Transgressive identities: LGBTI musical resistance and activism in Lima, Peru[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Positioning my voice**

I grew up, like many others in Lima, in a fervently catholic family. I was educated at a private Catholic girl’s school run by nuns with strict rules of conduct for ‘decent and demure’ young ladies with inflexible standards for skirt length and sock height, and they put the fear of God into my every fibre and kept me in fear of being myself. From my schooldays I have two key recollections: 1) taking part in every concert, recital and creative performance that involved composing and performing music, this did not go unnoticed by teachers and classmates and cemented my identity as an artist; and 2) dressing in drag for every single play, contest and performance that was put on. At an all-girls school you always need some girls to dress up as that generalised representation of a man (a manly heteronormative trouser-wearing type) for performances, and I was happy to oblige. Hard as it may be to believe, it meant that the open exploration of my masculinity went completely under the radar. Throughout my school and university years, music and arts in general helped me to express my gender in ways that other areas could not, they facilitated the exploration of my sexuality and gave me the courage to later come out as a lesbian.

As an ethnomusicologist, I found that music proved to be a technology for the discussion and transformation of conflict. Music, yet again, opened doors that tend to stay firmly shut in the everyday. It led me to spend years studying and publishing about the relationship between music and the Lima high class or elite in a post conflict context. It is not easy to talk about class, race, whiteness, discrimination, and much less about the multiple psychological traumas we inherited from the armed internal conflict. However, there are so many musics that touch on these topics, or are motivated by those social fractures, that music becomes liberating, a means by which human diversity explores new possible futures (Montero-Diaz 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

During my studies of fusion music on the Lima music scene, I realised that the fusion bands were mostly all male, whereas the soloists in the genre were women. The women would hire male accompanists, while the men formed communities of artists. I flirted with gender studies, but timidly, for me it was always a thorny subject. How could I study music and gender if I had learnt to ignore my own gender quirks in order to survive in a sexist and discriminatory society like my own? I left Peru in order to study Peru. From abroad while studying music, whiteness and anti-racism, I observed at a distance the progress made on LGBTI rights and the pushback from conservative anti-rights campaigns and governments that were clearly in cahoots with fundamentalist evangelical Christianity. I kept a cowardly distance, until my brother came out as a trans man, that was when I decided to look at my own community from the lens of gender studies and diversity. I left Peru, but my brother is still there fighting for his rights and existence everyday shoulder to shoulder with a community that is brave, firm in its convictions, underpinned by solidarity and, in spite of it all, optimistic. This community is trying to change the status quo in many ways. One of these, perhaps the most subversive, is music.

Taking the same approach as many other queer colleagues have to their research in critical ethnography and queer studies (for example Taylor 2012, Clifford-Napoleone 2020, Barz and Cheng 2020), it is right that I position my voice and my queer experience in order to declare my epistemological perspective. As Ruth Behar rightly states when discussing her experience as a Latin woman in the field, “If I am going to be counted as a minority, if I am going to be on the margin, then I am going to claim that space and speak from it” (2003: 339).

Given the need for us to raise our own voices and research our own realities, I submitted, in partnership with Dr. Luis Gabriel Mesa Martínez of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogota, a research proposal to the British Academy of Medical Sciences. Its objective is to bring together musicians, artists and experts in ethnomusicology, visual anthropology and gender, sociology of religion, clinical and social psychology, law and other related fields in Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Chile, in order to develop responses to violence against the LGBTI community. We want to study music spaces where dissident voices meet to gather strength and challenge violence in society.

We were awarded a GCRF Networking Grantby the British Academy of Medical Sciences, which enabled us to create a space for dialogue and coproduction between academia and the music arts sector to share experiences and thereby contribute to the generation and dissemination of knowledge from Latin America to the rest of the world.[[2]](#footnote-3)

One of my main motivations for carrying out this research is the very limited attention these topics receive in Peruvian and Latin American academia. Another is that much of Anglo-American music literature that influences Latin-American literature, for example the outstanding contributions *Queering the Pitch* (Brett, Wood and Thomas 1996), *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Whiteley and Rycenga 2006), and *Queering the Field* (Barz and Cheng 2020), are mainly narrated by white upper middle-class researchers. Persons who, though they are part of the LGBTI community, do not have much of an intersectional take. Responding to Sugarman’s call (2019: 91), this is an attempt to reconcile prior gender and sexuality studies from Anglo American academia with an intersectional effort to decolonize ethnographic disciplines.

That is how I came to write this chapter, which, to my knowledge, is the first attempt in Peru to apply an ethnomusicological perspective to the study of dissident music scenes led by singers and artists who escape the enduring man/woman binary gender and sexual structures,[[3]](#footnote-4) which continue to dominate not only in Peruvian society, but also the perspectives of contemporary scholarship. I hope to contribute with a brief overview from the angle of Peruvian gender studies up to the present day, and a reflection on where our reality slots into the broader academic map. To this end I will draw on Peruvian and Latin-American literature, but also Western Anglo-American studies, given that many concepts and social movements that arose in the Anglosphere have served as frameworks and set precedents, with their limitations and decontextualisations, for several gender studies and perspectives in Latin America. Subsequently, this chapter will focus on the relationship between gender and sexual diversity and Peruvian popular music, specifically in emerging LGBTI scenes that demonstrate robust artivism[[4]](#footnote-5) visibilising new masculinities and femininities that transgress the traditional gender imaginary. In the third section, through direct testimonies from LGBTI artists and a selection of their followers, I will discuss the subversion, innovation, visibility, resistance and artivism of the contemporary LGBTI scene, thereby documenting the meaning of music especially in Lima’s transgender community. These perspectives, along with the testimony of singer Wendy Sulca, will guide us to detecting intersectional dynamics and the convergence of feminist, anti-racist and pro LGBTI rights agendas, which come together for the self-managed organisation of music events and urban interventions. I hope this text will contribute to documenting and taking LGBTI musical resistances seriously in the context of political life and the fight for equal rights in Peru, and that it may also encourage more researchers to note and document the role of dissident forces in the social organisation of Peru.

**Music and gender beyond Peru, influential currents**

It is not my intention here to provide a full overview of every scholarly current that has influenced the understanding of gender diversity. However, I would like to highlight those that have facilitated the deconstruction of gender and promoted a more open less binary sexuality, and which will therefore be relevant to this study.

We cannot begin without mentioning feminism as a movement. Anglo-American literature highlights three “waves” of feminism usually expressed in the language of rights. Broadly speaking, the first wave focused on women’s acquisition of legal rights (ownership and voting). The second wave was a reaction to the expectations still imposed on women following World War Two and it focused on knocking down gender stereotypes, as well as achieving pay and employment opportunity parity between men and women, expanding reproductive rights and fighting gender violence. Only during the third wave does the focus shift to include issues of gender and sexual fluidity; as well as intersectionality (further reading in Sugarman 2019: 72; Koskoff 2014: 8-10; van deir Tuin and Buikema 2010: 10-3). Binary gender structures are questioned and greater understanding of bisexual and trans identities is generated. Some women scholars, including Munro (2013), argue that we are now in a fourth wave driven by the internet and call-out culture, in which acts of misogyny, homophobia and sexism are publicly challenged. Munro defines it as “the facilitation of the creation of a global community of feminists who use the Internet both for discussion and activism” (2013: 23). With this feminism migrates from the traditional academic and political spheres and is fed by the immediacy of public discourse online and in social media. From this perspective, viral songs and interventions such as *“Un violador en tu camino”* (*“A rapist in your path”*) (Lastesis, Chile 2019)[[5]](#footnote-6), or *“Mujer montaña” (“Mountain Woman”)*[[6]](#footnote-7) (2021, Peru) would constitute contemporary manifestations of the fourth wave.

In these two artistic creations we see the mass participation of women shoulder to shoulder with trans women singing feminist anthems. Nevertheless, in the last decades one strand of feminism, termed radical feminism, initially Anglo-American and now also Latin-American openly displays transphobic antagonism. Though it is particularly amplified at present, given the progress made in the trans community rights, anti-trans feminism has a long history of denying the identities of trans women by utilising the argument of the predominance of biological gender (see more in Hines 2017; Leibetseder 2012: 160). It is not all peace and harmony in the feminist collectives and, once more, it is the trans community that bears the brunt of discrimination and exclusion.

Feminist waves have been and are roundly criticised for having assumed the homogeneity of women ignoring women of colour and decolonized narratives, as well as any others that differ from the white middle class perspective (Sugarman 2019: 72, Koskoff 2014: 16-7). It is argued that a homogenous notion of feminism has been imposed on women from all over the world (Scholz 2010: 133-57). When these limited visions of feminism reach Latin America, these omissions are replicated, fostering a feminism with limited intersectionality and little diversity that remains highly binary. The notion of multiple feminisms becomes more necessary than ever in the Latin-American context in order to understand the convergence of gender, class and race, which is key to comprehending our society.

In this overview it is important to highlight the work of post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler, particularly her contributions in books such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), which constitute a milestone in contemporary queer studies. Her gender performativity theory proposes that gender is not fixed or natural, but rather constructed through a series of repeated gestures and actions that constitute performative acts (Butler 1990: 136). Jodie Taylor adds that binary gender normative structures are mere fiction, which we perceive as reality and are therefore practically forced to embody. Anyone who does not do this is perceived as an individual with an unnatural gender identity (Taylor 2012: 31). Basically, gender identity is a construct. The links to biology and the binary structures that are accepted as natural, are consequences of power structures and the fundamentalist forces that cement them. Thus, gender is purely cultural. For Koskoff, the only way to resist these structures and norms is through a clear awareness of the power of gender performativity (2014: 152). And, as we will see further along, this is precisely what LGBTI music in Peru is currently doing.

Butler shows us the strong ties between feminism and queer theory. The word queer, long used as a slur against gays and lesbians, was reappropriated by the LGBTI community in order to seek empowerment and imbue the term with a new meaning, one of anti-assimilationist resistance (Taylor 2012: 13), of opposing the norm (Halperin 1995: 62), and heteronormativity (Halberstam 2006: 3). The queer individual is outside the symbolic order of the everyday, but must still function within national institutions that structure this symbolic order (Slominski 2020: 221). In Lima’s LGBTI music scene the term queer is not very common[[7]](#footnote-8), as terms such as gay, lesbian, trans masculine or trans woman are more in use. The musicians interviewed in this chapter use words such as “*cabros, maricas, tracas*” (“poofs, faggots, trannies”) when they talk to each other or as a means of self-identification. They are reappropriating precisely the words hurled at them as insults and making them their own so that they will no longer hurt, shouting them so that they will no longer mean the same. “They used to be insults, but now we’ve taken them and I think that’s part of the empowerment we have as a community. The fact that we use these words among ourselves, like an everyday thing, they no longer hurt,” (Marina Kapoor, trans singer and actor, aged 33. Personal interview, September 2021). However, these words mingle merrily with others such as “*bebe*”, “*bebita*” and “*amor*” (“baby” “little baby” and “love”), which for many attending LGBTI music events reinforces the sense of community, of being welcomed, and accepted. For many the opposite of what they feel in their homes and environments. “… I was shocked that everyone was calling each other *bebe*, because I went from a “hiya dirtbag” to “baby how are you”. It was super strange to see that people could be nice to each other, the opposite of my home” (Fabio, aged 25, trans man. Personal interview, October 2021).

Ethnomusicology and gender studies

The topic of gender started to garner the attention of ethnomusicology in the US in the 1980s, a period during which some ethnomusicologists noted and mentioned the disproportionate presence of male voices in the field (informers) and the classrooms (methods, teachers, mentors and schools of thought) (see Nettl 1983: 334), which contributed to the discipline becoming androcentric (Sugarman 2019: 71; Shelemay 2020: 3).

At this juncture a quest is launched to afford women equal footing on the social map of ethnomusicology, as a way of redressing history (Nochlin 1971) and feminist ethnomusicology emerges with the notable contribution of Ellen Koskoff and the first works linking music practices carried out by women and gender issues (1987, 1988, 1991, 1996). Butler’s influence helps ethnomusicologists to examine sound as a technology to resist binary structures on and off stage (Diamond and Castelo Branco 2021: 6). In 2014 *A Feminist Ethnomusicology* (Koskoff) compiles a lifetime of texts about music and gender. However, Gregory Barz notes that, although Koskoff dedicates her life to shaping a feminist ethnomusicology with a broader take on gender, in the section of the book that focuses on queer theory there is no mention of ethnomusicology (Barz 2020: 19). Ethnomusicological studies of gender and sexual diversity really emerge as of the year 2010, reminding us of the significance of music and dance as safe spaces and the role of dissident communities in the creation of genders recognised as crucial in various cultures around the world (see for example Morcom 2013, Amico 2014, Morad 2014).

I should highlight four texts in English, which have had a major influence both on the Anglo-American and Latin-American spheres: *Queering the Pitch* (Bret, Thomas and Wood 1994), a musicological text mainly focusing on the Western music canon, which is recognised as the first book to deconstruct certain reductionist arguments about the relationship between gender, sexual identities and music tastes (Liska, 2014: 5). Regrettably, as Deborah Wong highlights (2006: 266), the editors did not include any ethnomusicologist in this work. In 2006 *Queering the Popular Pitch* was published, a more inclusive response edited by Sheila Whiteley y Jennifer Rycenga; subsequently, in 2012 Jodie Taylor publishes *Playing it Queer. Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-making.* These two texts contribute to “an understanding of popular music as a social force that constructs heteronormativity and resistant queer sexualities” (Taylor 2012: 3). In 2020, Barz and Cheng edit *Queering the Field*, a pioneering book shedding light on the experience of queer ethnomusicologists in the field during ethnography and dialogue with collaborators and informers. The writers present an innovative analysis of queer and dissident musics in various cultural contexts, and they do so by interlinking their queer positionally in an intimate and rigorous manner, inviting readers and future ethnomusicologist to apply, even though they may not be queer, an open, critical and, why not say it, queer perspective to the musics they study. The heterosexual male Western perspective has been the norm for a long time, perhaps the time has come to change that.

But what is happening in Latin-American and Hispanic ethnomusicology? There are myriad calls to strengthen gender music studies or “queer musicology” transcending historic compensation by visibilising the life and work of women, as well as taking critical, open and bold stances by studying music from the multiplicity of identities (Millán de Benavides and Quintana Martínez 2012: 18). According to Mercedes Liska, gender studies of popular music in Latin America remain few and far between, even more so in the case of practices that differ from the hegemonic heterosexual norm (Liska 2014:5). Towards the end of the decade of the 2000s, several Latin-American studies on queer and dissident music begin to appear, with Argentina at the forefront (see Cecconi 2009; Blázquez 2009; Lenarduzzi 2012; Liska 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018; Wood 2016, López Cano 2008). So, we are talking about approximately fifteen years of contributions, though they may be scarce, of literature about queer music transmitting the voice of the LGBTI community in Latin America. However, the effort of these authors is significant, given the limited material specific to our discipline, above all in Spanish, which serves both as a reference, and theoretical and methodological framing of how to approach dissident gender and sexual representations through music. We now have a generation of researchers with fluid notions of gender and sexuality who are queer or dissident themselves and promote intersectional queer ethnomusicology.

**Gender studies in Peru. Where are we at?**

The year 2019 saw the publication of the volume *Trayectorias de los estudios de género. Balances, retos y propuestas tras 25 años en la PUCP*, edited by Fanni Muñoz, Cecilia Esparza and Martín Jaime. This tome celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Universidad Católica’s Gender Study Programme, including research carried out at said institution. A section is included here on “Representaciones de la Diversidad Sexual” (“Representations of Sexual Diversity”*)*. However, these studies about dissidences and gender and sexual diversity are not usually included in stock-taking or overviews of Peruvian gender studies. For example, Norma Fuller, in this very volume, in her contribution “Los estudios de género en el Perú. Aportes desde la antropología” (“Gender studies in Peru. Contributions from anthropology”), makes no mention of any of these studies. Instead, she highlights the need to explore how “gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination such as class, race, sexual orientation and age” (2019: 41). In this publication the editors make a call for more studies of diversity that visibilize spaces for LGBTI identities: “In Peru sexual diversity is a phenomenon that is little explored compared to other subjects, though in recent years the output of academic studies has grown considerably” (Muñoz, Esparza and Jaime 2019: 17). The mentioned studies of diverse identities include publications by Giancarlo Cornejo (2014, 2011, 2019), Martín Jaime (2009, 2013, 2019), Jorge Bracamonte (2001) and Angélica Motta (2001, 2019).

Although the book was published in 2019, the overviews and contributions included attest to a highly binary notion of gender expressed in roles, performativity, classification systems and power hierarchies, which in turn reflect the marked absence of research that escapes said binary. This does not mean that there are no studies about gender and sexual dissidences, however the early works, at least, did not enjoy access to the same privileged spheres or academic standing, as the more traditional research rooted in feminism. This is changing.

For many years in Peru LGBTI issues were reduced to depathologizing the homosexual individual in the social imaginary. “The area of health has been a constant reference in the social imaginary associated with LGBTI people and from this angle it has been possible to build a presence (Jaime 2019: 321), especially when for a long time this community was the focus of public policies around HIV and AIDS. That was when attention began to be paid to trans women.

Between pathologization and depathologization Latin-American LGBTI collectives have celebrated several victories in their fight for equal rights. At the same time this progress has generated violent reactions in the form of misinformed anti-rights campaigns opposing a so-called “gay agenda” or ill termed “gender ideology”, which have found backing in conservative governments supported, in turn, by Evangelical and Pentecostal movements, that perpetuate the exclusion of the LGBTI community (further information in Motta 2019). In this struggle the dissident citizen is shaped, the LGBTI individual with political agency. This agency is initially related to denouncing cases of discrimination and violence (Jaime 2009: 7-14) and subsequently this denouncing transform into visible activism and artivism that builds a robust and diverse community of citizens who, beyond traditional binaries, construct a dissident citizen identity.

In the year 2016 the movement Not One Less[[8]](#footnote-9) against femicide and gender violence reaches Peru, and in August that same year a march brings together half a million people in the streets of Lima. For Angélica Motta this movement gave rise to new expressions of feminism that enable articulating the feminist agenda and sexual diversity, especial that of trans women (Motta, personal communication, October 2021). Since then the studies of dissidence and gender and sexual diversity have gathered force in Peru. Not One Less in Argentina succeeded in “articulating cross-cutting activism that generated a lever in the social perception of gender, thereby fostering a growing list of demands, which propelled several actions, many of them artistic” (Liska 2021: 86-87). There are clear overlaps in the demands put forward and the outlines of intersectional agendas are emerging. I am convinced that this juncture calls for urgent research on how gender inequality can be framed from the vantage point of said intersectionality. Can everything that we have learned and studied about racism, as well as racial and ethnic inequality help us fight gender inequality? This for me would be the greatest contribution we could make from Latin America to the world. We who have postcolonial experience, who have been fighting racism and social inequality for years and yearn for true social inclusion recognising and respecting the diversity that makes us who we are; perhaps we are the ones who are called to bring to gender studies everything we have learned in other areas of study and to contribute an intersectional, diverse and open perspective that documents dialogue and the convergence of activist agendas.

LGBTI youth use music against violence and discrimination. Their compositions, audiovisual creations, protest music and sonic interventions in political demonstrations represent, visibilise and build communities and identities of struggle. This gives rise to music spaces that become communities of psychological healing where dissident voices find themselves and each other to find in unity the strength needed to confront violent society.

Music, in this context, not only provides an opportunity to visibilise the LGBTI individual, but also opens doors to a community of artivist peers as political entities and as sexual, dissident beings with a need for positive connection in environments that are less toxic and hostile. Said spaces serve as music therapies that contribute to the psychological wellbeing of the group. This is crucial, because precisely these individuals do not have easy access to mental health services. Not only because it is a scarce service in Peru, but also because of the enormous demand, given the multiple situations of violence, abuse and discrimination faced by this community (Jaime 2013), as well as the absence of training on concepts such as gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual diversity and sexual practices among healthcare personnel in Peru (Gómez Cardeña 2019: 328).

**The LGBTI music scene in Lima. Innovation, subversion, visibility, resistance and artivism**

As we have seen in previous sections, if gender and diversity studies are rare in Peru, ethnomusicological music studies of dissidence are even rarer. This article is the first to approach this music community, and to this end it draws on direct testimonies from LGBTI artists. It is not my intention to provide a complete biography of the actors herein, but rather to articulate the importance of the LGBTI music scene in Lima today, how it is received and what role it plays in the community.

There have, of course, always been gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people who have composed and performed music in Lima and all of Peru. However, their stories were told in gossip, secrets spilled and tabloid scandals, one example is the widely known story of Andean singer Abencia Meza.[[9]](#footnote-10) Some hid their homosexuality to avoid risking their music careers, others lived in very closed circles trying to decouple their music from their “intimate life”. The pathologization and demonisation of homosexuality painted a very negative picture for emerging musicians on the Lima scene. According to some LGBTI musician in Lima, coming out as an artist was only an option once you were famous or left the country to record abroad, in true Ricky Martin fashion, arguably the most famous Latino singer to come out of the closet. Still, even he waited until 2010 to declare himself “a fortunate homosexual man.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

Of course, many others who are less fortunate are still waiting to be honest with themselves and their audience. And given the rates of violence against the LGBTI community in Peru and Latin America it is understandable.[[11]](#footnote-12) However, what is an option for some members of the LGBTI community, is not for others. For trans or non-binary people hiding their identity on stage and in front of an audience is harder. Fiorella Cava, lead guitarist of the 1980s rock band JAS, was the first to visibilise trans identity in Peruvian popular music, though her transition took place several years after the band’s heyday.[[12]](#footnote-13) Twenty years later Eme Eyzaguirre[[13]](#footnote-14) enters the stage and it is with him that I begin this story.

I got to know Eme’s music in 2016, while engaged in long-term research on Peruvian fusion music and its role in the search for a national identity among white high-class youth from Lima. I was interested in the recontextualisation of many iconic criollo, Andean and Afro-Peruvian songs through his voice. I use the term recontexualisation given that the songs were not fusions per se, but did acquire a different meaning, a more political one, when they were sung by Eme from a pro-rights and anti-violence lens against the LGBTI community, Eme himself is a member of the LGBTI community. I did not include Eme in my fusion mapping exercise, but his voice, music and history stayed with me for a long time, perhaps also because I felt highly identified with his transition process, his lyrics and his political presence, as it came through in interviews and performances: “the artist has this responsibility, more than responsibility the urgency to speak out about what is happening, you would have to be very cold to just watch everything that is going on without saying anything” (Eme, radio interview in Qué tal Perú, 2017).[[14]](#footnote-15)

Eme transitioned before the eyes of his audience and all of Peru. The changes in his body, face and voice could be seen and heard in every song and performance. Eme, who was always giving his musical renditions of songs with sensual themes or that expressed desire; situated the trans person in the space of desire and not on the margins of the alien and sick. Given that he is a singer, and a highly expressive one at that, this is part of his performance style, it is not just his lyrics that convey inclusive or sensual messages, but his voice framed with marked arm, hand and facial gestures. He creates what Suzanne Cusick describes as a space in which sex, gender and sexuality are performed (1999: 27). But every voice has a body, and this trans body onstage tells a story parallel to the songs it embodies. Well known songs such as *Cardó o Ceniza (Thistle or Ash)* and *Pecho de Cristal* (*Crystal chest*) acquire queer undertones. It is not Chabuca Granda[[15]](#footnote-16) or an old muliza[[16]](#footnote-17) on forbidden love, it is Eme singing about what one should nary mention or wish to see, visibilising diversity in love from a body in transition, which is deftly highlighted by body paint on the cover of his first album *Raíz/es* (*Root/is*) (Lima, 2017).[[17]](#footnote-18)

*Photo caption*

*Eme in concert. (Image: Francesca Bernetti. Photograph used with the permission of Eme and Francesca Bernetti)*

Unknowingly, Eme touched a generation of LGBTI youth, especially trans, which in future would share the stage with him and irrupt into the world of artivism in full force. In 2016 these well-known song lyrics, in a predominantly Catholic context where conversion therapy, threats of eternal damnation and guilt pushed by relatives and friends are common and frequent in the contexts of most LGBTI homes, touched the LGBTI community and allies deeply, it is not hard to identify with Eme and his message: “I’ve seen that no soul is condemned for loving” or “they say that I’m headed for hell and that my love is incurable, but the *cholita* I were to love would find herself straight in heaven” (Extracts from *Pecho de Cristal*).[[18]](#footnote-19)

This popular music material, which reappropriates traditional Peruvian music, reaches audiences not only as sound, but also lyrics, fashion and audiovisual production making it even more attractive to LGBTI and straight youth. Some arrive at it through traditional music, others because of the audiovisual message, others thanks to the lyrics and yet others because they identify with the artist. Eme then launches *Pecho de Cristal* as a LGBTI Pride 2016 videoclip; does the same with *Cardó o Ceniza in* 2017[[19]](#footnote-20); and for 2018, Eme composes the huayno[[20]](#footnote-21) *Corazón Resiste*[[21]](#footnote-22) (*Heart Withstand*) inspired by two collaborative poems written by over 60 LGBTI people in Lima and Huancayo. In 2019 Eme writes and composes, along with guitarist Ruth Torres, the waltz *Ser el Grito* (*Be the Cry*).[[22]](#footnote-23) In these last two videoclips several members of the Lima LGBTI community take part, supported by Eme’s voice they share their stories, their presence, their urban interventions and their cries. In both videoclips we see the participation of Gahela Tseneg Cari Contreras, the first trans and indigenous woman to run for Congress in Peru in 2021, which adds even more weight to the political message.

The artistic universe goes hand in hand with activism and is linked to self-management. In early 2019 Eme, along with his then representative Adriana Seminario, create Escuela Libertad (Freedom School) with objective of establishing a safe space of “learning, coming together and questioning from the arts.” (Facebook group Casa Libertad, May 15th, 2019). Escuela Libertad would provide formal work in the arts to dissidences and in turn empower the LGBTI community through music in a safe space.

Escuela Libertad later becomes Casa Libertad (Freedom House) in response to the needs of women and dissidences at risk of close and intimate relationship violence and abandonment. The house grows, the number of beds increases and music, from being a space of social questioning from the arts, becomes psychotherapy.

In my case, personally, my music is a space of healing, a hug, I always like the idea of being able to meet other trans people, other dissident people and to give each other that hug, which through music I also intend to give them (Antay, trans man singer, age 25. Personal interview, September 2021).

I personally associate music with a safe space and calm, mainly that. Casa Libertad was an “I’m escaping to find some peace,” and then became… “well, I’m going to music therapy” [laughter] I would go there, talk to people, it was super relaxed. In general Casa Libertad was the polar opposite of being at home (Fabio, trans man, age 25, Personal interview, October 2021).

Casa Libertad was financed through the self-management of its members and external donations. It offered concerts, workshops and talks and had vegan food on sale. And this confluence of art and activism creates a community centred on the ideals of artivism; a community that later would drive a vibrant dissident scene in Lima. In its short life, pre Covid-19 pandemic, this space sheltered several people in search of a safe place. It accompanied not only dissidences, but also women who had suffered gender violence, it helped foster strong ties between feminism and the LGBTI community, created inclusive job opportunities and the diversity of the community enabled intersectional dialogue. Yet precisely this intersectionality also caused wires to cross, given that many agendas imbued with the pain of abandonment, rage about injustice and uncertainty about the future collided within four walls:

When you are trying to do activism, it’s as if each person has a wound, a pain, an experience, which we have to be aware of and we have to be careful. Perhaps in that moment nobody had an answer yet as to the vantage point from which we wanted to engage in activism (…) we hadn’t even defined who we were, what we wanted to do (Antay, singer trans man, aged 25. Personal interview, September 2021).

After an intense year filled with music and activism, the pandemic and an accusation of racism by an Afro-Peruvian activist who was a friend of Casa Libertad, causes fractures in Casa Libertad and subsequently its closure. The accusation was not taken lightly and the founding members of the community, including Eme, distanced themselves from the art world in order to reflect on the issue raised. These reflections also had an impact on the music, given that part of the reflection was around music appropriation, meaning performing and composing music using Afro-Peruvian and Andean elements without direct belonging to those cultures.

When you want to take on so many angles, when you are working with so many people in pain, with traumas, you also need psychological support, flanking measures. There was a lot of good will and vibes in that house, but we were all twenty-somethings. It’s not enough. Casa Libertad is gone and my safe space, my community, my strength in music went (Naty, trans woman, aged 26, Personal interview, October 2021).[[23]](#footnote-24)

The thing is that not every agenda was compatible. Racial, ethnic, LGBTI, even feminist agendas. They’re all-time bombs for our community. We should have carried on talking, changing, giving opportunities. How many times haven’t we given opportunities to homophobic people? People mess up, but you move forward. (Manuel, gay man, aged 28, Personal interview, October 2021).

Casa Libertad closed its doors, but its community remains active, self-management and the attempts to generate a community based around activism and solidarity continue. Many music projects were managed from dissidence for dissidence and emerged after 2019, including *Júrame. (Swear to me)* (Antay)[[24]](#footnote-25) and *El Reino de los Raros* (*The Kingdom of Queers*) (Marden Crunjer).[[25]](#footnote-26) Several artists, LGBTI musicians, experts in production, makeup, photography, fashion come together to develop music projects, one clear example is Gahela’s production *Nuestra Lucha es Fiesta (Our Struggle is a Party)[[26]](#footnote-27)* it is a showcase of the multiple collaborations within the LGBTI collective. In this way the LGBTI collective reconstructs the concept of society and citizenship from a queer perspective *(*queer world making*)* (Muñoz 1999: 195-6). But not everyone in the community is an artivist.

**Escaping artivism: *Negra* Valencia**

Valeria *Negra* Valencia is 31 years old and for several of these she has been making independent music within a national circuit known as DIY.[[27]](#footnote-28) Since 2016 she has been a driving force behind several parallel music projects, which are entirely self-managed, she uses them to express diverse messages always from “a lesbian language”, as she herself terms it. Her sonic influences are eclectic, as is her music, from Arctic Monkeys and the B52s to sub genres such as emo punk, electro punk, hip hop and trap. As one of the very few women on the independent electronic circuit, she has managed to carve out room for herself in a white upper middle-class space. Hers is a bid to break with the elitist and closed tradition of this circuit, and, along with fellow musicians of a new generation, she has created an inclusive community open to the provinces using the Internet as the main means of dissemination and music exchange.

Photo caption

Mi Puga Mi Pishgu. From left to right: Daniel Valencia, Valeria Valencia and Paulo Pereyra. (Photography: Sebastián Mariscal. Photo used with the permission of Valeria Valencia).

Valeria created three parallel music projects: 1) Dan Dero[[28]](#footnote-29), an indie dream-pop band with a 1990s sound that they generate with lead voices in unison and exaggerated use of reverb to create interminable legatos, not only in the voices but also in the instrumentation. 2) *Negra* Valencia, her solo project where she sings the lead with explicit sensuous and sexual lyrics and a creative and quite unusual use of panning, which increases the erotic and sexual effect of the sung sections. And 3) the now defunct Mi Puga Mi Pishgu[[29]](#footnote-30), a trio fusing trap and electro punk with hypersexual lyrics and a low-fi aesthetic based on sound distortion.

As opposed to many other LGBT artists, who I’ve heard, I don’t directly discuss LGBT issues, because, apart from the fact that it doesn’t necessarily come naturally to me, I’m not an activist, my music doesn’t necessarily spring from activism, but rather individuality. If I have to say that I love a girl, I have no problem saying that and I’ll say it and I’ll speak from the voice of a lesbian (Valeria Valencia, personal interview, October 2021).

The common denominator for all these projects, within a sea of stylistic differences, is that the lyrics are written from a lesbian individuality. This individuality is expressed in different ways, just as LGBTI identities are. For Valencia, as for many in the LGBTI community, you cannot be either a full-time activist or politically passive, LGBTI identities are more than that, there is also the sexual and affective side, the erotic aspect and the realm of desire, fantasy, romanticism, the explicit and even what is perceived as vulgar.

*Comparto mi hamaca con otras muchachas*

*Veteranas pitucas me censuran la huacha*

*Mis pecados los salvo pagando mis diezmos*

*Para que no me linchen cuando las tijereo*

*I share my hammock with another lady*

*Veteran posh girls censor my fanny*

*Paying my tithe I purge my sins*

*So they won’t lynch me as I scissor ‘em*

*(Extract from Skama - Kloaka (Scab - Sewer), Mi Puga, Mi Pishgu, 2017)*

*La noche es oscura y una gitana me hipnotiza,*

*Me llama y yo salgo de la cloaca que cobija*

*Las criaturas que la aldea ya quiere matar*

*Porque dicen que a sus familias van a malograr*

*Mi boca gitana atrevida y bandida*

*Quiere que la lleve a una aventura sin salida*

*Somos monstruos que queremos por la noche amar*

*Sin importar que en la mañana nos van a linchar*

*In the dark night a gypsy las has me hypnotised*

*She calls and I come out of the sewer that hides*

*The creatures who the village wants to slay*

*Saying we’ll lead their families astray*

*My daring and renegade gypsy mouth*

*Tells me whisk her on trip with no way out*

*We’re monsters who want to love in the night*

*No matter that they’ll lynch us at first dayligh*

*(Extract from Monstruo - Kloaka (Monster - Sewer), Mi Puga, Mi Pishgu, 2019)[[30]](#footnote-31)*

In dialogue with young LGBTI audiences in Lima, some appear to perceive that the artivist music stage, which predominates, is intended for the LGBTI community, but that it perhaps, in order to raise awareness, speaks more directly to those straight people who do not support or understand their struggle. “It’s not a let’s burn it all to the ground, I want my rights, but rather a let’s transform the way the ignorant think” (Nano, trans man, aged 30). For others, it is important to have dissident music for dissidences that transcends an explicitly activist message.

*Negra* Valencia, Andrés Bello, and La Saya sing unapologetically from a gay existence, without suffering, are we indecent? Too much for tender Catholic eyes and ears? deal with it… I don’t just exist in suffering, but also pleasure and explicit love (Marta, lesbian, aged 24, personal interview, November 2021).

The two strands coexist without contradiction. Valeria, for example, is aware of the need to have multiple messages from the voice of the LGBTI community, but also underlines that not all LGBTI singers have to be artivists. It is important to note that Valeria perceives herself as an artist from the vantage point of intersectionality, she is of Afro-Peruvian heritage and a lesbian and it has been more difficult for her to accept herself as black (hence the artistic name), than as a lesbian. “The moment I take on *Negra* (Black) as a name I feel totally empowered, in the sense that *Negra* is no longer a taunt for me (…) Being a lesbian you can hide, being black is not something you can hide” (personal interview, October 2021).

In a country like Peru where otherness is grounds for discrimination, an individual can be excluded from a peer group because an intersectional element detonates this otherness, meaning, being an artist of intersectional identity can alienate an individual more from the dominant status quo. In the case of Valeria, going to a white upper class school meant that the otherness was caused by her skin colour, not her gender or sexual identity. In Valeria these two sides to her identity as a person overlap and it is not surprising that what she recounts about the term *black* and her personal empowerment through the appropriation of that word is equivalent to how others in the LGBTI community feel about words such as “*cabra, marica* or *traca*” (“poof, faggot or tranny”). What shines through is a potential for the convergence of intersectional agendas in a bid to unite subordinate voices.

Some LGBTI singers also feel that they cannot escape artivism:

I think that our very existence sort of takes us there. Getting on stage as a trans person, even for a instant, being that *wow!..* [surprised inhale] It’s already political. I mean, you may want to deny it, there are probably people who wan’t to deny that, but that shit is already political. It’s putting a body, which usually doesn’t have a presence in the hegemony or in desire, on a stage and generating for those 2 to 5 minutes the performance lasts a *wow!,* it’s already political because you’re educating, you’re generating change, you’re saying “listen up, you who constantly marginalise me, look at me”, “I’m something else, I’m more than what you think I am” (Antay, personal interview, September 2021).

Whether the artist wants to or not often the personal and the sexual and erotic becomes activist, and although LGBTI existences sing from their dissident individuality, the message will be received by many as something political. Songs such as *Skama (Scab)* or *Monstruo (Monster)* by Mi Puga, Mi Pishgu are perceived as affronts to a conservative, Catholic and sanctimonious society, a subversive manifesto of these communities that are slanted as monstrous and corrupt; those decadent bodies that cannot love and much less desire or be desired.

**Confluence of agendas: intersectionality, feminism and LGBTI allies: Wendy Sulca**

In the opening pages of this article, I suggested that countries with post-colonial experience that are immersed in a century-old struggle against racism, discrimination and social injustice, may have more tools to contribute to gender studies from an intersectional, diverse and open perspective, which documents and encourages the confluence of activist agendas. Drawing on Casa Libertad as a case study, we saw that this very intersectionality can cause fractures when individuals feel “othered” by intersectional characteristics that are not shared by the group in question. In Casa Libertad everyone represented a letter in the LGBTI acronym, but not everyone shared the same racial experience or psychological experience in the aftermath of trauma. In the case of Valeria Valencia, we see how different strands of her intersectional identity merge, and how the LGBTI aspect of it may have facilitated racial acceptance, which was the main element of ‘otherness’ in her case. This demonstrates how one of the identities that co-exist in the intersectional self can support a process of acceptance of the individual.

In Peru, as opposed to many Anglo-American countries, contemporary feminism goes hand in hand with LGBTI activism, specifically trans feminist alliances, which have strengthened both communities in their fight against violence and equal social inclusion. Efforts were made to make this happen with Casa Libertad, and in 2021 a new house, Casa Transformar, of the new Transformar collective, which is led by Gahela Tseneg Cari Contreras[[31]](#footnote-32), opened its doors as “a space for diverse women to meet. An intersectional space that attempts to work collectively in order to transform the reality of women and trans people in Peru” (Angélica Motta, video clip Transformar, 2021).[[32]](#footnote-33) Nevertheless, the intersectionality of race and diverse abilities generates anxiety among activist organisations and collectives that work to secure more rights in Peru and Latin America. In this section the singer Wendy Sulca, a valued ally of the LGBTI community, helps us to understand the importance of linking agendas through experiences of discrimination and racism.

Wendy Sulca began her singing career aged six. Her family is Andean from the province of Ayacucho, and she took on the mantle of her father’s tradition, a Northern huayno harpist, and in the vein of her great influences Dina Páucar and Sonia Morales, she enters the vernacular scene. How she innovated was always by singing the humorous lyrics in double-entendre, which are very common in Northern folklore music, in the voice and body of a little girl with a broad smile and innate musicality. Her band also drew attention, they were all young men around the age of eighteen adding a fresh youthful music framing. By the time she was eight (2005) Wendy was already a folklore star with contracts in several Andean and Amazonian regions. That was how La Pequeña Wendy (Little Wendy) and her band, accompanied by Wendy’s mother, the then manager and composer of the songs her daughter sang, began touring the four corners of Peru receiving very warm welcomes from Northern huayno followers (see Ferrier 2010), which was in its heyday in early 2000.

Photo caption

Filming *Chao Chao Chao* at Downtown Vale Todo, Lima. From left to right: Uriel The Drag, Toño Rodríguez, Belaluh McQueen, Wendy Sulca, Egocéntrica Chameleon, Leyzan Smith, Nébulah Knowless. (Photo given by Gustavo de la Torre. Credit: 24 Studio. Photo reprinted with the permission of Marcos Rodríguez - Vale Todo-, Wendy Sulca and Gustavo de la Torre).

In 2005 three songs go viral thanks to YouTube: a) *La Tetita (The Breast)*, a song sung from the perspective of a little girl who wants to be nursed by her mum[[33]](#footnote-34); b) *Papito (Daddy)[[34]](#footnote-35)*, a song composed on the death of her father; and c) *Cerveza (Beer)[[35]](#footnote-36)*, a song in the voice of a spurned lover where alcohol takes the spotlight as a healer of sorrows. These songs travel beyond the regions where Wendy was already popular and reach Lima, as well as many other Latin-American cities. Before her 10th birthday, Wendy goes from experiencing the love of her followers in Peru’s provinces to being the target of ridicule, scorn, hatred and age-old violent racism that makes her question her love of music:

I have been viciously attacked since I was very little. At first it made me cry, because, of course, people said horrible things, literally that I should die, and why are there so many bad people? I really didn’t understand that, why do the hate me so much? What have I done to make them hate me […]? I might not be the best singer, but that’s no justification for saying “just drop dead” or “*chola* this that and the other” I didn’t understand the insults, and my mum was a huge support for me, she has always been the pillar that sustains me, she’s a very positive person and she tells me “you’re not going to give up because of that”… I wanted to stop singing, obviously, I said “ mum I’m no good at this, people hate me”… I even felt that my friends [from school] were ashamed of me and I said I didn’t want that. I don’t want people to be embarrassed by me. I was feeling ashamed of myself and that’s not ok. Well, my mum made me understand that nobody is liked by everyone and even great artists like Shakira, like Madonna, you know much greater artists, are not to the liking of the entire public (Wendy Sulca, personal interview, October 2021).

This, of course, goes hand in hand with a very typical Lima notion that Andean music is old-fashioned, backwards, in poor taste and simply ridiculous (Montero-Diaz 2016, 2017). Outside of Peru, in Anglo-American literature and the media, these songs become “Peruvian kitsch” or “Neo Andean kitsch” a clear reference to the “kitsch” aesthetic, sound, message and singer, an obvious example of symbolic violence (Aguiló 2020). It should be said that any perception of her music as kitschis not something that concerns Wendy. Like every singer she cares about keeping her public happy and continuing to create material. It is clear that the online harassment and bullying she has experienced has been largely down to her being an indigenous girl with international success, not so much to the perception of her art.[[36]](#footnote-37) As an example, a tweet when Wendy Sulca participated in the MTV Millenial Awards (2014), which was discussed on a showbiz programme on the Peruvian television channel Frecuencia Latina read: “I can’t understand that Wendy Sulca is famous and I’m not. Indigenous bitch”*[[37]](#footnote-38)* At the end of the day, the songs mentioned have about 22 million views one YouTube and all her other videos have over 100 thousand views; far more than any average mainstream Latin-American artist.

In spite of the abuse and harassment, Wendy continued to grow and collaborated with international artists the likes of Andrés Calamaro, René Pérez, Dante Spinetta, Fito Páez, Dani Umpi, Rubén Albarrán (Café Tacuba), Gepe, Miss Bolivia, and the Peruvian Susana Baca, among others. She was one of the first Peruvians to be digitally distributed by the Spanish label AltaFonte and she knows the most prolific music producers of the Latin-American scene. Wendy, at the age of 25, has moved beyond the songs of her childhood and continues to make music as a soloist leading a band of musicians with established careers on the Lima music circuit, who also happen to be from Lima’s upper middle class.

Wendy does not perceive this as an inversion of the power dynamics of a society like the Peruvian, but rather enjoys it as a validation of her artistic presence and value. Having been violently abused by Lima’s upper middle classes, she is now leading her own music and musicians of that same class, by managing her artistic and media presence and by promoting her own clothing label, among other business initiatives. From Andean music Wendy turns to folk fusion and it is with this aesthetic that she launches songs such as *Eso ya fue (That’s in the past)[[38]](#footnote-39),* *Cerveza, Cerveza 2.0 (Beer, Beer 2.0).[[39]](#footnote-40)* Wendy, now wearing a *pollera* (traditional Andean skirt) as a mini skirt, which she has adapted herself and sells as part of her clothing line, Princesa Inca*,* sings these songscrammed with references to what caused her harassers to ridicule her. For example, in *Eso ya fue*, there is a line that says: “Don’t ask me for *la tetita* that’s in the past” and in *Cerveza, Cerveza 2.0* one of the recurring phrases throughout the video, which comes on just as Wendy prepares to eat off the back of a man, is “Ser(Mesa)” (BeingATable). This scene is a reference to her much discussed pronunciation of *cerveza* (beer), which she pronounced “*cermeza*” (being a table), in the original song from when se was eight. This quirk was roundly mocked mocked in YouTube comments back then, but she now draws on it as an empowerment tool.

*Chao Chao Chao (Bye Bye Bye)[[40]](#footnote-41)* is another song composed for the singer by a group of Venezuelan composers of long-standing music career, which has a message of transcending and overcoming the hatred and racism levelled at Wendy over the years. The song was released with a video recorded at the most famous LGBTI disco in Lima, Downtown Vale Todo.

*No me importa lo que digan  
No me importa lo que hagan  
Lo que pienses de mi vida  
Suavecito me resbala*

*Y yo te digo chao, chao, chao  
Te repito chao, chao, chao  
Que te vaya bien, que te vaya bien*

*Sigue opinando que todo es envidia  
Yo lo que tengo nadie me lo quita  
Yo me lo gano, no tomo nada en vano  
Y tú perdiendo el tiempo criticando*

*Sigo subiendo y tú vas bajando  
Yo ya encontré lo que tú estás buscando  
El dinero, la fama, no importa nada  
Como quieras seguiré cantando*

*I don’t care what they say*

*I don’t care what they do*

*Your thoughts on my life slide*

*like water off a ducks back*

*And I tell you bye, bye, bye,*

*I repeat bye, bye, bye,*

*Good luck to you, good luck*

*Keep talking it’s all jealousy*

*What I have no one’ll take from me*

*I earn it taking nothing for granted*

*Keep criticising your time’s wasted*

*I keep rising and you falling*

*I’m found you’re still searching*

*Money, fame, don’t matter a thing*

*No matter what I’ll keep singing*

(Extract from *Chao Chao Chao*. Composers lyrics and music: Manuel Zabala/ Edmundo Benavides / Juan Carlos Luces / Paola Marrero)[[41]](#footnote-42)

Wendy considers herself a feminist and an ally in the LGBTI struggle, she saw in *Chao Chao Chao* a way to unite the two causes in one song and proceeded to sing and film this video thinking of the LGBTI community.

As soon as I heard it with my whole team I said “Wow*!* I love the song, it’s amazing”, and it’s because they were really inspired by my career and what I’ve gone through and all that. And I keep listening and listening and I tell them “guys, this song is perfect for the [LGBTI] community, I think the community will feel very identified with this song” because it’s also about that, and because they’re also treated with prejudice, with discrimination and it’s something that shouldn’t exist (Wendy, personal interview, October 2021).

The video clip features Wendy, her musicians and well-known Lima drag queens. However, in the video you also see, especially during the chorus, a group of women with Andean features by the artist’s side, in clear contrast with the very tall women in high heals in the second row.

They’re my friends. That’s why I was telling you that the song is for everyone, in general, and its against prejudice, against discrimination, against racism, against haters, it’s dedicated to the people who suffer at their hands and especially to the community that has suffered so much of that (Wendy, personal interview, October 2021).

Having dealt with violent misogyny and racism from a very early age means that Wendy empathises with others groups that have suffered discrimination and gratuitous hatred simply for being who they are. She understands LGBTI issues, just as the LGBTI community understands her testimony of resilience, resistance and success. Much of her music material can be interpreted in various ways and by many communities, in particular the LGBTI community which favours her in its music taste. Can other Peruvians who have experienced racial discrimination empathise with the LGBTI community? Given that the everyday of your average person from Lima is permeated by racism, exclusion and discrimination, is it not possible to use these experiences of systemic violence as tools to empathise with other marginalised and violated populations? In other words, can anti-racist action and reaction support the anti-homophobia cause?

Wendy has been bullied by people saying she is a *chola*, kitsch, uses *polleras*, sings out of tune, is toothless… but she kept singing. I’ve been bullied for daring to be trans as a *cholo*, for wearing bright colours, for being camp, for being gay, for being me… and I’m still alive. Wendy and her life experience broadcast on TV and documented on social media gives me the strength to carry on being me “whatever they say about my life slides like water off a ducks back” (Martin, trans man, aged 23. personal interview, September 2021).

We need more intersectional spaces recognising experiences that are shared, albeit not identical. Music once again generates those spaces, but as participants we should broaden the discussion, empathy, intersectional visibility and cultural subversion. As academics we urgently need to expand the study of the LGBTI community from several fronts, but in particular artivist spaces, that are widespread at present and not just in Lima. The Lima LGBTI community thanks to self-management and networking, accesses more spaces that are political, artistic and have social influence. From being a community reduced to pathologization owing to its homosexuality, it has become a visible, socially and economically active, empowered and empathic community with great solidarity. There is still a long way to go, but in the artistic workspaces there is a note of optimism, unity and a desire to transform Peruvian society.

In Latin America, in response to social violence, dictatorships, internal conflict and gender inequality, diverse populations have used art as resistance (Ochoa 2006, Milton 2014, Chornik 2018, Montero-Diaz 2016). A range of artivist spaces are formed to commemorate and preserve memory in order to discuss social violence, post-conflict trauma and transforming the future of societies fractured by violence and mistrust. All of this long before the term “artivism” becomes known in Latin American spheres. Scholarly work such as that of Andrea Giunta and Mercedes Liska demonstrates how quantitative and qualitative music studies are generating changes in the sphere of the arts (Giunta 2019: 55) and in state cultural policy (Liska 2021:103) by visibilising information, particularly on topics of gender and inequality. My own research on fusion music, whiteness and antiracism in Lima illustrates the importance and impact of popular music as a technology for conflict transformation (2016), for changing racial perceptions and stereotypes (2018b) and for building a new citizenship (2019). Given that music, gender, sexuality, the body and desire are part of a social experience in community, but also highly personal, these acquire a unique potency to subvert the status quo, knocking down established power hierarchies that the majority bows to, and why not? reconstruct our notion of the world. We have, from Latin America, much to share, much to theorise on from our intersectional experience, much to contribute.

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no. 2: 259–279.

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2. Global Challenges Research Fund Networking Grant awarded by the British Academy of Medical Sciences for the project Sounding a Queer Rebellion! LGBTI Musical Resistances in Latin America <https://www.queermusicprotest.com/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. My deepest gratitude for their time, friendship and sincerity during the preparation of this article goes to all of the interviewees. I am also thankful for the time, support and rigour of Dr Angélica Motta and Dr Luis Gabriel Mesa Martínez who read and commented on this contribution. Of course, I also owe infinite thanks to the editors of this volume and the British Academy of Medical Sciences. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Artivism or “activist art” (Nina Felshin 1995), is understood as the combination of artistic expression, political activism and group organisation. A blend that visibilises art as communication and the body as support (Ortega Centella 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Colectivo Lastesis carry out a performance on the day against violence against women. Santiago town centre November 25th 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7r6hdo3W4> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Vivir sin miedo (Living without fear) is a media campaign aimed at changing sociocultural patterns that genera inequality and gender violence against women, youths, teenagers and girls. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzAH06bnpYY> (Last accessed on January 04th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. This does not mean that there are no people, who identify as such, however, it is uncommon and more frequent among the higher socioeconomic strata. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ni una Menos (Not One Less) is an activist movement that originated in Argentina but spread to many other countries creating a wave of social awareness that washes over and involves the whole region transforming multiple social structures. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. “Juicios Mediáticos” (“Media Trials”) by Patricia Salinas O. Caretas Magazine. <https://caretas.pe/caretas-tv/juicios-mediaticos/> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “Ricky Martin remembers that it was hard for him to acknowledge that he is ‘a gay man’” El Espectador. <https://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/gente/a-ricky-martin-le-costo-reconocerse-como-un-hombre-homosexual/> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See studies on violence against people because of their sexual orientation: <https://observatorioviolencia.pe/comprendiendo-la-violencia-por-orientacion-sexual-e-identidad-de-genero/> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. “Se llama Fiorella” (“Her name is Fiorella”) by Bethsabé Huamán. Runa <http://www.runa.org.pe/hot-news-1/sellamafiorella> In 2012 Fiorella becomes the first transexual woman to be legally recognised as a woman after years of legal processes and activism. (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Merian was his pre-transition artist name. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. You can hear more of the interview here: “Que tal Perú. Entrevista con Merian” (4 julio 2017) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywyMf7OWhcI> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Chabuca Granda, was a Peruvian singer and composer from Lima. She composed and interpreted many waltzes and afro-Peruvian songs; including Cardó o Ceniza. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Peruvian mestizo folk music genre popular in the central Andes, [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Eme releases this first album under the artist name Merian. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. “Eme-Pecho de Cristal (Pride 2016 video clip) Launched on August 31st 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_gGfMF4bHE> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. “Eme-Cardó o Ceniza (Pride LGBTIQ 2017 videoclip) Released 30th of September 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9e7O_I-sZ4> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Traditional Andean genre that incorporates both pre-Hispanic and Western musical elements. The genre changes depending on the region. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. “Eme-Corazón Resiste (Pride LGBTIQ 2018 videoclip) Released 23rd of August 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nszVWwVO56Y> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Eme-Ser el Grito (LGBTIQ Pride 2019 videoclip) Released on 29th of June 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ciwa_WjDEw&t=2s> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Some names have been anonymised at the interviewees’ request. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Antay – Júrame. Released June 25th 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWsty6zfJCI> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Marden Crunjer – El Reino de los Raros. Released June 29th 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqnbNq71Lro> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Artistas varios – Gahela, Nuestra Lucha es Fiesta. Released March 31st 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTEJNRyoV04> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. DIY is an abbreviation of *Do It Yourself*. It stems from an anti-consumerist ideology in which the artist self-manages and carries out the entire music production without the aid of industry *profesionals*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Band made up of Valeria Valencia, Jimena Guinea, Cinthia Trujillo, Mateo Novoa and Erik Baumann. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Band made up of Valeria Valencia, Daniel Valencia and Paulo Pereyra. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Lyrics reprinted with the permission of Valeria Valencia. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. The current director is Maju Carrión. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Transformar. Published on October 17th 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/transformarperu/videos/919408962266879> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Wendy Sulca – La Tetita. Released on September 10th 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO8R1kjpoo0> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Wendy Sulca – Papito. Released in 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdockhpuFZ4> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Wendy Sulca – Cerveza. Released in 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuoCd7UEkpc> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. There have been other Peruvian singers, who have been branded as “bad” or “in poor taste” in public opinion and discourse, for example, La Tigresa del Oriente, Susy Díaz and Tongo, who have not suffered the violent abuse Wendy has been the target of throughout her career and as a minor. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. # “Wendy Sulca plays down racist insults after her MTV performance” Published on August 19th 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRRfFiuMze4> (Last accessed on January 4th 2022).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Wendy Sulca - Eso ya fue. Released on January 11th 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R4fmUEGowA> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Wendy Sulca – Cerveza, cerveza 2.0. Released on March 01st 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLbfT8Ts94I> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Wendy Sulca – *Chao, chao, chao.* Released on July 19th 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uueXaOZG_nc> (Last accessed on August 25th 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Production and musical arrangement: Nani Luna and Gonzalo Calmet. Mix: Nani Luna. Mastering: Dave Kutch (The Mastering Palace). Lyrics printed with the permission of: Wendy Sulca, Gustavo de La Torre, Manuel Zabala, Edmundo Benavides, Juan Carlos Luces and Paola Marrero. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)