

# Feminist Reggaeton in Spain: Young Women Subverting Machismo Through 'Perreo'

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## Abstract

This article explores the feminist potential of the Spanish 'reggaeton' movement led by young women through the song lyrics and public discourses of artists Brisa Fenoy, Ms Nina and Tremenda Jauría. These three singers and composers have been categorized as belonging to reggaeton genre, in a context in which Feminism is widespread among young people in Spain. Reggaeton is commonly considered (both in popular culture and academic studies) a sexist musical style, inherently male-centred in the way its songs and its 'perreo' dancing style are performed, and also in the pleasure provided to their audiences. Three feminist music projects from diverse backgrounds give voice to the artists themselves and use this music style as a parody and as a way of responding to everything they dislike about reggaeton and society, while at the same time resignifying this music genre and opening up an opportunity to deliver a feminist message.

## Keywords

Reggaeton, music, popular music, feminism, sexism, perreo, appropriation, young women, culture, popular culture

## Introduction: A Feminist tour-de-force in Spain

Massive demonstrations celebrating International Women's Day brought the streets of many cities in Spain to a standstill on 8 March 2018 (Jones, 2018a). Only a few weeks later, crowds made up mainly of women again led huge mobilizations in response to the verdict delivered by the court in the 'La Manada' ('The Pack') trial.

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This case concerning the gang rape of an 18-year-old girl revealed the institutionalized machismo of the judicial system when the perpetrators were cleared of ‘sexual assault’ (or ‘rape’) and their charge reduced to one of ‘sexual abuse’. This caused a public uproar because the judges considered that there was insufficient evidence showing coercion and resistance for them to rule it as ‘sexual assault/rape’, while feminist collectives argued that other recent victims in Spain who had tried to resist rape had risked death or were actually killed (Jones, 2018b). Demonstrations against the all-male court’s ruling on that sex crime made people aware of how poorly educated in a gender perspective many legal professionals are, and how lacking magistrates courts of this kind are in both diversity and women judges. In both cases, the people taking part (and sometimes even leading) these marches included young women who identified themselves as victims, survivors or at the very least sufferers of gender inequalities. One of the headlines for 8 March in *El País* read ‘A movement that’s being driven by young women’ (Álvarez, 2018). These young protesters, together with more veteran feminist movements and transnational mainstream campaigns, such as #MeToo, laid bare a collective sense of oppression and showed a renaissance of ‘feminism’ after the already thoroughly analysed era of its backlash and depoliticization (Gill, 2016b; McRobbie, 2004). Young women in Spain may have been continuously engaged in feminism from a heterogenic perspective (Martínez, 2007), but recent years have seen a comeback and a surge, partly fuelled by popular misogyny (Núñez-Puente & Gámez-Fuentes, 2017) and a perception of collective vulnerability (Martínez, 2017).

This rebirth of feminism in its new organizational and communicative forms (Gill, 2016b), or the so-called ‘fourth wave of intersectional feminism’ (Zimmerman, 2017) along with the demands it makes of society are reflected in contemporary popular music produced by young women. In Spain, although also connected to other geographies, young women have reinterpreted music styles such as rap, hip-hop, reggaeton and trap that were considered male (and underclass) territory. The case of reggaeton is paradigmatic, since many researchers considered it to be an extremely sexist register (Ramos, 2015). Spanish artists such as Brisa Fenoy, Ms Nina and Tremenda Jauría have appropriated reggaeton as an allegedly subversive tool to deliver Feminist messages. The aforementioned artists consider this displacement of a music style as an awareness-raising move that turns music into a key area for turning young women’s minds away from oppressive belief systems, and wish to have a strong influence on young people’s collective existence. We can see this feminist attitude in music lyrics from both subcultural backgrounds and mainstream platforms that are aware of the need for more ethical (or at least less dangerous) promises of what a loving or a sexual relationship is.

The way in which contemporary music and, more specifically, reggaeton can be used by popular artists to build and frame a feminist message is the focus of this article, which explores the capability of the aforementioned three young music projects to resignify the public discourse on sexism. We will observe how a music style that became mainstream as an alleged expression of machismo (reggaeton) has been appropriated and used to depict egalitarian models of femininity and sexual relationships, as well as feminist concerns, through song lyrics and public speech. As the journalist Sara Calvo pointed out in an article about Madrid-based band Tremenda Jauría: ‘Perreo has switched sides’ (Calvo, 2017). ‘Perreo’ or ‘doggy dancing’ is a

traditionally female dancing style associated with reggaeton and has been normally interpreted as sexualizing and objectifying women for the pleasure of a male gaze (Gallucci, 2008), yet some artists claim they can give it a distinctively feminist slant.

## Gender and Reggaeton

While a detailed account of music and its subcultures goes beyond the scope of this article, a brief outline of the approaches to popular music and gender is necessary here. Popular music is an important source of role models and cultural values related to the construction of gender identities (Frith & McRobbie, 2005; Nieto-Álvaro, 2012). From a feminist perspective, some authors have stated that popular music, being a product of a sexist world, promotes and sustains gender inequalities (Ramos López, 2003). In pioneering studies on popular music, authors like Horton (1990) found narrow, repetitive patterns of sexual and affective relationships described in voguish song lyrics. As well as reproducing the community's beliefs, the music industry has been seen as reproducing hegemonic ideologies on gender, sex and race (Hobson & Bartlow, 2008). In addition, if we look at women performers, we observe that media tend to portray them reproducing traditional standards of beauty, pleasing to a male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), yet their bodies are also places where cultural expectations about gender have the potential to resist stereotypes (McCarthy, 2006).

Many studies have focused on specific music genres and styles considered 'more male chauvinist' than others. Generally speaking, hard rock, rap, hip hop and reggaeton have been targeted for analysis due to their alleged machismo and the reproduction of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Graebner (2000) pointed out the excessive masculinity linked to (deviant) sexual practices such as bestiality, sadism and masochism in performances by male rock stars in the 1980s. According to this author, rock music in this period reacted against feminism with misogynistic attitudes. Whiteley (1997) found the same macho pattern in some Rolling Stones songs, linked to verses that promoted female submission. Today even prominent artists like Madonna, committed to subverting gender identities, have portrayed tough masculinities as attractive to women in some music videos (Tortajada, Araúna, & Willem, 2017). This said, while it is true that male stars have often built public personas based on traditionally masculinist traits and the degradation of women (Graebner, 2000; Whiteley, 1997), it is also true that some of these styles have sometimes been labelled sexist because of their underclass status.

Reggaeton originated as an underground hybrid music style recognizable by its 'dembow' rhythm and influenced by reggae, rap, hip-hop and other Latin music styles such as bachata and merengue (Pacini, 2014). Its origins, dating from around the 1990s, are still under debate (Marshall, 2008; Pérez, 2014), but most accounts locate them in Puerto Rico or Panama (Gallucci, 2008; Pacini, 2014), revealing its transnational nature (Marshall, 2008). In its early years of existence, it was considered an underground style also used to perform lyrical wars between gangs, with violent lyrics that were forbidden by the Puerto Rican authorities (Gallucci, 2008). Some authors also underline its racialized and underclass status as being a cultural manifestation able to visibilize subalternity and, echoing Anderson, to build an alternative 'imagined community' (Rodríguez, 2016). This music style rapidly spread from peripheral marginalized sectors of society towards the middle classes, becoming

one of the most popular music styles of South and North America and Europe. In the process, it lost its underground, stigmatized status to become a mainstream product for a pan-Latin community (as represented by artists such as Daddy Yankee, Ivy Queen and Don Omar). ‘Machismo’ remained one of its core traits, but moved from a racialized homophobia to a male gaze towards women (Marshall, 2008). Its lyrics, often full of sexual comments, and its sexualized ‘doggy’ dance style or ‘perreo’ (Lira-Beltrán, 2010; Rivera, Marshall & Pacini Hernández, 2009) are combined with New York gangster clothing for men and scanty, sexy clothes for women (Gallucci, 2008). Men are represented as excessively hypermasculine (Dávila, 2016) and, following Ramos (2015), reggaeton’s lyrics involve ‘1) verbal violence against women, 2) sexual objectification of women, 3) objectification of women to prove men’s masculinity, 4) women as willing participants of violent sex acts, and 5) demeaning representation of female femininity’ (pp. 68–69), thus promoting rape culture and male domination. These dehumanized, objectified depictions of women are usually the counterpart to the male artists’ voices and their hypermasculine performances (Dávila, 2016; Nieves Moreno, 2009).

Some authors, however, contend that accusations of sexism are an oversimplification of the meanings produced in reggaeton. Rodríguez (2016) maintains that while there is sexist imagery in reggaeton songs, there is also a subversion of bourgeois romantic love and an assumed active participation of women in the pleasures of sex. Dávila (2016) argues that women can use reggaeton to promote their sexual entrepreneurship (and benefit from self-objectification) and subvert traditional ideas of respectability, providing a feminist discourse without denying the pleasures of vibrating dance and desirability. Through an analysis of some of the most popular reggaeton songs of 2005, Gallucci (2008) argues that although the lyrics describe women by reproducing traditional stereotypes (as sexual predators, unfaithful beings, victims of male cruelty or desired partners), it is also true that women’s voices have actually a presence in these hits. Also, she states that words such as ‘bitch’ or ‘killer’, often attributed to women, are used without a derogatory tone within the genre’s codes (p. 97). Báez’s analysis of Ivy Queen’s career reveals how artists like her are able to present self-confident female subjectivities and feminist lyrics, yet at the same time fulfil the contradictory need to sexualize her image (and whiten it) to comply with hegemonic feminine beauty standards, including plastic surgery (Báez, 2006).

## **Feminist Voices**

Women have long been part of the worldwide music industry, yet Anglo Saxon artists have gained more academic attention than the rest, probably because of their hegemonic position in the international market. Besides many individual singer-songwriters, there have been collective appropriations of different music styles by women who deliberately reconvert their meanings. Some of these initiatives have led to internationally well-known movements like Riot Grrrl punk bands and the more controversial appearance of commercial girl bands like the Spice Girls (Kearney, 1997; Leonard, 1997, 2007). As one of its main examples, the Riot Grrrl movement, headed by bands such as Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy and The Slits, prompted the debate about the possibility of constructing alternative femininities from masculine spaces,

which until then included the punk scene (Gottlieb & Wald, 1994). Their lyrics covered subjects that were relevant to women but had been silenced until that point, such as sexual assaults, eating disorders and self-hate (Schilt, 2003). Bands like L7 in the alternative hard rock scene also challenged hegemonic gender relations (Schippers, 2000). The repercussions of these bands are still clear in international music festivals and events (Downes, 2012), and some of their ideas were appropriated by what in the United Kingdom was called 'angry women in rock' (Schilt, 2003). Trier-Bieniek (2013) also describes the subversive power of reinterpreting well-known songs and styles using Tori Amos's cover of the sexist song *Bonnie & Clyde*, originally written by hip-hop singer Eminem: 'This reappropriation of a misogynistic song made these concerts more aggressively based in antipatriarchal sentiments. Tori's performance of the song was a slowed-down, spoken-word recreation and was backed by a symphony.' This strategy, according to Trier-Bieniek (2013), '... allowed her to draw out the genuinely disturbing lyrics describing Eminem slitting his wife's throat and tossing her body into Lake Michigan while their toddler daughter watches' (p. 3).

Likewise, some Spanish women who felt uncomfortable with the current repertoire of contemporary popular music are following the stages and echoing what other movements did before, except with the styles that were the *bête noire* of their time. These women form part of groups of cultural participation identified by common interests and tastes, also known as subcultures. Youth subcultures have been crucial to the consumption and production of different music styles since popular culture was first to be considered seriously in cultural studies (Frith, 1968; Hall & Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 2005). Authors such as Feixa and Guerra (2017) have dealt with the importance of the music and arts produced and distributed within these groups in the identity (re)structuring and social inclusion of many youths. Thus, there has been recognition of the central role that music plays in the formation of young people's identities and political participation through practices such as composing, playing, rehearsing, recording, sharing and consuming music. Some of the most fertile grounds for studying meanings have been the lyrics and sounds of the songs, as well as the performances of rock and pop celebrities who have been influential in young people's identity-building processes.

As far as most of the research into music and young people's identities is concerned, feminine experiences have been largely ignored or reduced to what has been called 'the bedroom culture' (Kearney, 2007; McRobbie & Garber, 1975). Thus, women's participation in the popular music scene has been considered passive, complementary or secondary to the male-centred, active notion of subcultures and music-interest groups. Women in these spheres have been defined, usually derogatively, as fans, groupies, girlfriends or collectors of male-band merchandising (Trier-Bieniek, 2013). Only a feminist revision of subcultural studies has shown that women should always have been taken into account as main actors in most of the traditionally studied youth groups—mods, motorbike girls and hippies (McRobbie & Garber, 2007); yet research that considers women as relevant participants in subcultures and popular music is still scarce and mainly based on flagship activist movements like the Riot Grrrls (Downes, 2012; Kearney, 1997).

Based on the case of singer-songwriter Tori Amos and her own experience as a fan, Trier-Bieniek (2013) explores how female listeners can develop a feminist consciousness through an artist's activism. She argues that presenting women as thinking individuals challenges patriarchy because it makes it clear that they

‘do not need to stare at attractive men on a stage’ (Trier-Bieniek, 2013: 129). Instead, they might be empowered by a collective musical consumption of female artists.

Digital technologies have contributed to the democratization of music production. If the DIY spirit contained in punk culture (Bittencourt & Guerra, 2018) allowed women the confidence to carry out an assault on the masculinized scene, now the digital spirit provides a sense of empowerment for women when producing music from their own (or a friend’s) room. Ms Nina, Brisa Fenoy and Tremenda Jauría all blend private and public experiences when producing and disseminating their music. By using easily available musical means, they have found a way to convey their feminist commitment.

## **Methodology: Studying Feminist Reggaeton**

Our research studies young people’s uses and ways from the standpoint that these individuals are fully fledged citizens (or, at least, so much so as their adult counterparts; Oliart & Feixa, 2012). In doing this, we follow a tradition that seeks to understand youth subjectivities and creative forms of social participation as meaningful in their own (Feixa, Ospina, & da Silva Araújo, 2014). Specifically, we aim to understand how young feminist reggaeton artists empower themselves through this music style and analyse the strategies they use to turn an otherwise sexist register into a feminist medium. In order to do so, we set out the following research questions:

1. What is the definition of femininity and the context of sexual relationships that most agrees with the female identity described in the music lyrics and performances by mainstream reggaeton feminist music projects?
2. What kind of references to feminism and gender equality are put forward by these artists in their song lyrics and their public appearances?

After reviewing the whole feminist reggaeton scene, we chose as our cases for studying three music soloists and bands, all of them young artists under 30, who are producing feminist reggaeton in Spain and have reached significant success among young audiences: Brisa Fenoy, Ms Nina and Tremenda Jauría. Other reasons to select these three cases were: 1) Brisa Fenoy wrote the second most downloaded song from iTunes Spain in 2018 (‘Lo malo’), which was the 11th most streamed song on Spotify global; 2) Ms Nina has been labelled as the ‘Queen of the Reggaeton’ in the Spanish media; and, 3) Tremenda Jauría plays regularly sold-out concerts in alternative music venues and define themselves as a DIY band with a feminist and anticapitalist commitment.

To delimit our object of study, three well-known songs were selected and analysed in depth through a close reading of the lyrics. We have also scrutinized public declarations and media interviews to contextualize the artists’ discourses. The analysis is guided by a qualitative method and informed by a feminist approach (Van Zoonen, 1994) based on theoretical categories. The analysis of the material has been triangulated by three different researchers (Denzin, 1978). The analysis takes the disruptions of the normative regime of representation of masculinities and femininities as strategies to politicize reggaeton. We are interested in both the definition of the feminine identity put forward by these musical expressions and the sexualities

they promote or challenge, as well as in the dialogue with the current debates in feminism they involve. To answer our research questions, we deal with an axis of analysis (rather than fixed categories) related to feminist topics: discourses on submission versus independence/male gaze versus queer gaze/aesthetical empowerment versus political empowerment/self-objectification versus non-self-objectification.

## Results

### *Reggaeton Against Normative Masculinity—Brisa Fenoy*

Brisa Fenoy is a model, composer and singer. She has become very popular in Spain since writing a cover of ‘Bad Boy’ (a trap song by Morgan and Will Simms) at the request of Universal and Gestmusic for the talent show ‘Operación Triunfo’. This is the origin of the hit ‘Lo malo’, which reached number one in Spotify’s Spanish list and number six in the global list. The track also won a double platinum disc and a digital gold disc. Nevertheless, it was not selected to represent Spain in the 2018 Eurovision Song Contest. Composer Brisa Fenoy has declared in many interviews that she listens to mainstream music styles, which she considers to be a way of reaching young people who are disconnected from politics. She argues that political content needs to be translated into a chewable and attractive product (El Periódico, April 2018<sup>2</sup>). She defines ‘Lo malo’ as a feminist anthem (Mundo Deportivo, May 2018<sup>3</sup>) in opposition to the genre’s predominant machismo (Marshall, 2008; Ramos, 2015). She thinks this is one way to reverse the pejorative image of women in reggaeton and trap music and highlight the positive elements of female agency, while at the same time producing a song that can be sung and listened to on radio stations and in clubs: ‘What better message than this to spread across the country?’ (Vertele, January 2018<sup>4</sup>). She contends that ‘there was a great need to write a reggaeton song about our independence and autonomy, about the fact that we do not need a man. With this song I’m not saying that people are disposable, but that women should be valued more highly because we’re the ones that are most used and tossed aside’ (Yasss, March 2018<sup>5</sup>). In fact the lyrics of ‘Lo malo’ were used in the demonstrations of 8 March 2018 and printed on special-edition shirts signed by fashion brands.

In ‘Lo malo’, Brisa Fenoy tackles one of the subjects of recent debate among Spanish feminists: the attraction attached to the aggressive model of masculinity. The implicit that ‘proper men’ should be tough is so pervasive that it becomes present even in some cultural depictions of caring masculinities (Araüna, Tortajada, & Willem, 2018). This pattern of representation has become established in popular culture and is broadly accepted (Figueras-Maz, Tortajada & Araüna, 2014) also as an icon of contemporary popular music, particularly reggaeton. In ‘Lo malo’, Brisa Fenoy resignifies an old saying (the convenience of finding ‘a good boy’, who would be the right person for a ‘happy life’) to challenge the contemporary popularity of the ‘bad boy’. Thus, when the composer writes in the distinctively repetitive style of reggaeton that ‘I sure won’t go for a bad boy, no, no, no/out with the bad, no, no, no/I don’t want anyone bad, no, no, no/never the bad, no, no, no’, she is reversing a well-established trend in how flirting and popularity dynamics are understood. This dimension is especially relevant since the song is not only in the charts but also danced to in clubs.

In the song, we also find a defiance of the postfeminist-exploited notions of choice and empowerment. Post-feminism is a complex frame of analysis that describes the representation of new femininities in a process of mediatization based on an instrumental use of a feminist lexicon and notions that appear, however, devoid of political content (Araüna, 2012; Gill, 2011; McRobbie, 2004). In postfeminist representations, even if women are portrayed as assertive, self-assured and goal-oriented achievers (Dobson, 2015), their empowerment is connected and framed by consumer culture and resembles a mere lifestyle (Lotz, 2001). Their ability to choose is linked to a desire (and ability) for self-objectification and the achievement of traditional standards of beauty (Gill, 2007). Postfeminist representations are an essential part of mainstream culture, and are only partly contested from alternative media spaces and regional popular music production (Araüna, 2013).

Brisa Fenoy highlights an idea of empowerment that is limited to the self-regulation of the body and self-objectification, and in this regard produces an exercise in what Hall (1997) called the rupture of the regimes of representation, through a contest from within. The empowerment in 'Lo malo' is associated with independence and self-affirmation—'I'm gonna get out/no more pretending/no more serving/the night is mine/it's not some man's'—the courage to break off harmful relationships—'Just by losing you I won'—and self-affirmation and self-esteem: 'I decide when, where and who with/I'm going to give back to myself, again and again/what I took away that was so much of me, that was so little to you'. Thus, empowerment is not just cosmetic but also acquires a political level in which feminist demands such as 'the night is ours' and 'the right to decide' were appropriated by the feminist demonstrations of 8 March by turning some of the verses of the song into banners. However, the music video of the same song broadcast by the talent show *Operación Triunfo*, featuring contestants Aitana and Ana Guerra, shares some of the postfeminist patterns of representation, especially those involving the normative beauty and sexualization of young female singers. This visualization of 'Lo malo' highlights the contradictions of commercial culture, which favours certain (very limited) feminine subjects over others.

Something similar happens with the polysemic and controversial line 'I'm the bad one' (*pa mala yo*) with which the song ends, which has become popular on branded fashion shirts and conjures up the battle of the sexes and gender reversal proposals. However, we should not overestimate this clichéd assertion. Brisa Fenoy has made clear on numerous occasions her desire to include males in the transformations and the feminist struggle, with the aim of spreading the message of 'Lo malo' beyond feminism while continuing to denounce machismo in different social spaces such as sexual and affective relationships and the music industry.

### *From Prejudice to Pride—Ms Nina*

Ms Nina was one of the first women to make reggaeton in Spain. She became well known for composing music for a commercial full of memetic expressions that entered the everyday language (with 'Of course, beautiful'/*Claro que sí, guapi* being the most notorious). She claims to have her own style and the subcultural affiliation of being a *choni* or *cani*, a derogatory term for working-class people, therefore supposedly lacking in cultural competence and finesse. This is a Spanish label similar to the 'chav'

designation analysed by Jones (2011) and especially stigmatizing for women and their sexuality (Willem, Araüna, & Tortajada, 2018; Moreno-Segarra & Bernárdez-Rodal, 2017). On numerous occasions, Ms Nina has publicly advocated sexual freedom, the freedom to show herself and her body as she wants to, and the power to resignify derogatory words like 'slut'. Thus, she defines her music as 'feminist, fun, free, because I say what I want, and also a little bit "cani"'. (El Confidencial, April 2016<sup>6</sup>). In the same way, as she aims to positivize terms like 'slut', she adopts the cani aesthetic (Willem, Araüna, & Tortajada, 2018) as a vindication of the ability to build a trash femininity that transgresses the canon.

For Ms Nina, reggaeton serves to talk about whatever she wants and to break stereotypes, since, according to her, having fun and demanding reappraisal are not at odds with each other: 'You can say all kinds of nonsense with no meaning or sing 'I am a princess and not a slut' (El Confidencial, April 2016). She describes her songs as feminist texts but, like other celebrities, is more cautious when she describes herself. Thus, she attributes the feminist intent less to herself than to the readings of audiences and those who consider her a feminist: 'I don't say "I am super-feminist", I say I'm a girl who makes music and does whatever she wants. But I think that even if not intentionally, this can be considered "feminist", right?' (Jenesaispop, November 2017<sup>7</sup>). She also downplays some of her actions, like distributing stickers with the word 'bitch' or collaborating with King Jedet, a genderfluid artist with whom she has made big hits. To her, these activities are not strictly political, but emerge as a result of the individual freedom to do 'what you want'.

Overall, Ms Nina represents herself and other women as agentic beings or, in the words of Trier-Bieniek (2013), being able to challenge patriarchy. In songs like 'Reinas', Ms Nina transcends the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) by displaying a queer gaze. Hence, she recovers for herself (and for other women and genderfluid people) the power to produce meaning while at the same time questioning the objectification that results from the pleasures of looking, as constructed by the patriarchal representational order. This break with the positions of helplessness and victimization in which women are situated allows Ms Nina to express a feminine desire without falling into the trap of internalizing heterosexual male desire and gaze, and resisting postfeminist self-objectification (Gill, 2007). She manages to exhibit herself in a sexual way and 'perrear' (*doggy dancing*) from a position created by herself that defies the genre's codes. Through the lyrics of her songs and the images of her music videos, she goes beyond objectification or self-objectification. In 'Reinas', Ms Nina reasserts herself as an independent woman who is able to express her desires and triumphs—'I've got money because I work/you want it easy/I do it slowly'—without renouncing either solidarity or pleasure, which are represented as compatible drives: 'We are all queens/the secret is in strength/come enjoy with us/if you don't like me, there's the door/these things happen, daddy/these things happen, mommy/Go down/dance, enjoy/go, down, down, down'.

Another act of resistance to the male gaze found in 'Reinas' is the importance given to King Jedet (genderfluid) and the partial response made to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) through most of the characters in the music video. These visibilize transsexual and gay identities using mainstream codes in a context of positive non-commercial images. Through individual performances, it is possible to recognize non-man and non-woman genres that denaturalize the very concept of gender as an imperative binary. To the chant of 'I have a beard and I wear makeup/I'm a

guy in a dress', Ms Nina shows us that what matters is how every person decides to exhibit their gender, which is not something biologically given but something constructed through interrelation and exhibition in front of the others (Goffman, 1979), who are expected to respect it.

This dual feminist action that, on the one hand, aims to conquer the space of the symbolic to undermine the patriarchal subconscious that manifests itself in the gaze, and on the other aims to show that gender and sexuality are social constructs, is presented interconnectedly in 'Reinas'. In the music video, all forms of corporeality are far from the normative codes of beauty and exhibit gender as something that individuals are able to modulate beyond boundaries, thus making clear the fragility of essentialist and binary conceptions. The 'different' is shown as desirable, and the hyperfemininity of King Jedet opens the door to a masculine femininity that, together with the other characters in the video, delineates the diversity to that we should aspire. The statement 'We are all queens' summarizes this exercise of resignification and empowerment, in which whoever plays/sings/dances the song (which can be anyone) overcomes the victimization deriving from binary and heteronormative patriarchal judgement—'Put on the lipstick/get out of the cave'—and alludes to a potential attacker: 'You feel like God but you're like anybody/I'm different and that bothers you/your criticism only shows your frustration'.

Ms Nina challenges anyone who listens and dances to her to assertively reject everything that causes suffering: 'If you don't like me, why are you bothering me?' and 'If you don't like me, there's the door'. These are examples of self-affirmation and self-esteem, which are repeated throughout the song, combining the political with the festive: 'Being all the same isn't interesting/life's too short to worry/get out of bed and go dancing/move that ass and let them talk/no need to look like anyone/let yourself go'. 'Reinas' is a song that Ms Nina wrote thinking about her fans, with the aim of reversing common offenses of patriarchy (for being a guy in a dress, or being fat ...) and preventing these stereotypes from restricting diverse identities. The song reads 'Your insults, my tickle' and Ms Nina is proud that these lines and images might help her fans reject normativity, feel better about themselves ... and express it.

### *Changing Things Up!—Tremenda Jauría*

Tremenda Jauría is a quartet that fuses cumbia-punk with reggaeton and electronic music to create a style of electrocumbia. In addition to music, they share other political and life projects. In their performances and songs, dancing is presented as a form of self-affirmation and independence ('Esta noche') and 'perreo' is resignified through association with rebellion and a very critical view of the socioeconomic system ('Vamos sobradas'). In all cases, there is an explicit feminist discourse—'We're feminists dancing reggaeton/we don't need no thug/don't think you're invited if they haven't even looked at you' ('Vamos sobradas')—which is not at odds with partying and having fun: 'Why wouldn't we be reggaetoneras, if our whole life is lived hip rolling' ('Con tol deskaro'). To them, reggaeton is today's equivalent of what punk meant as a disruptive style, and they celebrate the fact that now it is not only a sexualized style but also a political music style (Público, February 2017<sup>8</sup>). Reggaeton becomes a 'way of roaring', a place where it is possible to combine tropical sounds with dissident European urban voices ('Guerrilerxs Madriz'), and a

conscious choice of Latin identities as opposed to hegemonic Anglo-Saxon cultural references, thus breaking musical hierarchies. Contesting from within (Hall, 1997) the Latin rhythms through their rewriting of the lyrics and their onstage performance, Tremenda Jauría resignify a genre that is one of the usual suspects of machismo. Yet other genres considered more refined usually manage to shake off this criticism, despite a similar stereotyping and degradation of women (Gallucci, 2008; Marshall, 2008; Ramos, 2015). Here, we can observe how lyrics and other meaningful body languages carry a political stance that can be read over genre codes. For Tremenda Jauría, sexist or any other kind of exclusionary content substantially diminishes the musical value of a song, and the band argue they are sick of the macho stench emanating from many well-known or mainstream songs (El Confidencial, May 2016<sup>9</sup>).

‘You are not my daddy’ conveys many of the messages contained in other songs by the band. First of all, a contesting from within (Hall, 1997) is stated as a way of denouncing the position assigned to women in reggaeton and other Latin rhythms: ‘Not mommy, nor chati, nor pretty, nor beautiful/my name is not baby, your shitty lyrics don’t represent us, let’s see if you realize/you’re not my daddy, you’re not my daddy, you’re not my daddy’. Another strategy for breaking with the regime of representation in reggaeton that can be seen in this song is the creation of positive images (Hall, 1997): ‘Brave women taking a step forward/taking the stage, we won’t stop/and you’ll find us on the dance floor’. Another tactic to subvert discriminatory representations is to occupy both (seemingly exclusive) positions, that of ‘mommy’ and that of ‘daddy’, thus taking the masculine space as part of a strategy of self-assertion and visibility of the constructed positions of power: ‘Since I am also daddy if I decide to be [...] like I say, you are also mommy even though you thought you were daddy’.

‘Tú no eres mi papi’ builds an empowered image of women that transcends post-feminist representations that, even when promoting powerful and active femininities (Gill, 2008), cannot avoid including them in a discursive framework that often pornifies them (McRobbie, 2004), leaving the visual codes of patriarchy intact (hooks, 2012). Therefore, women’s strength comes from courage (‘I take a step forward’), from self-affirmation (‘I decide to sing and to dance’), from defending equality (‘Either we’re partners or you haven’t understood’) and from independence (‘in your little world you’re not my relative, my owner or my manager’), but not from aggressivity (Gill, 2008). This characterization is aligned with representations of strong, independent women who no longer submit themselves to domestic inequalities or romantic relationships (Blackman, 2006).

The song gathers the manifold feminist achievements and demands regarding women’s agency. Tremenda Jauría promotes empowerment while avoiding the revictimization of women, but also challenging the victim-executioner binarism and, above all, invalidating the postfeminist strategy of gender role reversals that depict women as figures empowered through violence (a model based on the concept of the battle of the sexes) and sexualization. The competitiveness, regrets and, at the same time, the erotic attraction typical of heterosexual affective relationships in mainstream culture (Gill, 2008) find a response in ‘Tú no eres mi papi’: ‘Not daddy, not mine, not anybody’s, not hers, [...] you’ll be something of your own if that’s what you want [...] sometimes active, sometimes passive/let’s play yin and yang with your feminine side/do you feel it?, I feel it’. In addition, the insolence of the (feminine) first-person voice is not associated with aggression or obstinacy, nor with the

kind of violence that confers glamor (Wang & Petula, 2007), but with rebellion and a demand for rights: 'people be alert, I came without a boss, without a busybody to affect my existence/you're not my daddy, I'm your elixir'.

In short, our analysis of feminist reggaeton lyrics and related material suggests that the young Spanish women that participate in the creative projects analysed here have adopted this music style as a tool for constructing songs of protest that strive to go beyond normative cultural representations. The fact that reggaeton is understood by society as a sexist music style means that, when it is sung by young, feminist women, it forms a counterpoint which makes the global sense of these songs more strikingly subversive than they might be otherwise. In such a context, these results point to these women's creative ability to appropriate supposedly male chauvinist music genres to produce socially committed songs; thus, popular music and genre codes become a medium for young women to express a variety of meanings. This implies that young people's cultural products might gain scholarly attention as relevant signs of cultural resistance and change; like in this case, the rise of a feminist consciousness that exposes the continuing pervasiveness of gender inequalities.

## Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have argued and shown that the young female artists we have studied have the ability to take on a traditionally male sexist musical style such as reggaeton and resignify its form and meaning, thereby turning it into a feminist tool. In order to make these claims, we have drawn upon our research into three different female reggaeton projects based in Spain (Brisa Fenoy, Ms Nina and Tremenda Jauría) to describe how an increased feminist consciousness among these young artists operates in the lyrics and performances of a section of the Spanish music industry. We have found how these three young creative projects not only use music as a tool to promote their members' ideas but also how they are likely to use digital tools for self-promotion and for the dissemination of their messages. The verses of the songs analysed were displayed in banners in the massively attended feminist demonstrations that took place in Spain in 2018, and are a promising material to dig into in future research on young audiences in relation to social change.

Coinciding with global trends, we see different ideologies on gender and sexuality in these music products, in a context in which feminism has gained a new yet contradictory visibility that includes many versions of feminism (Gill, 2016a). In our three cases in particular, we have detected Ms Nina and Brisa Fenoy, a commercial duo of artists who became well known to audiences through a self-promoting use of social networks such as YouTube and Instagram and some appearances in the mainstream media. Broadly speaking, these artists tend to be aligned with a liberal-feminist view of gender and sexuality, advocating the individual freedom of women, a demand suitable for mainstream media. Their songs express the willingness of young women to be relevant subjects in the music scene and to use their attractiveness as a tool for empowerment. The typical dance-style associated with women in reggaeton, 'perreo', is resignified in terms of a subjectification of its motivations and gratifications (the frame of the discourse being that women choose to 'perrear' because they enjoy it, makes them feel attractive, and therefore they want to be free to do it without being degraded by men). With their liberal views, many of these

songs contain a vindication of equal rights and, in some cases, an opposition to sexist violence (a pedagogical case is ‘Lo malo’, the song by Brisa Fenoy mentioned earlier). This group of artists may or may not self-align openly with feminism<sup>10</sup> and might not necessarily have a solid theoretical background in feminism, yet their demands coincide with the most basic claims of the feminist cause and they have ultimately assumed so.

Then there is a feminist reggaeton produced in or for collective alternative spaces, which is represented in our study by Tremenda Jauría. Their recordings show a much more conscious and situated use of feminism both in their statements and their articulation. Their songs are normally aligned with—or aware of—old-school and contemporary theoretical debates within the local feminist movement, tackling issues such as the need for self-defence and to take collective action to reverse sexist power relations. Uttering forbidden and taboo words (from a heteropatriarchal perspective) becomes in these singers an act of visibilization and rebellion in itself. These songs also show a much more intersectional approach to feminism, something interwoven with class, transgender and non conforming identities, nationality, race and other vectors of privilege and oppression.

Overall, these songs and performances are a manifestation of a complex underlying process, and future research should tackle the relationship of this music style with the so-called renaissance of feminist movements in Spain in the wake of the crisis that brought along more precariousness and poverty to the working classes (but especially to women and young people). Also the fact that the Law Against Gender Violence (2004)<sup>11</sup> has not achieved its goal of drastically reducing the number of women murdered and mistreated by men is one of those shocking social phenomena in Spanish society that might be a direct consequence of institutionalized misogyny, and that might also be a factor in the creative reaction of some young artists. This deserves further analysis. What it is at stake here is the renaissance of feminism and the fact that young people take the lead in this movement again after a period in which post-feminist popular culture has begun to decline (McRobbie, 2006; Gill, 2016b).

We are used to having a negative view of the ideologies shared by young people, as if they tend to reproduce negative values and inequalities. However, the significant commercial and public success of the three cases analysed here points to a commitment and engagement within the mainstream youth culture of younger generations with the debates and struggles for equality of earlier ones. The three feminist reggaeton projects we analysed acknowledge that young people still suffer gender inequality and that popular young artists are aware of it. As contradictory as feminist reggaeton artists are, the fact that ‘feminism has achieved a new luminosity in popular culture’ (Gill, 2016a: 1), and the fact that this luminosity is promoted by young artists, triggers new debates on the chances for further gender equality. If we get to elaborate on this line of research and on the observation of consumers’ practices, we are likely to appreciate in a progressive light the cultural activities of young people when they produce songs that tell of their desires, fears and wishes. Seeing these feminist songs lets us know for sure that they are still striving for equality.

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### Notes

1. ‘La Manada’ was the name of a male-only WhatsApp group of five who were taking a trip to the running of the bulls in Pamplona. Once there, they gang-raped a young woman and bragged about it in videos and other messages sent over another all-male WhatsApp chat (this one called ‘Peligro’ or ‘danger’) with 28 members. They also used the chat to boast about their sexually aggressive attitude towards women.
2. ‘Brisa Fenoy is ‘the good one’. The composer behind ‘Lo Malo’ success, performed by the voices of Aitana and Ana Guerra, is a women committed with diverse social causes’. Noelia Sastre, 14 April 2018, *El Periódico*.
3. ‘Brisa Fenoy speaks out: I would have preferred to see ‘Lo Malo’ in Eurovisión. The co-author of famous ‘Lo Malo’ considers the choreography to be too ‘sexualized’. 12 May 2018, *Mundo Deportivo*.
4. ‘Brisa Fenoy, about the controversy with Bad Boy: ‘They will be able to change whatever they want to appropriate the song’. Laura Pérez, 25 January 2018, *Vertele*.
5. ‘Brisa Fenoy, author of ‘Lo Malo’: ‘I’ve had toxic couples and I have been dominated’’. Fran Patiño, 6 March 2108, *Yasss*.
6. Ms Nina: “‘I am a princess and not a slut’”. This young woman is one of the few Spanish women making reggaeton. High voltage, sex and brazenness are the keys to a success that advocates freedom for women and has exploded with “Chupa, chupa” 17 April 2016. *El Confidencial*.
7. Ms Nina: ‘I am very happy to be one of the first women to make reggaeton in Spain’. Pablo N. Tocino. 18 November 2017. *Jenesaispop*.
8. ‘El reguetón de Maluma no es más machista que Alejandro Sanz o que Sara Montiel’. Sara Calvo, 7 February 2017, *Público*.
9. ‘Tremenda Jauría, the “perreo” that scares the PP [Popular Party: hegemonic conservative party in Spain]. The Madrid group that played a powerful set in San Isidro have published their infectious first album.’ 31 May 2016, *El Confidencial*.
10. Ms Nina said in a TV show that she felt more like someone who is ‘for equality’ rather than a feminist, while Brisa Fenoy openly describes herself as a feminist and talks about the need for the movement to be more than a superficial ‘trend’.
11. Ley Orgánica January 2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género.

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