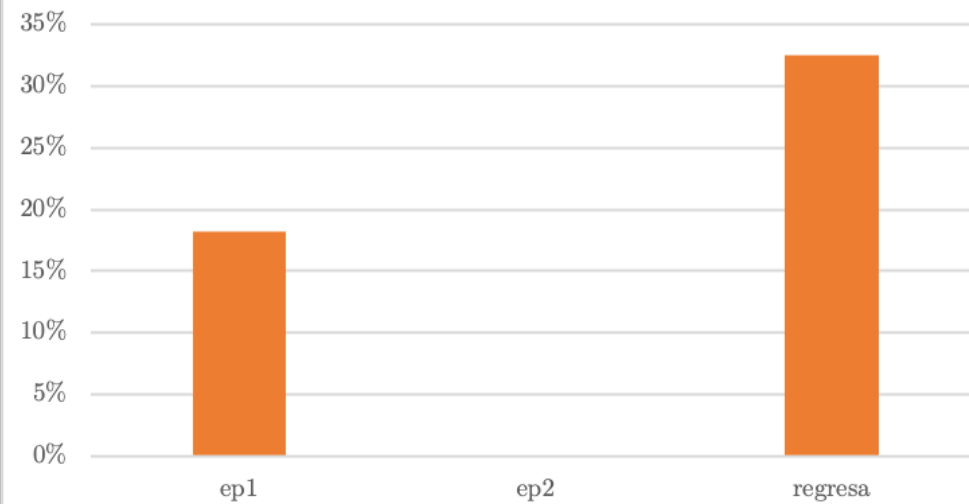
/d/-elision by album



Orthographic /s/-lenition by album



Orthographic /d/-elision by album



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 commentators from the colonizers

Examples

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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