

Bad Bunny's Transgressive Gender Performativity: Camp Aesthetics and Hegemonic Masculinities in Early Latin Trap Music

Performatividad de género transgresora de Bad Bunny: Estética camp y masculinidades hegemónicas en las primeras manifestaciones de la música trap latina

Performatividade transgressiva de gênero de Bad Bunny: Estética Camp e masculinidades hegemônicas nas primeiras manifestações da música trap latina

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Abstract: This article studies Bad Bunny's camp aesthetics as a strategy that makes visible the artificial naturalness of hegemonic masculinity of Latin trap music. The analysis shows that Bad Bunny represents a hypermasculine subject who complies with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity in Latin trap and reggaeton. On the other hand, his camp appearance disrupts the artificial boundaries between the masculine and the feminine through his ironic humor, extravagance, and theatricality. Thus, it is possible to consider Bad Bunny's gender performative as challenging the hetero-patriarchal gender expectations. Furthermore, although he denaturalizes the hegemonic masculinities in Latin trap through his incongruency, eccentricity, and theatricality, camp aesthetics rely on parodying and, by extension, reproducing normative performatives of gender.

Keywords:

Bad Bunny, trap, reggaeton, Latin music, masculinities, gender performance,

Resumen: Este artículo estudia la estética camp de Bad Bunny como una estrategia que visibiliza la naturalidad artificial de la masculinidad hegemónica de la música trap latina. El análisis muestra que Bad Bunny representa un sujeto hipermasculino que cumple con las expectativas de masculinidad hegemónica en el trap latino y el reguetón. Por otro lado, su apariencia campestre quiebra los límites artificiales entre lo masculino y lo femenino a través de

su humor irónico, extravagancia y teatralidad. Por lo tanto, es posible considerar que el performance de género de Bad Bunny desafía las expectativas de género heteropatriarcales. Además, aunque desnaturaliza las masculinidades hegemónicas en el trap latino a través de su incongruencia, excentricidad y teatralidad, utiliza la estética camp para parodiar y, por extensión, reproducir performances normativos de género.

Palabras claves:

Bad Bunny, trap, reguetón, música latina, masculinidades, género, performance

Resumo: Este artigo estuda a estética camp de Bad Bunny como uma estratégia que torna visível a naturalidade artificial da masculinidade hegemônica da música trap latina. A análise mostra que Bad Bunny representa um sujeito hipermasculino que atende às expectativas de masculinidade hegemônica no latin trap e reggaeton. Por outro lado, sua aparência campista rompe as fronteiras artificiais entre o masculino e o feminino por meio de seu humor irônico, extravagância e teatralidade. Assim, é possível considerar o desempenho de gênero de Bad Bunny como um desafio às expectativas de gênero hetero-patriarcais. Além disso, embora ele desnaturalize as masculinidades hegemônicas na armadilha latina por meio de sua incongruência, excentricidade e teatralidade, a estética do campo depende da paródia e, por extensão, da reprodução de performativos normativos de gênero.

Palavras-chave:

Bad Bunny, trap, reggaeton, música latina, masculinidades, gênero, performance

1. Introduction

This article studies Bad Bunny's camp aesthetics as a strategy that makes visible the artificial naturalness of hegemonic masculinity of Latin trap music. Hyperbolic virility characterizes the masculinity performances of contemporary mainstream Afrodiasporic (urban) Latin artists. While contemporary urban Latin artists perform violence-oriented, sex-driven, and wealth-flaunting masculinities in their lyrics and actions in music videos (Carballo Villagra, 2006), other media like promotional photos, Instagram posts, and news media coverage help construct their star image. Contemporary artists like Anuel AA, Ozuna, and Bryant Myers

reproduce the visual aesthetics of the “barriocentric macho” (Nieves Moreno, 2009) that characterizes the hegemonic masculinity performances in reggaetón. Reggaetón artists display their tough, desirable, and dominant masculinity performance through stylized confrontational poses and the use of sober streetwear, designer jackets, and shiny jewelry. However, music journalists, mainstream media outlets, and scholars recognize Bad Bunny as a celebrity that challenges the hegemonic masculine performativity in a hypermasculine and often homophobic genre (Platt, 2018; Viera 2018; Fullana Acosta, 2018; Herrera, 2019; Del Valle Schorske, 2020).

Drawing from the extravagant and eccentric camp aesthetics, Bad Bunny makes visible the artificiality of the hypermasculine performance that characterizes the mainstream celebrities in Latin trap music. An urban Latin trap artist, Bad Bunny’s gender performative is bound by the reggaetón and hip-hop genre conventions. While some of his most recent songs may address domestic violence, sexual consent, and body positivity, Bad Bunny often sings about sexual encounters with female partners, his capacity for being violent against other men, and his material well-being (Carballo Villagra, 2006). In this study, I argue that Bad Bunny’s camp exceptional individuality demystifies the naturalness of the hegemonic masculinity performance in Latin trap while simultaneously reinforcing its limits. Thus, Bad Bunny represents a transgressive masculine performance that makes visible the limits of hegemonic masculinity without disrupting or expanding them.

This article discusses Bad Bunny’s camp aesthetics as, simultaneously, a form of cultural resistance and containment. This article is structured in three parts. The first part discusses the camp resistive potentialities and the hegemonic masculinity elements in hip-hop and reggaeton music. The second part discusses the masculinity performances in Puerto Rican trap as a genre convention that responds to the industrial logic of the music business. As I discuss, Puerto Rican trap genre conventions determine the masculine performances of the artists. The third part of this article focuses on Bad Bunny’s camp aesthetic resistive potential and containment as Bad Bunny camp performance simultaneously highlights the artificiality of the hegemonic masculinity in Latin trap and reproduces it. I argue that Bad Bunny’s camp performance represents a transgressive masculinity that makes visible the limits of the hegemonic performances while it does not expand or disrupts its limits.

2. Camp Resistive Politics and Hegemonic Masculinity in Hip Hop and Reggaetón

This study is concerned with camp's resistive possibilities as an aesthetic sensibility for denaturalizing hegemonic masculinity performances in Latin trap. Bad Bunny's ironic, eccentric, and highly theatrical performance evokes a camp sensibility that can subvert the naturalized heteronormative masculinity performances in Latin trap. Parodic character, ironic humor, extravagant aestheticism, and theatricality constitute the camp sensibility (Sontag, 1964). A camp object, cultural product, or performer underscores its artificiality and incongruity between the object/performer and its context. As Cleto (1999) succinctly claims, camp "works by emphasizing or demystifying the artificiality that passes for natural" (p. 25). Here lies camp's resistive potential.

Indeed, numerous scholars have argued that camp aesthetics have the potential of disrupting naturalized discourses (Cleto, 1999; Babuscio, 1977; Dollimore, 1999; Butler, 1990; Shrugart and Waggoner, 2008). Due to camp's association with gay male culture (Babuscio, 1993), it has been theorized as an aesthetic that potentially subverts heteronormativity. Robertson (1996) argues that camp "as a performative strategy, as well as a mode of reception, commonly foregrounds the artifice of gender and sexual roles through literal and metaphoric travestism and masquerade" (p. 14). However, we must not naively interpret camp aesthetics as politics. Robertson's (1996) critical analysis of camp offers a perspective of camp's resistive potential limits. In her words, camp is "both a mode of excess and a method of containment. Camp depends on our simultaneously recognizing stereotypes as stereotypes to distance ourselves from them and at the same time recognizing, and loving, the hold and power those stereotypes have over us" (Robertson, 1996, p. 144). Thus, Bad Bunny's camp sensibility works by reproducing stereotypes and tropes that characterize the hegemonic masculine performances in hip hop and reggaeton.

Studies of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005) in hip-hop and reggaetón have focused on the hyperbolic masculine performances that characterize the genres. As Crystal Belle (2014) notes, "hip hop critics argue that the music only promotes misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and blatant hypermasculine performances" (p. 289). Hip-hop artists draw from the "badman" trope (Kelley, 1996; Perry, 2004) to assert their masculinity in their lyrical narratives as "drug dealers, hustlers, pimps, and players" (Oware, 2011, p. 25). As Matthew Oware (2011) argues, hypermasculine performance in hip hop is often portrayed through stereotypes of black

men. As Belle (2014) points out, rappers exploit these stereotypes, “playing into the gaze of the White mainstream imagination in order to make profit” (p. 289). Thus, the performance of stereotypical black hypermasculinity is an intrinsic characteristic of the commercial logics of the hip-hop genre. As Priscilla Carballo Villagra (2006) has discussed, the genre conventions of hip-hop masculinity performances influence reggaetón artists in Puerto Rico. This influence is evident in the lyrics, music videos, and star images. Priscilla Carballo Villagra’s (2006) work elucidates the hegemonic constructions of masculinity in reggaetón during the mid-2000s. As a Costa Rican studying Puerto Rican reggaeton artists, Carballo Villagra (2006) calls attention to the national, geographical, and local dimensions that characterize the Puerto Rican rappers’ performance of masculinity. Studying the lyrics and visuals of the most played reggaetón music videos on Costa Rican TV, Carballo Villagra (2006) argues that reggaeton artists display three main “self-images”¹ of themselves: 1) the sexually driven heterosexual Latin American *macho*, 2) the violent man against threats to his dominance, and 3) the man who demonstrates his material well-being. As I note below, Bad Bunny’s gender performative simultaneously denaturalizes and reproduces the hegemonic masculinity performances of reggaeton and hip-hop.

3. Methodology

Although the study of masculinities in hip-hop and reggaetón has focused on the discursive formations in their artists’ lyrics and narratives in music videos, stardom studies offer a unique approach to studying masculinity as part of the structured polysemy of star images (Dyer, 1998). As Suzanne Leonard and Diane Negra (2018) note, “a central insight arising from the early “wave” of intellectual inquiry into the cultural functions of stardom is that star personae are “always intertextual and syncretic” (in Richard deCordova’s phrasing) sustaining a “coherent consciousness” over and above individual roles and appearances” (p. 219). Studying music artists’ songs or music videos as stand-alone objects limits a comprehensive analysis of their intertextual relation with other paratexts. Popular music stars exist outside of their songs and music videos. Ancillary texts like interviews, magazine publications, marketing materials, YouTube reaction videos, online fan interactions, official social media accounts, and other sites produce and circulate cultural meanings about the star. These texts constitute a complex relation of meanings associated with the star’s image in a specific historical moment. Thus, this research

¹ Translated from the Spanish. The original term is *autoimagen* which is literally translated as “autoimage”.

studies Bad Bunny's masculinity performative as constructed through intertextual relations of several texts.

Bad Bunny's star image comprises various texts, including his music, videos, social media presence, publicity, and media coverage. From his SoundCloud rapper days to his multimillion artist-brand empire, Bad Bunny has gone through many different stages in his career. As Richard Dyer (1989) reminds us, "the image is a complex totality, and it does have a chronological dimension" (emphasis in the original text) (p. 63). In this research article, I study Bad Bunny's star image during his time under the Hear This Music label. Under Hear This Music, Bad Bunny had his breakthrough moment as the poster-boy of Latin trap in the Latin American, European, and US markets. Throughout this period, Hear This Music managed Bad Bunny's career opportunities, artist-brand, and star image. Thus, this research project focuses on Bad Bunny's star image since his popular debut song "Diles" in February 2016, until before his release of "Estamos Bien" in June 2018².

In the following pages, I discuss how Bad Bunny embodies the ironic, eccentric, and highly theatrical characteristics of camp aesthetics. As I note, through his emphasis on artifice, Bad Bunny denaturalizes the masculinity performances in Latin trap. However, camp's resistive potential is contained by relying on familiar stereotypes or tropes that reproduce hegemonic masculinity discourses in Latin trap music. Thus, the second part of this analysis focuses on Bad Bunny's reproduction of hegemonic masculinity performances that characterize Latin trap. Using Carballo Villagra's (2006) categories of hegemonic masculinity in reggaeton, I go over Bad Bunny's discourses that reproduce tropes like the "Latin American" macho, the violent badman, and the wealth flaunting artist.

4. Masculinities in Puerto Rican Trap: History and Genre Conventions

The hegemonic masculine performances in Puerto Rican trap music result from genre conventions characterizing trap music as different from other genres in the music industry. Although hegemonic masculinities in Puerto Rican trap are similar to those in the early days of reggaetón (Carballo Villagra, 2006), the explicit lyrical content differentiated the trap genre from the sanitized lyrics of contemporary reggaetón music. Puerto Rican trap hybridized the musical

² It is estimated that Bad Bunny broke up with "Hear This Music" during this period because "Estamos Bien" is the first song where the record label does not own the copyrights, nor they are mentioned in the song.

aesthetics of trap music with thematic narratives found in reggaetón music. Just like reggaetón artists, Puerto Rican trappers portrayed a sexual-driven, violence-oriented, and wealth-flaunting masculine performance (Carballo Villagra, 2006). In contrast to contemporary reggaetón music, the trap scene distinguished itself for its violent, vulgar, and sexually explicit lyrics. However, as I discuss below, the Puerto Rican trap genre conventions are intrinsically tied to the industrial logics of the music business.

The rise of Puerto Rican trap coincided with the rapid adoption of streaming technologies, which catapulted reggaetón music as a global mainstream genre. As music journalist Elias Leight (2017) argues, the increasing popularity of Latin music -particularly reggaeton- resulted from a synergistic relationship of various factors. In Leight's (2017) words, "Increasingly widespread adoption of streaming services in the Latin American market coincided with those services honing their playlist approach, allowing them to concentrate their considerable muscle on catapulting tracks into global ubiquity. Latin American acts have also relied more on collaboration in recent years, allowing artists to pool their fan bases and enhance the effects of streaming's power."

The rapid adoption of streaming services -like Spotify and YouTube- in Latin America during the early 2010s coincided with the rising popularity of Colombia based reggaetón artist like J Balvin, Nicky Jam, Maluma, and Karol G. Thus, Colombia decentered Puerto Rico (and Miami) as it became one of the leading centers of reggaeton music production (Marshall, 2009). The Colombia ballad-reggaetón style came to characterize the mainstream aesthetic. As music critic Eduardo Cepeda (2019) argues, "mainstream Colombian reggaeton marked a softening of the perreo that had once ruled the charts. The new brand of reggaeton traded hard-hitting dembow with more velvety riddims and also toned down the lyrical content by focusing on romantic lyrics". While reggaetón remained one of the most popular genres in the Latin music industry, Spanish language trap music became an appealing music style among young lower and middle-class young adults in Puerto Rico for their musical aesthetics and explicit content.

Puerto Rican trap emerged in the early 2010s as a subcultural movement responding to the industrialized, commercialized, and saturated reggaetón market (Fullana Acosta, 2018). However, unlike reggaetón music, Puerto Rican trap did not receive any airplay during 2016. While reggaetón music dominated the airwaves, YouTube, and Spotify, artists and independent record labels working in the trap scene concentrated their distribution efforts in SoundCloud and urban music websites like iPauta.com, "FlowHot.net," "Obligao.com," and "AK47Full.com".

Eventually, Puerto Rican trap artists began appearing in ad-sponsored streaming platforms like YouTube and Spotify. Although artists like Myke Towers, Fuede Billete, and Alvaro Díaz developed a trap scene through SoundCloud and social media since 2012, Puerto Rican trap music did not become a significant social, cultural, and economic phenomenon until the release of Bryant Myers, Anonymous, Anuel AA, and Almighty's song, "Esclava Remix" in 2015. Following the American trap music style, the instrumental of the song consisted of arpeggiated synth chords, airy pads, hard-hitting kicks, crisp snares, and hi-hat triplet notes. However, in contrast to American trap music, which was mainly associated with gangster narratives of gun violence and drug trafficking, sexual narratives were the thematic focus in "Esclava Remix" (2015) (Fullana Acosta, 2018).

"Esclava Remix" (2015) became the primary reference for producing the Spanish language trap genre convention in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican trap narrative *par excellence* depicts a nocturnal urban scene where the singer has a sexual encounter with a female partner, usually a married woman and/or a strip club dancer. For instance, the chorus for "Esclava Remix" summarizes the narratives that characterize Puerto Rican trap:

*"Hoy de nuevo te voy a ver, si llama pichea' el cell
pero todo callado, nos tenemos que esconder
hija de Lucifer, un demonio hecho mujer
por eso soy tu amante y de lo mío eres fiel
eres esclava de mi cama, matemos esas ganas
contigo la paso y siempre lo volvemos hacer
esto sin dejarnos ver, el secreto nadie va a saber
que matamos las ganas en el cuarto de un motel"* (Esclava Remix, 2015)

The success of "Esclava Remix" on the streets led to subsequent songs that copied the pornographic aesthetics, sexual encounter narrative formula, and depictions of male dominance through sexual conquest. Popular songs such as "Tu Me Enamoraste Remix" (November 28, 2015) by emerging artists Larry Over, Anuel AA, Brytiago, Almighty and Bryant Myers, and "Ella y Yo" (January 27, 2016) performed by the emerging artists Anuel AA, Bryant Myers, and Almighty in collaboration with urban superstars Tempo and Farruko, and "La Ocasión" (February 13, 2016) performed by Anuel AA, alongside the successful emerging artists Ozuna and veterans Arcángel and De La Ghetto followed the narrative formula and solidified the thematic approach of trap music. As the University of Puerto Rico professor Mabel Rodríguez

has pointed out in an interview, “it seems that there is a type of soft porn in these songs” (Fullana Acosta, 2018). Using the narrative vehicle of the excess and the detail (Calabrese, 1999), trap artists narrate their sexual encounters in a pornographic register. Thus, the vulgar and explicit narratives of sexual encounters serve as tropes to depict the Puerto Rican trap artists’ virility.

The genre conventions of Puerto Rican trap informed the masculinity performances of artists. They reproduced vulgar narratives where sex-driven, violence-oriented, and wealth-flaunting attitudes comprise the hegemonic masculinities. The vulgar and sexually explicit content became a precious cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) for emerging Puerto Rican trap artists as they paved the way for the increasing industrialization of their careers. Already established Puerto Rican reggaeton artists like Farruko, Arcángel, De La Ghetto, Baby Rasta, Tempo, and Zion adopted similar approaches as they ventured into the emerging subcultural scene. Thus, in this context where vulgar, excessively violent, and sexually explicit lyrics comprise the cultural capital of Puerto Rican trap music, Bad Bunny emerges as a prominent figure.

4.1 Bad Bunny: From SoundCloud Rapper to Artist-Brand

The increasing industrialization of the Latin trap genre -as exemplified by the increasing participation of well-established reggaetón artists and producers such as Farruko, DJ Luian, and Mambo Kings- coincided with Bad Bunny’s emerging career. By the time that DJ Luian and Mambo King’s released “La Ocasión” (2016), the first international Latin trap hit, Bad Bunny had only released his first popular song, “Diles” on SoundCloud (February 2016). Before becoming the famous Bad Bunny, Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio was a student at the University of Puerto Rico in Arecibo and worked at a local supermarket in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. Like other Puerto Rican trap artists, Bad Bunny grew his audiences by uploading songs to SoundCloud until “Diles” (2016) broke out as a hit on the island. According to Bad Bunny’s origin story myth, one of the Mambo Kings heard “Diles” and referred it to DJ Luian, who immediately signed Bad Bunny to their record label *Hear This Music*.

During his time under *Hear This Music*, Bad Bunny started defining his star image through his music, live performances, and, most importantly, his visual appearance. Since the early days of his career, audiences praised -and criticized- Bad Bunny for his unconventional fashion choices and self-presentation. For instance, his infamous “Flow Miami” outfit, composed

of a matching set of a pineapple patterned pink short-sleeve button shirt and shorts, marked Bad Bunny as an artist with kitsch and bad fashion tastes. A few months later, he became a fashion icon recognized for his eccentric fashion styles that set trends among the Puerto Rican youth. As his manager at the time, DJ Luian, claims “his clothes and his style, he brought that on his own. I mean, when he came to us, he was already that way. That was one of the things that caught our attention. If you go to a clothing store in Puerto Rico now, the mannequins are Bad Bunny” (Billboard, 2018a). His eccentricity and extravagance became one of the main features that differentiated Bad Bunny from the rest of the Latin trap and reggaeton celebrities. As Omar Calabrese (1999) points out, eccentricity is highly regarded value in media cultures because it confers an aura of distinctiveness from the ordinary. Indeed, his fashion became Bad Bunny’s distinctive quality, as evidenced by the media coverage in the popular press (Dominguez, 2018; Cordero, 2018), and trade publications (Estevez, 2017; Cobo, 2018)

The independent label *Hear This Music* -distributed by “Sony Latin Entertainment” (Leight, 2018)- served as an industrializing production force, digital branding agency, and as an intermediary between Bad Bunny and big act artists (Ydrach, 2017). The record label introduced Martínez Ocasio to an accelerated production workflow that afforded him to stay relevant throughout 2017 and 2018. As the Latin Vice President in *Billboard* magazine claims in 2018, Bad Bunny “is an artist that, two years ago, no one knew him, and he’s exploded, and he is releasing new music every couple of weeks” (Billboard, 2018a). Throughout 2017, Bad bunny released several songs, music videos and toured for months in Latin America, United States, and Europe. In addition, *Hear This Music* acted as a marketing agency that manufactured the fame and charisma of Bad Bunny on Instagram with daily content. As DJ Luian claims, “we took in Bad Bunny when he had 6,000 followers [on Instagram] and now he almost has 600 [thousand followers]” (Ydrach, 2017). Instagram became the artist’s most important marketing tool because he could reach his devoted fans directly by posting pictures, recording ephemeral 20-second ‘stories’, and broadcasting live transmissions as an ordinary user who shares his spectacular everyday life. Finally, *Hear This Music* served as an intermediary between Bad Bunny and other famous acts. In his early career, he accrued social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) by working with famous reggaetón artists such as Ozuna, Arcángel, Ñengo Flow, Jory Boy, De La Ghetto, Wisin, and J Balvin, among others. In addition, Bad Bunny began to enter the US mainstream market by collaborating with American pop music figures such as producer Major

Lazer, Latina singer Camila Cabello, rapper Travis Scott, Migos-member Quavo, trapper Future, producer Timbaland, mainstream artist Nicky Minaj, and rapper 21 Savage.

While 2018 was one of the most productive years for Bad Bunny's career, he had problems with his team at *Hear This Music*. He was disgruntled with the exploitative working pace, the lack of creative autonomy, and the terms of his contract. For instance, in an interview in January 2018, he jokingly said that his first memory from the *Billboard Latin Awards* was "going 24 hours without eating, I was doing media" (Billboard, 2018b). The accelerated workflow that once helped him reach his place at the top provoked feelings of depression (Ydrach, 2018). As a result, Bad Bunny, the excessively active Instagram user, disappeared from social media at the beginning of June. After disappearing for 28 days³, Bad Bunny returned to the media landscape with a highly publicized new song and music video, "Estamos Bien" (2018)⁴. After he left his former record label, Bad Bunny began a new phase in his career.

Under record label *Rimas Entertainment*, Bad Bunny has embraced his queer- and I would argue camp- aesthetics more explicitly and changed his lyrical content. Previously, Bad Bunny stirred a moral panic in Puerto Rico for his vulgar, violent, and sexist lyrics (Bonilla, 2018). In the new stage of his career, Bad Bunny sanitized his lyrics and stepped away from violent and hypersexual narratives in favor of themes like nostalgia, social commentary, queerness, and self-love. For instance, his songs are full of references to older reggaetón songs, and his music videos reference 90s aesthetics. In addition, the "Solo De Mi" music video (2018) is a social commentary on domestic violence. Furthermore, as Larissa Hernández (2020) has argued, Bad Bunny's music video "Caro" (2019) is a cultural product that carves "a queer space in the greater discourse of Latin trap music" (158). More recently, Bad Bunny has maintained his new image by invoking nostalgia in music videos like "La Difícil" (2020), playing a leading role during the "Verano del 19" protests in Puerto Rico, and disrupting gender norms while performing drag in the "Yo Perreo Sola" music video (2020). In addition to maintaining his musical career, Bad Bunny has expanded his artist-brand in other capitalist ventures. His acting role in the next season of Netflix's *Narcos* TV series, his shoe design collaboration with

³ The fact that his disappearance from social media was reviewed by several media outlets indicates

⁴ It is rumored that "Estamos Bien" (2018) marked Bad Bunny's departure from *Hear This Music* because the label did not own the copyrights to Bad Bunny's song for the first time since his debut.

sportswear brand *Adidas*, and his physically challenging work as a wrestler in the WWE signal his incursion into other areas of the entertainment business.

5. Bad Bunny's Masculine Performativity

Bad Bunny's star image became a representation of alternative forms of masculinity. As Puerto Rican professor Sarah V. Platt (2018) has argued, Bad Bunny "redefines or challenges masculine performances associated to [Latin trap]" (p. 8). Similar claims have been made in the popular press (Viera 2018; Fullana Acosta, 2018; Herrera, 2019; Del Valle Schorske, 2020). Although I agree that Bad Bunny's gender performativity has the potential to challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity in Latin trap (and reggaeton), I argue that his gender performativity only transgresses the limits of masculinity in Latin trap. As I argue below, Bad Bunny's camp aesthetics offer a potential resistive act against the reproduction of hegemonic masculinities found in Latin trap music. Through camp aesthetics, he makes visible the artificial construction of masculinity that has been naturalized by reproducing specific tropes like the pimp, the gangster, or the player. However, the denaturalizing effect of his camp performance requires the reproduction of these tropes and, by extension, maintaining them as the normative masculine form. In addition, the individualization effect of camp aesthetics constructs Bad Bunny as an exceptional case rather than the norm. Thus, while he makes visible the limits of hegemonic masculinity, he does not expand them.

5.1 Bad Bunny's Camp Visual Aesthetic

Bad Bunny transgresses the limits of masculine performance in the Latin trap genre through eccentric and extravagant camp aesthetics. Bad Bunny's gender performative draws from the genre conventions of Puerto Rican trap, digital cultures, and male fashion. Particularly, Bad Bunny emulates the gender-bending fashion and visual aesthetics of high fashion brands like Gucci (Rivera-Figueroa, 2019). Gender fluidity has been used as a marketing strategy and assimilated as a normative performance in spectacle cultures (Crepax, 2017). Bad Bunny is not the first artist to deploy aestheticized ironic approaches to gender expression. The US mainstream culture has seen the camp performances of celebrities like David Bowie, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Boy George, Lady Gaga, Lil Nas X, among others (Donnelly, 2017; Jamieson, 2007; Crepax, 2017; Vigo, 2010).

Nonetheless, it is not common to find gender-bending performances in a genre characterized by heteronormativity, sexism, and homophobia. Historically, reggaetón and hip hop artists have depicted hyperbolic hegemonic masculinity performances that reject men who are not, do not appear to be, or do not look like heterosexual men. Thus, Bad Bunny appears to disrupt the expectations of masculine performance in the Latin trap genre through his aestheticized, ironic, and theatrical camp sensibility. However, his transgressive performance requires him to reproduce the stereotypical performances that characterize the genre. Thus, it is within the limits of camp as, simultaneously, a form of resistance and a form of containment (Robertson, 1996) that we should consider camp's resistive possibilities.

Bad Bunny is known for his ironic take on the "badman trope" (Kelley, 1996) that permeates hip-hop and reggaetón genres. As Babuscio (1977) argues, "irony is the subject matter of camp, and refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or a thing and its context or association. The most common incongruous contrast is that of the masculine/feminine" (p. 41). As a Latin trap artist, Bad Bunny is expected to take on a threatening, confrontational, and hypermasculine role when he appears in the public sphere. As I note below, his lyrics and music videos reproduce the stereotypical depictions like the gangster, pimp, drug dealer, and player. In addition, the music industry expects a congruency between his masculine performances and his promotional images on his social media accounts. However, Bad Bunny appears as an incongruous individual in the Latin trap celebrity system for his eccentric attires and traditionally feminine poses. For instance, his role in the "Tu No Mete Cabra" (2017) music video mixes two different stereotypical depictions, "El Bandido" (Ramírez-Berg, 2002) and the pimp (Bonilla, 2018). Both of these representations construct violent, vicious, and threatening masculine performances. However, Bad Bunny's vibrant color clothing like his *Gucci* floral shirt with yellow shorts and his bright pink trench represent an incongruent contrast with the gender expectations that characterize the narrative tropes. Similarly, *Gucci's* gender-bending *Snake Floral Heritage* suit provokes a similar effect in Bad Bunny's *Tony Montana-esque* drug lord performance in "Chambea" (2018). In addition, Bad Bunny deploys an incongruent construction of a Latin trap artist by using traditionally feminine clothing and body decorations in his live performances, Instagram posts, and media appearances. For instance, he uses bright-colored shirts and pants, highly stylized jackets, long earing hoops, neck chokers, stoles, jumpers, and nail polished hands.

Although irony and incongruence are at the heart of camp, “incongruence must be made visible [...] in particular, typically excessive, ways for it to be coded as camp” (Shrugart and Waggoner, 2008, p. 33). Bad Bunny is a star known for his eccentric and flamboyant visual appearance. As Shrugart and Waggoner (2008) argue, “style of the exaggerated, ostentatious, outrageous sort constitutes camp, rendering a spectacle” (p. 33). The glamorousness of camp performances corresponds with the conspicuous consumption that characterizes many star images (Dyer, 1998). Bad Bunny’s over-the-top attires and extravagant accessories attract the camera lenses of paparazzi, red carpet photographers, and social media users. As a result, his exaggerated and highly stylized fashion became one of the main discussion topics in red carpet events. For instance, Puerto Rican fashion stylist has mentioned that “everyone is looking forward to witnessing Bad Bunny’s [red carpet] outfits [...] he captures the attention [of the media and audiences]⁵” (Cordero, 2018). For instance, his sensuous purple light reflecting jackets in the 2018 Latin Billboard Awards, exaggerated soft-textured fur coats, and kitschy outfit combinations exemplify Bad Bunny’s camp aesthetic as an attractive element in his career. However, more than being an attractive quality of Bad Bunny’s star image, camp aesthetics unveil the artificialness of the normative masculine performance in Latin trap through exaggeration. Through exaggerated performances, Bad Bunny evidences “the ‘off,’ of things-being-what-they-are-not” (Sontag, 1964, p. 3).

Bad Bunny’s theatrical performance emphasizes the socially constructed nature of the masculine performance in Latin trap music. His participation in live events, social media, and music videos tends to emphasize his life-as-theatre. Bonilla (2018) has already noted that Bad Bunny’s middle-class background reveals that his violent and misogynistic lyrics are fantastic narrativizations of an imagined underclass lifestyle. Nevertheless, this critical distance between the reproduction of stereotypical representations seems evident in his star performance.

Bad Bunny’s theatrical performance is evidenced in Instagram posts where he uses a Panther head, carries the WWE Heavyweight Championship belt, or brings a slice of pizza into the studio. However, the most obvious example of his theatricality is his red carpet appearance and live performance in the 2018 *American Music Awards*, where he showed up with a prosthetic third-eye on his forehead. His unnatural and highly stylized appearance emphasizes his “Being-as-Playing-a Role” (Sontag, 1964, p. 4) in the Latin trap celebrity system.

⁵ Translated from the Spanish

Through his ironic, eccentric, and theatrical performance, Bad Bunny demystifies the naturalness of the “Latin trap artist” hegemonic masculine self-image. His ironic presentation of his star persona presents a contrasting incongruence with the hyperbolic, threatening, and confrontational masculine presentation that characterizes hip-hop and reggaeton artists. His eccentric, extravagant, and excessive visual aesthetics highlight the contrasting incongruency in the genre expectations by exposing the artificialness of its arbitrary but naturalized boundaries. The juxtaposition of the narrative tropes of the Latin trap genre and the ironic, exaggerated, and theatrical performance renders visible the limits of masculine performativity in the genre. However, Bad Bunny’s camp performance singularizes him as an exceptional case among other artists. In addition, his ironic, eccentric, and theatrical performance reproduces the generic hypermasculine stereotypes. As Robertson (1996) has argued, camp serves as both a form of resistance and containment. In the following pages, I discuss the reproduction of hegemonic masculinities found in Bad Bunny’s star image.

5.2 “Diles Que Yo Me Sé Tus Poses Favoritas”: Bad Bunny as a Sexual Subject

As Carballo Villagra (2006) argues, the “self-images” constituting the masculine identity in reggaetón music is the Latin American macho, a promiscuous male who is “surrounded and desired by multiple women, always available to engage with them sexually⁶” (Carballo Villagra, 2006, p. 93). Bad Bunny has not shied away from flaunting his sexuality in his songs, music videos, interviews, and social media posts. By conquering sexual partners, men demonstrate their power as sexual subjects. As Puerto Rican anthropologist Rafael Ramírez (1991) points out, “the *macho* seduces, conquers, takes, and deploys his sexual potency” (p. 59). Throughout the conquest process, men represent themselves as sexually experienced subjects who satisfy their partners' needs. In his first popular song, “Diles” (2016), Bad Bunny conquers a woman with whom he does it “*adentro del carro,*” and he “*prende otro phillie*” while they prepare for “*el cuarto polvo.*” Nonetheless, Bad Bunny’s sexuality is not exclusive; instead, he has the power to conquer several “*babys*” after his breakup in his song “Soy Peor” (2016). Among them, we can find,

*“la blanquita que le hace lap dance,
la rockerita que se lo meto con to' y Vans,*

⁶ Translated from Spanish

*las prietas, las rubias, modelos
y eso es sin contar todas las fans”.*

Similarly, music videos for songs like “Diles” (2016), “Soy Peor” (2016), “Chambea” (2018), and many others construct the artist as surround and desired by several women. Bad Bunny represents himself as a masculine self who accrues and exercises his power by conquering and having sexual encounters with multiple women. However, women are not represented as passive or disinterested subjects in Bad Bunny’s lyrics; on the contrary, women are portrayed as active subjects who seek and enjoy sexual pleasure.

Female sexual satisfaction is an essential feature in Puerto Rican trap lyrics. Trap artists construct themselves as experienced and knowledgeable ‘sex makers’ by sexually satisfying their female partners. As Ramírez (1991) argues, “in addition to providing sexual pleasure to his female partner, the [man’s] need to drive her to an orgasm or various orgasms, responds to the representation of the man as a potent subject” (p. 62) In his music, Bad Bunny represents himself as a “sex master” who satisfies his partners’ sexual needs in “Diles” (2016):

*“Diles, que yo me sé tus pose’ favoritas
Que te hablo malo y que eso te excita
Que te hago todo lo que necesitas pa’ hacerte venir”* (Diles, 2016)

The rapper’s ability to satisfy women constructs him as a potent male and signifies his superiority among other men. The narrative formula of Latin trap tends to revolve around a sexual encounter with a married woman who is not satisfied with her partner. An unsatisfied woman “is a potential adulterous woman because she can meet up with, or search for, another man who does it better” (Ramírez, 1991, p. 62). For instance, in the Grammy awarded song “Si Tu Novio Te Deja Sola” (2017), Bad Bunny asserts his masculinity by seducing a woman whose partner does not satisfy her. Similarly, songs like “Tu No Metes Cabra” (2017) construct infidelities as masculinity devaluating practice.

5.3 “Chambea, Jala!”: Bad Bunny as a Violent Subject

In addition to the sexual narratives that characterize the Latin American macho imagery, reggaetón and hip-hop artists portray a masculine performance that evidences violence and aggressiveness against police officers, other artists, and people who disapprove of their musical aesthetics (Delgado, 2000; Belle, 2014; Carballo Villagra, 2006). Bad Bunny is no exception to the rule. Many of his songs represent spectacular narratives of ghetto life. Moreover, as I note

below, Bad Bunny adopts stereotypical roles associated with street violence, such as the gangster, pimp, and drug lord (Bonilla, 2018; Belle, 2014).

By playing the gangster and drug dealer role, Bad Bunny portrays a violent character who intimidates a ‘ghost competitor’ in his song, “Tu No Vive’ Así” (2016). Elements like onomatopoeic gun sounds and poetic images like falling bodies indicate a violent attack against figures who threaten Bad Bunny’s dominance: “*prá, prá, otro más que se cae por la fuerza de gravedad, prá, prá, otro más por si sobrevive de casualidad*” (Tu No Vives Así, 2016). Thus, Bad Bunny’s self-image reveals his violent nature and his ability to dominate his opponents physically. Similarly, Bad Bunny depicts an aggressive and dominant performance in the “Tu No Vive’ Así” music video as he infiltrates a *residencial*⁷ in an ice cream truck accompanied by his producers DJ Luian and Mambo Kings and artist Arcángel, all dressed as masked “hit-men.”

Hip hop and reggaetón artists recur to devaluating other men’s masculinities to display their power. As Ramírez (1991) reminds us, “the competition [among men] can be expressed by recurring to mechanisms that devalue other men’s masculinity” (p. 83)⁸. Through devaluation mechanisms, Bad Bunny depicts his opponent as a “pendejo,” a lesser man, and a loser compared to him. For instance, the repeatedly sampled “Tu No Metes Cabra Sarabambiche” in Bad Bunny’s “Tu No Metes Cabra” (2017) song depicts an opponent who is incapable of inciting fear, get respect, and exert their power. Similarly, Bad Bunny’s song “Chambea” (2017) alludes to his opponent’s lack of power as Bad Bunny teases him to pull the trigger: “*Chambea, jala, cabrón que no te quedan balas.*” Thus, Bad Bunny devaluates his opponent’s masculinity for lacking ammunition rounds to kill him. As Bonilla (2018) has argued, “As one listens carefully to the lyrics it becomes clear that the theme of the song is not violence, but the fake bravado of those who pretend to shoot but have no bullets”.

5.4 “To’ Lo Que Me Compro Es Original”: Bad Bunny’s Conspicuous Consumption

The third “self-image” identified by Carballo Villagra in reggaetón music is the man with “material well-being. Four recurring elements surround the artist: money, jewelry, luxury cars, mansions and women” (p. 94). Although reggaeton artists flaunt their wealth, the conspicuous consumption and luxury lifestyle characterize the broader logics of the star system (Dyer, 1998).

⁷ Low-income housing project in Puerto Rico.

⁸ Translated from the Spanish

The notion of conspicuous consumption is central to the construction of stars as successful figures. In addition, as Dyer (1998) notes, conspicuous consumption “displays not only the fact that [stars] have wealth in the scale on which they consume and their access to the canons of taste and fashion but also the fact that they do not have to work” (p. 38).

The material wealth and conspicuous consumption are evidenced in Bad Bunny’s music videos, songs, and Instagram images. Bad Bunny’s access to canons of taste takes center stage in his song “Original” (2018) with Arcángel. The song makes a clear distinction between Bad Bunny’s luxurious lifestyle and access to canons of fashion to other artists or male competitors who buy cheap imitations of luxury brands. However, the most explicit example of Bad Bunny’s conspicuous consumption is the “Chambea” (2016) music video. After being introduced by World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) legend Rick Flair in an Atlanta skyscraper rooftop, the music video moves to a tropical paradise mansion reminiscent of the classic film *Scarface*’s (1983) Cuban Tony Montana mansion set in Miami, Florida. Wearing a flamboyant Gucci “Floral Snake Heritage” suit and the WWE Heavyweight Championship belt, the *Tony Montana-esque* Bad Bunny figure enjoys a rock-star lifestyle where drug consumption and semi-nude models walking around the house are the order of the day. Additionally, his mansion is the home of a cherry-red Ferrari sports car. Similarly, sports cars are portrayed in other music videos like “Soy Peor” (2016), “Tu No Mete Cabra” (2017), Si Te Acuerdas (2018), Amorfoda (2018).

6. Conclusions: Bad Bunny’s Transgressive Masculinity

As I have discussed above, Bad Bunny constructs his star image in several media texts: his lyrics, music video, red carpet appearances, live presentations, media coverage, and social media. Complex signification systems arise when trying to interpret the intertextual relations between these texts as a coherent system. Bad Bunny’s Instagram pictures, songs’ lyrics, music video narratives, and media coverage produce apparent contradictions when trying to understand them as a coherent system. On the one hand, Bad Bunny represents a hypermasculine subject who complies with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity in Latin trap and reggaeton. On the other hand, his camp appearance disrupts the artificial boundaries between the masculine and the feminine through his ironic humor, extravagance, and theatricality. Thus, it is possible to consider Bad Bunny’s gender performative as challenging the hetero-patriarchal gender expectations. However, his status as an extraordinary figure among other artists reinforces his

position as an exceptional case. Furthermore, although he denaturalizes the hegemonic masculinities in Latin trap through his incongruity, eccentricity, and theatricality, camp aesthetics rely on parodying and, by extension, reproducing normative performatives of gender.

For this reason, I consider Bad Bunny's camp sensibility as a transgressive performativity. As Foucault (1977) states: "Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time)" (p. 34). Thus, the limit becomes visible as it is transgressed. Nonetheless, the transgression does not intentionally seek to undermine the limit; instead, its mere existence uncovers a limit that did not seem to exist before. In that regard, Bad Bunny's camp aesthetics make visible the limits of the hegemonic masculinity performance of Latin trap artists. Through his exaggerated performance, he uncovers the artificiality of the limit of masculinity in the music genre. However, its denaturalizing force does not extend the limit. Instead, it makes it transiently visible without disrupting the limits. Therefore, the resistive potential of camp is not inherent to the sensibility. Camp's resistive potential resides in the eye of the beholder.

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