Reality of Trap: Trap Music and its Emancipatory Potential

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Abstract:

The reality that has been presented in rap music and its celebrity culture has always been connected with two extremes: the reality of the "thug" life of the streets on the one hand and with a specific sort of "American Dream" reality that presents climbing from bottom to top on the other hand. This article explores the reasons why trap music, which originated as a type of rap music in the south of the USA, is now with its specific mixture of hedonism and nihilism, darkness and joy, becoming the music of our times. It argues that this is not a coincidence: the two-fold reality, the cruel reality of living "in a trap" on the one hand and the idealized, dreamy reality full of gold and diamonds on the other hand, is the main allegory of "real" life in late capitalism. How to get out of the trap? In the article, I investigate some crucial problems of contemporary theory regarding class and racial differences and argue that we can extract far-reaching social, political, and theoretical statements through interpretation of music that is often presented as apolitical, vacant, and of poor quality. Interpretation of contemporary development in pop culture will be combined with readings of theorists such as Foucault, Mbembe, Balibar, Marx, Moretti, and Deleuze and Guattari. I argue that identification with trap music, even if it seems conformist and non-critical, is producing paradoxical minoritarian universalism, that could, if we understand the universalization of a dream of individual success as an implicit request for egalitarian society, present certain emancipatory potential.

Keywords: Trap music, universalism, race, class, becoming, identification, American Dream

Introduction

Usage of the word trap in contemporary media and public-speech is very diverse. This, sometimes, causes misunderstandings because the word itself could be connected with many different discursive fields: trap is a name for 1) a certain genre in hip-hop; 2) a certain subgenre of EDM music (sometimes also labeled EDM trap) ("What is Trap Music", 2013); 3) broader tendencies in contemporary pop music that often uses elements of trap, as music writer Taylor Bryant suggests "…what's considered trap is just as much Migos' 'Bad and Boujee' as it is Major Lazer's 'Lean On' or even Katy Perry's 'Dark Horse'." (2017). Interest in trap music increased after 2012, with an increase in online searches for the term.[1] At the same time a relative decrease in searches for the term "hip hop" was noted, supporting what many commentators observed: "[f]rom hip-hop to pop to EDM and beyond, the sound of trap music is everywhere" (Setaro, 2018). The majority of contemporary mainstream rap is actually trap (Migos, Rae Sremmurd, Savage 21) or at least possesses some of its elements (Kendrick Lamar, Drake, Kayne West) (Friedman, 2017). The rise of rap in general in the last few years is impressive. Music journalists commenting that for "… the first time ever, R&B/hip-hop has surpassed rock to become the biggest music genre in the U.S. in terms of total consumption, according to Nielsen Music's 2017 year-end report" (Ryan, 2018). Interest in the genre has also grown, with "… [l]istening in the genre increased 74% on Spotify in 2017..." (Bruner, 2018). In this article, I will not try to define trap as a genre or to present its genealogy. I will focus on a more specific question, which requires only certain elements from trap as a music genre: why is trap so popular? What is the link between trap music and the contemporary moment that could give an answer to this massive identification with trap music?

Trap music was a tradition of rap that developed during the 1990s outside traditional centers of rap creativity, neither on the east side (New York, Philadelphia) nor on the west side (Los Angeles and California), but in the south of the USA in Atlanta, Memphis, Miami, and Houston (Friedman, 2017; Setaro, 2018). This is an interesting moment for us: a new trend came from an unexpected place, from the "Dirty South". The term Dirty South, which was in a certain period almost a synonym with the term trap (in the narrower sense), was used as a "standard way of referring to the American South among rap music listeners" (Miller, 2004, n.p.). It connotes negative valuation: "[d]irt and dirtiness have … connotations of uncleanliness, disorder, corruption, unfairness and sexuality" and the south has, in the American context, connotations of "poverty, ignorance, rurality and violence" (Miller, 2004, n.p.). Trap music was, as we can see, among many not perceived as especially relevant or of good quality. Critics saw it as a vague, trivial and cheap genre, appropriate only for wild and excessive parties (Louis, 2015). Part of this rejection was based also on cultural prejudices that are similar to historical prejudices that were addressed to non-European cultures from the perspective of European civilization, which will present a crucial moment for our argumentation.

Trap began to reach strong presence on the mainstream Billboard music charts after 2009, with artists such as Young Jeezy, Gucci Mane, and Future, and producers such as Lex Luger and

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[1] Google word searches for the term "trap" received significant growth in the number of searches after 2012, with its peak between 2015 and 2017. In comparison, the word rap, received equal attention between 2004 and 2017, while searches for the word hip-hop gradually declined in that period. Trends and interests, visible from the statistics of the history of Google search, could be checked on a public web facility Google Trends. The result that are presented are the product of the following parameters: time period – 2004 till today, area (whole world, excluding China, part of Asia and larger part of Africa (Google Trends does not cover those areas). Other parameters (categories of searched topics, etc.) are not specifically defined. We have to read those results with restrains. (there could be, for example, some events or phenomena that generated interest in the word "trap" that are not connected with the analysis).

Mike Will Made It (Lee, 2015; Adaso, 2017). It was at this time when the characteristic 808-kick drums and melodic synths that create an overall dark and grim, but sometimes also bright and laid-back atmosphere, started entering mainstream music in general. It became one of the most "default" sounds of the mainstream of today, separated from its roots (Bruner, 2018). As music writer Sammy Lee suggests, "… trap-rap stars are now hitting the top of the charts and electronic music's take on the sound is everywhere from high-street shops to summer music festivals" (2017). This all-presence causes difficulties in defining what exactly trap is. Some argue that the word should, because of the cultural appropriation, be reserved for a specific genre of rap, while others use it as a loosely defined buzzword that has been continuingly creating hype in clubs and festivals and passionate debate on comment sections and internet forums across the world.[2]

However, trap is not just a sound. Or conversely, sound cannot be separated from the practice of production in which it originally appears: those circumstances are somehow preserved inside the sound. The word trap (in the slang of Atlanta's African American population) signifies a place, usually a typical wooden house from Atlanta's devastated suburbs, where drugs and other illegal businesses take place, and where a certain lifestyle is practiced (Adaso, 2017). The term trap is appropriate, because it is hard to escape out of such a life-style in which people are entrapped. Studios, where the trap sound first appears, were usually a side product of the surplus money of illegal activities, while local night-clubs, strip-clubs, and street-corners were usually places where trap music was consumed. Trap music was therefore deeply connected with the under privileged community in which it originally appeared and it described nothing but the cruel reality in which that music was produced (Carmichael, 2017). That is why trap music is, often perceived as devoid of deeper meaning, promoting immoral behavior, talking mostly about money, drugs, women[3], criminal and other stories of "real" life. This reality is best described by the state of entrapment in a certain situation or in a certain way of life.

However, trap also presents exactly the opposite reality: it is also music about escaping the trap, about getting rich, having too much gold, and succeeding in life. Gold, jewelry and other prestigious objects shine out in many trap videos (Roberts, 2017). Viewer gets the impression that there is always too much money: dollars fly in the air or are burnt. As I shall examine in detail later, mostly through the example of Migos' hit *Bad and Boujee*, trap presents amtwo-fold reality: a reality of being entrapped on the one hand and a reality of extreme success ("from nothing to something") on the other. It presents a story of a transition from one extreme of social reality to the other. It is a reality of the "thug" life of the streets on the one hand, and a specific sort of "American Dream" reality on the other. Here a realistic presentation of life of the rich is not found, rather what is expressed is the phantasm of rich-life from the perspective of the poor. "Rap was for people who were on the bottom of the social hierarchy... So, when a select few were able to climb out of that despair into the ranks of the rich...it wasn't enough to have it... It had to be shown for all the world to see" (Roberts, 2017, n.p.).

Most of those elements could already be seen in (especially gangsta) rap from the 90s and 00s (Roberts, 2017). However, climbing from bottom to top is not only something that is presented in (some forms) of rap. It is also what rap as an act is all about. Rap, in its sincere and often angry speech from the perspective of the suppressed, entrapped or inferior, is sometimes similar to Michel Foucault's concept of fearless speech. Presented in one of his seminaries (Foucault,

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[2] See for example answers on Quora on quesiton: "Why do some hip hop fans dislike trap music?" (Why do some hip hop fans dislike trap music?, 2017).

[3] Trap has been criticised a lot also because of its sexism. However, in the last years, many female rappers have appeared and some of them are adressing exactly this problem (Jordannah, 2018).

2001), Foucault analyses the ancient concept of "parrhesia" to define fearless speech as completely and absolutely real. It is real because it is completely and absolutely fearless, because it dares to tell things as they are, no matter the consequences, no matter what the lord (or any other sort of authority) would think about it: "if there is a kind of 'proof' of the sincerity of the parrhesiastes, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is parrhesiastes" (Foucault, 2001, p. 15). Such speech is true also because it cannot be a mere performance or representation. The speaker cannot take any sort of distance towards his words: "He says what he knows to be true", as Foucault argues (Foucault, 2001, p. 14). Parrhesia is therefore "verbal activity" in which a speaker "expresses his personal relationship to truth" and "recognizes truth-telling as a duty" (Foucault, 2001, p. 19). It cannot be understood as a mere opinion, but it is in a certain sense complete and undoubted truth, truth including the "real" situation of the speaker. Similar discussion between real and true could be found in the rap community, where a crucial question is whether certain rap is "real" and "true" or if it is "fake" or "performed". Most of the critique that comes from the "old school" perspective, perceive trap and mainstream rap as being "fake", part of a post-modern mix of images that is completely separated from its roots and its emancipatory potential (Bryant, 2017). Of course, we cannot deny reproduction of some of the most problematic tendencies inside the cultural industry (for instance appropriation and commercialization), but nevertheless, I argue, that the mainstreaming of rap in general cannot be treated as "fake" appropriation of once authentic culture. Therefore, there is something "real" and "true" in identification with the imaginary of the previously described narrative of the two-fold reality of trap.

I argue that trap is "music of our time", not only as a sound, but more as a complex ideological mixture of certain affects. The concept of affection is, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define it, an "encounter between the affected body and affecting body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or 'ideal bodies')" (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi). There are common affects therefore, between the music and listeners who identify with it worldwide. Those affects are "real" in the tautological sense, exactly because they are perceived as real, because the identification is real. This same tautology is at work in Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of desire: desire is always real, it is producing something, it is in direct correspondence with social production **(**Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, pp. 10–11**)**. We will have to ask ourselves in this context, which social production is combined with such a desire of production as it is presented in trap music. This article argues that late-capitalism in general, with its reproduction of inequality that increases social differences, also produces the two-fold reality presented in trap music. Individuals no longer identify themselves with the middle class, white, suburban situation, if this was previously the most common form of identification. This is in direct correspondence, as it will be demonstrated, with a turn in the main model of identification: from middle class suburbia to "the dirty south", as we argue in section "New Universalism".

Spontaneous movements of expropriated masses of people are always fascinating leftist (especially Marxist) intellectuals. Reasons for this fascination do not always come up from the ideological content that is expressed in those movements but first of all because of their specific structural position. The question of the self-awareness of ruled classes as the ruled – a self-awareness that is a precondition for the realization that their ideology is not the ideology of ruling class – has always been specifically complex in Marx. In *German Ideology* "the ruling ideas" are defined as "the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). Ruling ideas are therefore ideas of the ruling class, "hence among other things [they] rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas

of their age" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). In difference with those who argue that trap music simply represents the ruling ideas of late capitalism (materialism, competition, individual success) (ndwogan, 2017), I will argue for the opposite: trap music represents the ideals of those who are suppressed. This thesis is comparable with the thesis of Slovenian Marxist Rastko Močnik who, in his analysis of the Punk movement in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, explains why Marxist theoretical approaches are useful in the context of subculture and pop-culture phenomena:

> When we analyze contemporary movements of expropriated youth crowds, we have to be aware that those crowds are not expropriated only directly "economically", but also ideologically – their "culture" and their "ethics" are taken away from them as an ability to establish their own ideological (class) platform on a progressive historical tradition. (Močnik, 1985, p. 62)

Class difference is therefore not embodied only as a different position in production, but also as a cultural difference. Antonio Gramsci may be the first who addressed the question of cultural difference, between 'the south' and 'the north', which could be useful in today's global context, even if it was originally applied only to Italy: why "southern" masses are not convinced by Marxist theory and why their "reality produces a wealth of the most bizarre combinations' of beliefs and expectations" (as cited in Arnold, 2013, p. 28). As E. P. Thompson commented in the context of colonial India, "there might be a radical disassociation – and at times antagonism – between the culture and even the 'politics' of the poor and those of the great" (as cited in Arnold, 2013, p. 36). In this context I argue that from a Marxist perspective, we should not treat the culture of the masses as irrelevant and useless and that we cannot dismiss identification with trap music worldwide as a mere trend of late capitalism.

This article seeks to explain identification with trap music and to present its correlation with the system of late capitalism. I attempt to defend the view, that this identification has emancipatory political potentials, even if it appears – with its promotion of materialism and individual success – as an ideology of a today's ruling class. The research data in this study is drawn from two main sources: 1) articles, essays and opinions about trap music and contemporary development in pop culture; 2) previously described theoretical background from critical theory, post-structuralism and Marxism. The article is divided into two parts. In the first part ("New Universalism") I establish the correlation between the imaginary of trap music and bipolar subjectivity of late capitalism. In order to point to the emancipatory potential of entrapped subjectivity, I introduce Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming minority" and Achille Mbembe's understanding of universalism that is concentrated in a moto "Becoming Black of the World". In the second part (titled 'Bad Boujee') I further develop and strengthen our thesis through Marxian interpretation of concrete example of trap music, and Migos's hit *Bad and Boujee* that implicitly addresses questions of class and cultural differences.

New Universalism

As previously discussed, I am not interested primarily in trap as a music genre, but more on the wider sense of the concept of reality of trap. Trap, in a combination of the general meaning of the word trap and its more specific use in context of trap music, consists of a series of specific and often contradictory affects: trap is bitter-sweet, it includes nihilism and joy, states of ecstasy and states of depression, life up's and down's, entrapment and escape. As the main motto of the first season of Noisey's online documentary series *Noisey: Atlanta* (2015) states: "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose" (as cited in "Welcome to the Trap", 2015). Such

statement presupposes a specific conception of reality. As Simon Reynolds pointed out in 1996, "real" in hip hop "signifies that music reflects a "reality" constituted by late capitalist economic instability..." (Fischer, 2009, p. 10). Mark Fischer similarly argues that:

> …the affinity between hip hop and gangster movies ... arises from their common claim to have stripped the world of sentimental illusion and seen it for 'what it really is': a Hobbesian war of all against all... where dog eats dog, where you're either a winner or a loser, and where most will be losers (Fischer, 2009, p. 11).

Such extreme competition is, as Franco "Bifo" Berardi explains, not sustainable in the long run: "a depression treatment based on artificially induced euphoria will not work" as the growth in economy could not prevent the next crisis, which is inherently inscribed in capitalism (Bifo, 2009, p. 210). According to Bifo, there is, therefore, strict correspondence between economic insecurity seen in the unpredictable growth and fall of values on financial markets, and insecurity on the psychological level, seen in the ambivalence of the main affects. This conception is similar to Mark Fischer's thesis that capitalism is, "with its ceaseless boom and bust cycles … fundamentally and irreducibly bipolar, periodically lurching between hyped-up mania... and depressive come-down..." (2009, p. 35). That bipolarity is composed of two complementary beliefs; one corresponding to state of mania, the other to state of depression. On the one hand there is an underlying conviction of depression, "that we are all equally uniquely responsible for our own misery and therefore deserve it" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.). On the other hand, is "the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.). According to Fischer, this is the "dominant ideology and unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society" (Fischer, 2014, n.p.), that can be detected in the imaginary of hip-hop. For example, Kayne West's latest album hosts the contradictory, but self-explanatory motto "I hate being bipolar, it's awesome" (Fitzgerald, 2018). However, psychological classification of affects produced by late capitalism, should not be understood as a legitimization of the system: "[t]he current ruling ontology denies any possibility of a social causation of mental illness. The chemico-biologization of mental illness is of course strictly commensurate with its depoliticization" (Fischer, 2009, p. 37). On the contrary, and in the vein of the radical political theory and politics of the 1960s in 1970s (such as Laing, Foucault, and Deleuze & Guattari,), Fischer calls for the politicization (and not naturalization) of "extreme mental conditions" (Fischer, 2009, p. 19).

Bipolar affects are, I argue, not present only in trap music in the narrower sense of the term, but can be found in the large part of contemporary pop-culture in general. Therefore, it is not only a sound of trap, but the whole imaginary of being in the trap, that became mainstream and reached its worldwide presence. Today we are faced with many different identification movements rising autonomously worldwide, deep-inside of the streets, that share with trap music the same series of affects, sometimes similar aesthetics, combining dangerous and nihilistic atmosphere made of drugs, guns, money and a bit of "unheimlich", post-apocalyptic feeling. Trap in this wider sense could, therefore, be found not only in grime, drill, cloud- and mumble-rap or in the phenomenon of so called "SoundCloud rap" (Burford, 2018), but also in the Latin-trap (Leight, 2017; Suarez, 2017), in rap combined with turbo-folk in the Balkans (Maksimović, 2015), and in Chinese trap (Hawkins, 2018). However, those affects also go beyond the sphere of musical form of expression. Slav-squat Facebook and meme pages, popular especially in the Eastern Europe, present a caricatured image of street life in eastern Europe (Song, 2016). Furthermore, *Rick and Morty* (2013-present), a globally successful cartoon series, is all about entrapment and escape and especially about the absurdity of the life in general, without any superior or idealistic value in which one should believe (as cited in

Cinnamon, 2015). Trap music also became one of the most significant elements used in movies that present cruel social situation such as Spring Breakers, American Honey, and The Florida Project. In general, aesthetics in all those contexts includes in itself moments of "being nothing" or "being trash" on the one hand and moments of extreme richness, self-respect, and self-confidence on the other.

I argue, therefore, that described affects are becoming universal and that there are real and material reasons for that universalization. In order to defend that thesis, we have to address the most common criticism of popular (t)rap music which reduces its popularity to cultural appropriation, and claims that this popularity could be explained as a mere trend produced by the music industry without any relation to reality, and consequently also without any emancipatory potential (Thompson, 2017).

Cultural appropriation is supposedly first observed with the rise of rap to the mainstream of pop-culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when youth from both underprivileged areas and middle and upper class, started to identify with an underprivileged position. A central question in the evaluation of rap music in general, the question of who is authentic and who is performing and appropriating street aesthetic, was in the context of rap deeply connected with racial difference (Williams, 2017). In particular, the phenomenon of Vanilla Ice and Eminem provoked debates, some similar to the question surrounding white rap and trap music of today: can white people identify with black? Must they be poor, from under privileged areas or from broken families in order to be authentic? (Setaro, 2017; Charity, 2014). It is not a coincidence that the slang term "wigga" – signifying a white person who adopts some clichéd characteristics of black culture – became used in the context of hip-hop culture (Usborne, 1993). As the title of an influential book on rap culture suggests: "Everything but burden (what white people want to take from the black)" (Tate, 2003). However, cultural appropriation is not so problematic on the level of individual white consumers as on the level of the whole (predominantly white) cultural industry, which functions through appropriations of inventions of the "dirty streets". As Andre 3000 from OutKast observed (in the song Hollywood Divorce) "all the fresh styles always start off as a good, little, hood thing, ... take our game, take our name, give us a little fame and then they kick us to the curb that's a cold thang" (Burgess, 2012).

I do not deny that part of the phenomenon of "trap-identification" could be explained with the concept of cultural appropriation, neither do I deny the role of the music industry that (to a certain extent) reproduces the popularity of trap music. Nevertheless, I argue that there are also certain important differences between mainstream rap and mainstream music in general. Music, that is becoming mainstream, usually loses its edginess, its subversive message and its cultural identity (Livewire, 2006). It is interesting that in some cases of rap music, this scheme does not seem to fit entirely because it is the universal message of the suppressed and excluded, expressed in certain rap lyrics, which seems to be a crucial part of its mainstream potential. As Reynolds explains in the article Street Rap it is a "crucial paradox" that "the hardcore street scenes are populist but anti-pop. Their populism takes the form of tribal unity against what's perceived as a homogenous, blandly uninvolving pop culture. They are about the 'massive' as opposed to 'the masses'" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 241). Their popularity, comparable to the popularity of today's Migos, Future or Rae Sremmurd, is "responsive to the motility of popular desire" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 241). The imaginary inside it goes beyond the borders of black-ghettos: its universal popularity is in direct correspondence with the insecure and unstable bipolar subjectivity of late capitalism.

I argue that identification with a state of entrapment, seemingly universal today, produces a multitude of minority subjectivities that are gradually replacing the dominant, middle-class white male subjectivity of universal human subjectivity. Like Deleuze and Guattari in *Thousand Plateaus*, I argue for the universal minoritarian becoming that is in contrast with the concept of majority:

> all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291)

The historic situation of black people has been (and still is) a paradigmatic example of a minoritarian state of entrapment. I do not argue for a form of change in which black identity replaces white to become a majority that represent universal human identity. On the contrary, the very idea of homogeneous majority, which is a foundation for universalism (from which minority is excluded), should be replaced with heterogeneous multitude of minorities that form a foundation for a universalism of a different kind. A universalism without exclusion, negation and without inner difference – present in the universalism of European enlightenment – that restrains it from becoming really universal. On the contrary, new universalism is a universal recognition of entrapment, a universal "becoming-minoritarian" of Deleuze and Guattari, that affirms diversity on the level of minoritarian identities. It is, because it resists the formation of normative a majority, not in contradiction with the equality between them. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

> There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; .... Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power [*puissance*], an active micropolitics. This is the opposite of macropolitics, and even of History, in which it is a question of knowing how to win or obtain a majority. As Faulkner said, to avoid ending up a fascist there was no other choice but to become-black. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 291 292)

Many difficulties arise in such a constellation of "non-fascist" life which dem&s becoming minority. "Becoming-black" in Deleuze and Guattari's meaning of the term must be strictly separated from reversed racism. Blackness is not a basis for a new privileged, normative and major identity, exactly because reterritorialization of becoming in certain stable identity is something Deleuze and Guattari try to oppose with the concept of "minoritarian becoming": "[o]ne reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291). However, the tradition of black emancipation produced this thought in one of the most explained ways: Achille Mbembe's universalism, concentrated in the motto "Becoming Black Of the World", is not affirmation of only black identity, but "affirmation of the irreducible plurality of the world" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 156). Furthermore, as Mbembe argues, the term black itself often designates "a heterogeneous, multiple, and fragmented world" (p. 6).

Black identity is therefore only one of the minor identities. It is, nevertheless, the paradigmatic historic example of entrapped identity. The concept of "Blackness" was namely from its historic beginnings formed in relation to major (white culture), which is superficial and free in relation to subjected and entrapped blackness. As Mbembe argues: "The notion of race made

it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being" (2017, p. 17). It is not a coincidence, therefore, that one of the main forms of success in this context was expressed in the notion of the "runaway" (Robinson J. C. & Robinson E. P., 2017, p. 3). Success of entrapped is therefore not to sustain or to defend the existing state or existing stable identity, but escape from the state of entrapment. This entrapment, that was in history most directly embodied in the figure of a black slave, represents impossibility of social transition, of any escape and becoming. On the discursive level this is legitimized by the exclusion of blacks from humanity, that was defined on the figure of majority, on the figure of the ideal (white) man: "[t]hey were the impoverished reflection of the ideal man, separated from him by an insurmountable temporal divide, a difference nearly impossible to overcome" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 17). In the same sense was according to Mbembe "Africa" in modern consciousness "the name generally given to societies that are judged impotent – that is, incapable of producing the universal and of attesting to its existence" (p. 49).

It would be a non-sense, to affirm such a form of black identity. That is why Mbembe's universalism is not based on it, but on universalization of difference. On the one hand, this universalization is affirmation of any difference inside humanity without any exclusion, what is precondition for real universalism. On the other hand, it is also an affirmation of desire for difference, that "emerges precisely where people experience intense exclusion" (2017, p. 183). "In these conditions, the proclamation of difference is an inverted expression of the desire for recognition and inclusion" (p. 183). Such universalism is a reversed image of an old universalism: a heterogenous minoritarian universalism of those who are excluded from homogenous majoritarian universalism. As Mbembe argues, to "affirm that the world cannot be reduced to Europe is to rehabilitate singularity and difference.... universal is always defined through the register of singularity" (p. 158).

The great danger of this approach is that it could lead to ignorance of differences between classes, races, and sexes. If I simply say, "we are all entrapped", we can find ourselves in a specific Foucauldian paradox. In one of his lectures on power, after explaining that power is not repression, that it is not in someone's hands and that it forms a "net-like" structure, Foucault stated: "… [b]ut I do not believe that one should conclude from that that power is the best distributed thing in the world, although in some sense that is indeed so" (1994, p. 215). If power (or entrapment) is everywhere, inflation of the very concept of power (or in our case the concept of entrapment) occurs. This inflation is used in certain white-supremacist ideologies as also in alt-right and some other neo-conservative movements, that have gained prominence in recent years. In order to be successful, even they have to put themselves in a position of an "underdog", in which the privileged (white-male-man) are presented as oppressed and excluded, as David Neiwert noticed (Neiwert, 2017). Appropriation of the discourse of the repressed, of the minority whose existence is endangered by a majority culture, presents a crucial ground for the legitimization of radical politics, that are suddenly seen as a mere self-defense of the suppressed. "White people are becoming second-class citizens", uttered David Duke in 1977 (as cited in Neiwart, 2017, p. 80). As Mathew Heimbach wrote in 2013 in the "Youth for Western Civilization (YWC)": "...we deserve the right to exist, deserve the right to defend our culture, and deserve the right to have a future for our culture" (as cited in Neiwart, 2017, p. 241).

However, I believe that the argumentation provides also a principle of selection that excludes such an appropriation of the entrapped position. First of all, in such an identification with the majority that only pretends to be a minority, there is no real "becoming minoritarian" in Deleuze and Guattari's meaning of the term. On the contrary in such an identification,

unchangeable majoritarian identity is affirmed. Furthermore, universalism that is "defined through the register of singularity" (Mbembe, 2017), affirms singularity of each trap (even if it is the trap of white male mentality that is usually behind historic universalism) and each speech that presents entrapment, as analyzed earlier through Foucault's concept of parrhesia, must reflect the reality that strictly corresponds with the position of the speaker. With this principle of selection, I can easily exclude such a performing of entrapment that wants to make America great again in the same way as rappers are excluded as being "fake" appropriation.

Universalization of entrapped position therefore calls for an adequate presentation of each singular entrapment. A similar argument was used by Foucault when he was confronted (by one of his students) with the reproach, that his analysis relativizes power:

> …because you are a student, you are on a certain position of power, and me, as a professor am also on certain position of power; I am on a position of power because I am a man and not a woman, and you are also on a position of power, because you are a woman. Of course, not on the same position of power, but we all are on positions of power. (Foucault, 2012)

There are different sorts of power (and different sorts of traps) and each speaker must, as in the case of Foucault's fearless speech, express the singular reality of his own singular trap.

Bad Boujee

Late capitalism, as explained, produces also its own main bipolar subjectivity or, better said, a series of subjectivities, that can be understood as different stages inside the story that presents individual success. It is a story of becoming what you want to be or what you have been before, if you already succeeded, or a dream about what you are going to become and how entrapped you are now, if you have not yet succeed. In this section I will further develop our argument for the popularity of such a frame and present some aspects of genealogy of modern capitalism leading to a state in which, as I argue, world-wide masses identify with movable and transient subjectivity. Through interpretation of Migos' 2017 top chart hit *Bad and Boujee*, I will analyze the question of cultural transformation of identity (on its way from the bottom to the top) and the question of legitimization of individual success (that is at the same time legitimization of the system that is based on ideal of individual success). Transformation of subjectivity presented in the imaginary of Migos' song, prompted analysis that discussed relations between trap music, critical theory and Marxism (Mueller, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Ganz, 2017; Wijesinghe, 2017; ndwogan, 2017). This was due mainly to the rapper's demonstration of "a movement from the working class to a rich and materialist 'boujee' class" (Wijesinghe, 2017) and the introduction of the "new bourgeoise", which is, as I will argue, different from the old bourgeoise in the same way as new universalism is different from the old universalism produced by European bourgeoise of the 18th and 19th century.

"We came from nothin' to somethin' nigga" sang Migos in "Bad and Boujee". The choice of the word "boujee", an abbreviation of the French "bourgeois", even if there are more common words in rap for a description of rich life, is crucial in this context. The structure of social climbing can first be observed in the literature of the 18th and 19th century, as it is presented by Franco Moretti in *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (2013). The figure of the bourgeois in this context does not function as it does today. It does not signify someone who already possesses wealth and power, but exactly this transformation "from nothing to something" that directly corresponds with the rising of the bourgeoisie as a class, that from the

16th to 19th century gradually replaced the aristocracy as a ruling class (Moretti, 2013, pp. 12–17). The main legitimization was based on the idea that the bourgeois is somebody who's wealth is not simply inherited (as in the case of aristocracy), but a "self-made" man, who deserves what he has, because he himself with his own abilities of "self-restraint; intellectual clarity; commercial honesty; a strong sense of goals", came to privileged position (Moretti, 2013, p. 16). Moretti chooses as a paradigmatic example Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*: the legitimate way to success is a combination of "adventure", "the sense for risk" and bravery on the one hand (pp. 25–29) and "rational work ethic", and delay of immediate satisfaction on the other (pp. 29–35). The same duality can be found in back story of today's pop-stars. Some praise dedication and hard work, and others God's gift, but a common factor is that they make money in their own. In the words of Migos' *Bad and Boujee*: "You know so we ain't really never had no old money – We got a whole lotta new money though" (Mueller, 2017).

The word bourgeois today signifies the opposite of its original meaning, now attributed to someone who inherited his wealth and social status by bourgeoisie pedigree and is therefore delegitimized on exactly the same basis as the aristocracy of old. Moretti does not speculate the number of individuals who inhabit this privileged position, but nevertheless, anticipates that the "American way of life" is probably the "Victorianism of today" (Moretti, 2013, p. 23). We can agree that "American way of life", or rather, the idealized image of this life as presented in the American Dream, is now a globally recognized ideal which functions analogically to the ideal of the bourgeoisie in the 18th and 19th century. In both cases, we are confronted with transformation which results in legitimate success. With legitimization of this form of success, the social system in which this success was possible is also legitimized.

A separate discussion will be needed to precisely analysis how liberal political thought, while establishing paradoxical thesis in which individual interest is equated with an interest of society as a whole, also blurs the division between the minority of those who can realize their interest, and the majority, who are excluded and even do not get this possibility. This was part of the function of the figure of Bourgeois and of American Dream imaginary: to (re)produce "universal" identification with values of the particular group (Livewire, 2006). As Moretti emphasizes, the word Bourgeois was not popularized in the Anglo-American context in 19th century, mainly because of the long tradition of capitalism and consequently, because of the existence of a larger middle class (in difference to continental Europe) (Moretti, 2013, pp. 8–12). "The lack of clear 'frontline' for the discourse on "Biirgertum" is what made the English language so indifferent to the word 'bourgeois' (p. 10). It follows that only a large gap between classes makes the Bourgeois visible as a particular (and not universal) figure in society.

It is not coincidence that the word Bourgeois latter appears in African American discourse with slightly different meaning, including not only class but cultural difference and mixed them both. The resulting effect is that a change of class also implies a change of culture. Citing the editor of *Journal of Hip Hop studies,* Daniel White Hodge, Catherine Zhang argues the term "Bougie" in 1950s among black community was used to describe an "…'elitist, uppity-acting African American' who has a higher education and income level than the average African American, and who 'identifies with European American culture and distances him/herself from other African Americans'." (Zhang, 2017, n.p.). Being "Bougie" at that time "implies the adoption of whiteness as a social identity" (Zhang, 2017, n.p.). The gap between both parts of African American society is therefore so obvious exactly because of the radical change of

cultural identity, that happened during the process of becoming bourgeois, which is not so obvious in case of the white community.[4]

However, it is crucial for us that Migos' *Bad Bougie* is not becoming white and does not change cultural identity while climbing a social ladder. Quite the opposite, what stands out is a very distinctive figure of "black bougie"; a bougie that preserves a lot of the clichéd customs from the previous 'street' life. As Zhang notes:

> In the song, Migos rap about stirring pots of drugs with Uzis, a type of Israeli submachine gun, making money off of the sale of cocaine, and having sex with women. The music video is filled with contradictory imagery. Women drink champagne poured out of gold bottles but eat Cup Noodles and fried chicken. (Zhang, 2017, n.p.)

This new "bougie" is not legitimized in the context of white bourgeois morality where bourgeois has to be a noble and respected person or – if we take a classic Victorian form of Bourgeois ideal analyzed by Moretti – a gentleman (Moretti, 2013, p. 120). And it is obvious that Migos in *Bad and Boujee* addresses exactly this perspective: why is their ethics (and aesthetics) seen as bad, sometimes even as degradation, from certain specific cultural perspectives or, if we put question in a Nietzschean manner, which interest is behind such judgment? In rap culture as a whole, there are many different wordings signifying exactly the opposite idea, that legitimate success is a route on which the subject remains the same as it was at the beginning without adoption to another culture: consistency, being true, being faithful to oneself, to the streets, to one's roots (Carmichael, 2017; Livewire, 2006).

A slight, but crucial, difference has occurred since the golden era of the American Dream ideal in the 1950s when a universal ideal was constructed of values of the white middle class. Identification with an image of life in the suburban white neighborhood does not seem to fit with the identification of the contemporary masses (Amadeo, 2018). This change has a material cause. As mentioned, the middle class is gradually disappearing in the time of late-capitalism. The gap between the bottom and the top is becoming more obvious. We therefore encounter a paradoxical twist: the universal position, historically prescribed to different types of white men (bourgeois, gentlemen, American dad), seems to lose its hegemony. It is gradually substituted by identification that was traditionally perceived as a minority. As I argue in this article, the ideology of the dominant class does not seem to be the dominant ideology anymore. Which is, according to Marx and Engels, basic for real (and not ideological) identification of subjected groups, and for their self-recognition (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 169). That is the reason why we count on possibilities that are opened with this twist. As argued, I do not need new universal subjectivity, but qualitatively different universalism, the universality of that what was excluded from the bourgeoise universality. It is significant in this context, that Migos named their mega-successful 2017 album, on which also song Bad and Boujee could be found, with such a universal title as *CULTURE*: culture as such, new universal culture, but not a culture of a certain defined identity.

Migos' culture is often perceived as a part of general trend of non-critical affirmation of late capitalism in pop-culture that embodies all its problems and reproduces inequality: "[r]appers

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[4] A similar, but exactly reversed change of culture happened in the context of one of the first modern subcultures, hipsters or "white negros": in order to be rebellious "frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life", Hipster has to identify with black (or at least perform this identification), "[s]ince the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the White", as Norman Mailer argues in his famous essay (Mailer, 1957).

are incentivized to put personal achievement over social awareness, materialism over restraint, and Uzi-carrying as a better way of staying true to one's roots than giving back to the community" (ndwogan, 2017). Individualism, egoism, narcissism and dedication to work and individual success are in general often perceived as symptoms of the absolute triumph of late capitalism. Even if we look at a definition of the term that usually represents universal subculture of today – "millennials" – we can see common moments to those presented in trap music, which supports the thesis that we talk about universal ideals. Millennials – despite the fact that term itself usually addresses only white middle class youth – are perceived as "more focused on materialistic values...such as money, fame, and image..." (Main, 2017, n.p.). They are seen as unrealistic regarding career and as individuals, appreciating only individual success instead of the success of the group (Main, 2017). As Malcom Harris argues, millennials "never learned to separate work and life" (Harris, 2017, Location No. 145), what he proves exactly through example of rap music: "[h]ustling has always been part of trying to come up in the creative world, but like everything else, it has intensified. The Fresh Prince could rap about relaxing, but now "work" is the name of the game, from Britney Spears to Gucci Mane." (Harris, 2017, Location No. 1891).

Another crucial characteristic that is often described to millennials is their submissive character, lack of any kind of rebellion and of any kind of utopic political ideals, which characterized previous generations and their subcultures. "Millennials have been trained to hold sacred our individual right to compete, and any collective resilience strategy that doesn't take that into account is ill-conceived, no matter how long and glorious its history. No one seems to know what we – with all our historical baggage – can do to change our future" (Harris, 2017, Location No. 199). That individualistic materialism becomes the reason for the lack of alternatives to the ideals of late capitalism, is crucial to Fischer's concept of capitalist realism:

> The Selfish Capitalist toxins that are most poisonous to well-being are the systematic encouragement of the ideas that material affluence is the key to fulfillment, that only the affluent are winners and that access to the top is open to anyone willing to work hard enough, regardless of their familial, ethnic or social background. (Fischer, 2009, p. 36).

Contrary to Fischer, I argue, that there is hope for a better future in the universalization of such a form of success, even for those who do not love capitalism totally, no matter how contradictory this seems. In this sense, our approach is close to accelerationism, as described by Benjamin Noys, where "[t]he result is that each intensifies a politics of radical immanence, of immersion in capital to the point where any way to distinguish a radical strategy from the strategy of capital seems to disappear completely" (Noys, 2014, Location No. 190). This same indistinctiveness appears in our analysis: universalization of a dream of individual success produced by "The Selfist Capitalist toxins" could not be divided from the rational claim of the masses; that want happy, successful and prosperous lives.

The desire for success is what drives the music scene and increases its productivity, but it seems inevitable that "only [a] few will ever have a chance of making it" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 386). However, acceleration of that process that results in universal materialization of the desire for success, would, paradoxically but structurally necessarily, produce equality. If every trap in this world becomes the center of civilization, and if every "trash" of this world becomes a star, the final result would be equality. That is, value indifference between the successful and entrapped. Maybe we should, as Deleuze and Guattari propose, accelerate the production of value, "go further...in the movement of the market of decoding and deterritorialization…[f]or perhaps the

flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough… Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process'…" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 260).

Therefore, we deny that the subjectivity presented in Migos' imaginary, even if it is totally un-critical and adopted by capitalism, does not have any emancipatory potential. It is not necessary for us to understand their claim for material goods, fame and luxury life as only an ideology of late capitalism. From the perspective of new universalism, we may understand those claims as legitimate demands of the world's proletariat. The Proletariat is namely defined as "the class antagonist of the bourgeoisie, and hence places its own interests above theirs" (Balibar, 1988, p. 166). It is a class of those who are excluded from the sphere of bourgeois abstract universality and those who are expropriated of wealth. In order to reach universality, the proletariat must subsume "specific interest into a 'general interest'… once it matches its definition, it is no longer simply a class but the masses" (Balibar, 1988, p. 166). It is only logical, from this perspective, that the proletariat (embodied in the Migos) claim participation on the level of discourse and participation in the sharing of wealth.

Migos' imaginary could in this context be seen not as a legitimation of the "new bourgeoise", but as a revelation of the absurdity of the rarity of success in capitalism and its devaluation. As Gavin Mueller interpreted, *Bad and Boujee* reveals that "such wealth in the face of so much misery is fundamentally absurd, and so it is best consumed on ridiculous vehicle customization, diamond-encrusted chokers, and Louboutin sneakers. They know that being bad and being bourgeois go together like white and T-shirts" (Mueller, 2017). Through that reading, the message of the Migos is that everybody can (and must) become something from nothing, as they did. The global universalization of the dream of success, which does not have any outside and any negation, could (even if produced in the middle of late-capitalism) provide the potential for a dream of a utopian end of the system that reproduces inequality. However, we must admit, that this is still just a dream and the main question is, how to make it real and how to materialize the universal dream of success for anyone.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the reasons for the popularity of trap. The popularity of trap music, that was observed as a phenomenon especially in recent years, was explained through a correlation between social production and desire production, between affects presented in music and main affects reproduced in late capitalism. This reality is on the one hand indistinguishable from the ideology that produces the subjectivity of late capitalism. At the same time, it cannot be treated as a mere false consciousness: it reflects two-fold reality of extreme success on the one and entrapment on the other hand. This corresponds with separation on two extremes which can be observed in bipolarity as a main disorder of late capitalism (as described by Fischer). Furthermore, that bipolarity very well reflects our evaluation of trap music: I do not deny that it could be treated as consumeristic, mainstream and appropriated by the music industry, but nevertheless, the main thesis of this article is that it includes emancipatory potential. That potential could, as I argue, be reached not with restraining, but with acceleration of the process, with universalization of "minoritarian becoming" (analyzed through Deleuze & Guattari and Mbembe) in correspondence with a new universal culture, presented by Migos and their figure of the new bourgeois.

Although this article focuses on the relation between critical theory and a certain type of music, the exploration can be expanded to fields of pop-culture's imaginary. Some of its findings, may

have implications on the complicated relation between class and cultural differences, and other problematic issues that characterize contemporary emancipatory struggles and discourses.

One of their main paradoxes seems that those emancipatory struggles and discourses often lack mass support and remain limited to small groups of progressive political activists. From another perspective, movements that reached massive popularity, with adaptation to mainstream expectations, often lose their emancipatory potential. Our analysis of trap is therefore an example that could help find a solution to that knot. I have explored some factors that are necessary to solve one of the crucial questions for today's critical thought – how to reach massive popularity and preserve emancipatory potential? How to connect critical thought with the movement of desire of the masses?

However, the problem may lie in the way the question is posed. Namely that the aim should not be just about how to inject rational critical thought in mass movements, but also conversely, to recognize the potential for rational critical thought that are already present in the imaginary of the masses.

This leap between the pop-culture and critical theory, is also the main reason for the limitations of our research. That these discourses rarely meet is the main reason, I believe, for a lack of academic debate about trap music. There are numerous non-scientific internet debates about trap music, but few incorporate critical theories. Conversely most critical theories judges pop-cultural phenomena such as trap music as being vague, trivial and not worthy of a serious investigation. In this context, this article aims to be a small step in overcoming this situation.

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