

May 10, 2020

To my 16-year-old self:

I know that, even you love dancing, you don't enjoy going out dancing. Moving carelessly to foreign music seems boring for the energy you have, in your body, in your hips, in your frizzy untamable hair, in your loud lips. You love Britney and her choreographies but going out dancing should give us a feeling of release, rather than impose more structure. I know you hate it when the boys stare, and they ask your friends to dance, but they never ask you. Going out dancing should connect you with the joy of music, not with the trauma of rejection.

This will make you stop dancing. But in some years, you will have new friends who will encourage you to give it a try. And you will discover a new kind of dancing: reggaeton. You will find in this new music stimulus for your senses, a vibe closer to your roots, and a connection to the primal instinct of moving your hips to the bass beat; those big Latina hips you try so hard so hide, will now be stars of the show. There will be boys around, but you won't care. You will again, enjoy dancing.

People will question you. How can you appreciate this music that is so demeaning to women? How can you sing along to a man saying, "*grab her, hit her, whip her*"? How can you dance to a style where the main move is the *perreo*, literally "doing it like dogs"? You were not taught like this. The nuns from your school would be so ashamed. You will be conflicted, because dancing to this *does* bring you true joy, in spite of everything people (and when I say people, I mean men) tell you.

You will become a feminist. After all, a big part of your life has been about trying to end oppression you have suffered because of patriarchy. Feminism will give this fight a name, it will give you role models, it will place your struggle in the context of those that came before you, and many more around you. It will give a new lens to see the world; at times more painful, because you will see all the things that are wrong; but it will give you a community of sisters, and they will compensate the pain with hope and love.

It is the year 2020, you are 32 years old today. You still love dancing. I want to tell you that your taste for this music and your feminism are not a contradiction. Reggaeton will give you music to dance to and release tensions. It will challenge stereotypes you have been subject of. You grew up in a society where it was natural for men to have sexual desire, yet for women, it would make them seem easy and dishonorable. Reggaeton will give you a socially acceptable way to be sensual and sexual with no guilt. It will give you a language; in words and movements to speak what was vetoed for girls. It will serve as a form of protest. Reggaeton will give you back agency over your own body and your own pleasure.

Here are some of the few songs that illustrate the many things reggaeton can teach us. Enjoy.

With love,
Ingrid from year 2020.

Alive and Perreando

<https://bit.ly/AliveAndPerreando>

Dancing reggaeton as resistance and liberation in four stages

Stage one: Dancing

Quiero Bailar – Ivy Queen (2005)

Back in the first years of reggaeton, Ivy Queen was the only female representative in the genre, and she was, indeed, representing the female view in her lyrics, spreading to the world her lesson on consent:

Yo quiero bailar, tu quieres sudar

I want to dance, you want to sweat

Y pegarte a mí, el cuerpo rozar

Stick your body to me and rub

*Y yo te digo sí, tú me puedes
provocar*

*And I'm telling you yes, you can
seduce me*

*Eso no quiere decir que pa' la cama
voy*

*That doesn't mean I'm going to bed
with you*

In an almost pedagogical way, she explained that dancing reggaeton didn't imply permission to take it further, neither it gave authorization to make assumptions about women's lifestyle ("*Bailo reggaeton pero no soy chica fácil*"; "*I dance reggaeton but I'm no easy girl*") making this the hymn of feminist reggaeton.

Yo perreo sola – Bad Bunny (2020)

Fifteen years later, Bad Bunny makes a controversial take on females dancing reggaeton by themselves... while being a man. In the song, a woman sings the female part ("*Yo perreo sola*") while he describes women's careless attitude towards men:

Te llama si te necesita

She'll call you if she needs you

Pero por ahora está solita

But for now, she's alone

As the most successful reggaeton performer today, Bad Bunny recognizes the space women have gained in the genre, by joining the movement and taking advantage of it for his own success.

Barre con el pelo – Tomasa del Real (2018)

Chilean singer Tomasa del Real is one of the most relevant voices in the Neoperreo movement, a subgenre of reggaeton created by young people from poor contexts. Far from recording studios, they write, record, produce and broadcast with basic equipment in their own homes. Tomasa del Real also represents a stereotype of women more similar to the Chilean and South American average, with black thick hair, that she calls in this song to use as broom, dancing so close to the floor you can sweep with your ponytail.

Tusa – Karol G with Nicky Minaj (2019)

The hit song from the Latin summer of 2019, made the Colombian slang “Tusa” famous all over the continent. The song is about a woman that was just broken up with; and is suffering from heartache (or “tusa”). Instead of crying alone, she goes out with her friends to dance and drink to forget about her ex. It goes back to the essence of dancing as a joyous activity, that can cure sadness, and maybe, even heartbreak.

Stage two: Challenging stereotypes

Mala fama – Dana Paola (2019)

Dana Paola grew up in front of an audience, as a child actress in Mexico, playing roles of good girl. She defies traditional roles in this song by mentioning that she has a bad reputation, but really doesn't care.

Fama

Dicen que tengo mala fama

Que me enamoro por la noche

Y se me pasa por la mañana, ah

Fame

They say I have a bad reputation

That I fall in love at night

And forget it in the morning, ah

She also makes demands of the things she wants in a man, instead of waiting for one that chases after her

Yo soy exigente

Y los nenes se asustan

I am demanding

And the boys get scared

No te enamores de mi – Paloma Mami (2018)

Paloma Mami got eliminated from a Chilean reality show for insisting in singing her own material instead of covers. Less than a year later, she was singing her own songs in the local Lollapalooza. In this song, she claims “Don't fall in love with me” because she is too much too handle:

*Dime si son mis cadera' que te
ilusionan*

Porque yo sé que no perdonan

Salvaje como amazona

No existe quien me doma

Tell me if it's my hips that excite you

Because I know they don't forgive

Wild as an Amazon

There is no one who can tame me

Mayores – Becky G with Bad Bunny (2017)

In this song, Becky G explains how she likes her partners, making wordplay with older and “larger” (both “grande” in Spanish) making a not-so-subtle reference to liking men with big

penises. The song was prohibited in many radios and channels, also because she explicitly mentioned that she liked being “dirty” in bed.

*A mí me gusta que me traten como
dama*

*Aunque de eso se me olvide cuando
estamos en la cama*

A mí me gusta que me digan poesía

*Al oído por la noche cuando
hacemos groserías*

I like to be treated like a lady

*Although I forget that when we're in
bed*

I like to be told poetry

*In the ear at night when we get
kinky*

She explained in many interviews that men had been singing things like that in reggaeton for years and no one questioned them, but she received considerable backlash for this song. Nevertheless, she opened the door for songs by female reggaeton artists that became more and more explicit.

Stage three: Female pleasure

Duro y suave – Leslie Grace (2018)

Many songs of the old-school reggaeton are deemed as sexist because they present violent sex. For years, it was assumed that it was against women's wishes, without considering that they might have consented to it. In this song, Leslie Grace asks for rough sex, claiming she's not afraid to ask for it, nor receive it.

Dale suave, que me duela

Cada vez que la boca me muerde

Go softly, make it hurt

Every time you bite my lips

Dale duro, que me gusta

*Dale sin miedo que a mí no me
asusta*

Go hard, I like it

Go without fear that I'm not scared

Punto G – Karol G (2019)

Karol G literally explains that she likes to be stimulated in the G-Spot.

Downtown – Anitta with J Balvin (2017)

Less explicit in the lyrics, this song is about oral sex. There are many references to oral sex performed by women in other reggaeton songs, and this is the first one that references a man performing it to a woman, who is demanding it and guiding it, while the male is happy and willing to do it.

Stage four: Protest

Encadená – Denisse Rosenthal (2018)

Denisse Rosenthal honors her Chilean roots by giving the song a title with the local pronunciation of past-tense verbs (skipping the last syllable), and makes this a manifesto of releasing herself from the chains of patriarchy. She grew up as a child actress and has been vocal about her complex relationship with food and her body. She has used her social media platforms to make this struggle visible for her millions of teen fans.

<i>Quiero mi alma liberar</i>	<i>I want to free my soul</i>
<i>Va mi mente encadená</i>	<i>With my mind chained</i>
<i>Como en una condena</i>	<i>Like in a sentence</i>
<i>El miedo a mí ya no me va a dominar</i>	<i>Fear will no longer dominate me</i>

Mi cuerpo es mío – Krudas Cubensi (2015)

This Cuban band of feminist reggaeton takes some of the slogans from the feminist protests across Latin America and puts them together with music we can dance to, while protesting.

<i>Saquen sus rosarios de nuestros ovarios</i>	<i>Get your rosaries out of our ovaries</i>
<i>Saquen su doctrina de nuestra vagina</i>	<i>Get your doctrine out of our vagina</i>

Tu no eres mi papi – Tremenda Jauría (2016)

Tremenda Jauría is a Spanish creative collective of women who define themselves as “a herd of wild dogs that howl and roar in the heart of Madrid”. They sing in anonymity, with masks to cover their faces, about antipatriarchal and anticapitalistic politics. In this song, they take the common words to refer to men and women in reggaeton, “papi” and “mami”, claiming ownership over themselves saying “You are not my papi” and “I’m not your mami”.

<i>Ni mami, ni chati, ni linda, ni guapa</i>	<i>Neither mami, nor chati, nor linda, nor guapa</i>
<i>No me llamo nena, tus letras de mierda no nos representan</i>	<i>My name is not baby, your shit lyrics don't represent us</i>
<i>a ver si te enteras,</i>	<i>see if you find out,</i>
<i>Tú no eres mi papi</i>	<i>You are not my daddy</i>
<i>Mujeres rebeldes dando un paso al frente.</i>	<i>Rebel women taking a step forward</i>