

**Singing to voice experiences of violence:  
a lyrical analysis of songs exploring violence against women in Latin America**

Emily McLean

Spanish Capstone

Professor Ryan Hallows

December 10, 2021

## Introduction

Violence against women in Latin America is not a new phenomenon, and it takes on numerous forms including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, femicide, trafficking, and infanticide (Wilson 2014). A report from the World Health Organization combining studies and surveys on gender violence from the years 2000-2018 estimates that in Latin America, 25% of women experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime (WHO 2021:23). It also estimates that the rate of non-partner sexual violence for Latin American women is roughly 11% (30). The rate of femicide is an especially prominent form of gender violence in Latin America. A 2016 Small Arms Survey titled “A Gender Analysis of Violent Deaths” found that “the subregions with the highest violent death rates for women include Central America, the Caribbean, and South America,” and that of the “25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, 14 are from Latin America and the Caribbean” (Widmer and Pavesi 2016).

While leaders and governments have made commitments to stop this violence (Global Americans 2021), the region’s rates of violence persist. Women’s movements throughout Latin America are demanding social and political reform in order to create awareness and find ways to prevent this violence. In recent years, many female artists have released songs around the issue of gender violence. It is therefore valuable to consider, *what do female artists communicate about the experience of women in Latin America through songs about violence against women?* Analysis of these song lyrics reveals how female artists are using song as a means to voice how loss, guilt, and shame are a part of Latin American women’s reality because of the violence they experience, which in turn has sparked both a necessity and responsibility to push back against oppression and demand change.

## **Lit Review**

### **The legal, social, and cultural reality of violence.**

The rates of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and femicide in Latin America reveal how violence has become a pervasive aspect of women's experiences throughout the region. Many researchers cite current justice systems and access to them as a factor contributing to gender violence in Latin American societies. Shannon Drysdale Walsh and Cecilia Menjivar analyzed the legal justice systems of Guatemala (2016) and Honduras (2017). They show how Guatemala, Honduras, and other Latin American countries have laws in place to prevent violence against women, but they fail at implementing and enforcing those laws. Drysdale Walsh and Menjivar refer to this phenomenon as "the gap between law on the books and law in practice" (2016:32). This creates a system overridden with "legal tolls"—a term the authors use to refer to the obstacles victims and families face in accessing the justice system. Consequently, victims do not come forward often and face rejection or denunciation when they do. These tolls therefore perpetuate a cycle of impunity that reinforce a culture where violence against women is an acceptable norm.

Drysdale Walsh and Menjivar are not the only researchers studying how the legal justice system affects the issue of gender violence. In 2010, Susan Franceschet compared anti-domestic violence policies in Chile and Argentina. Both countries first began implementing their respective policies in 1994. However, the author notes that Chile was better at gathering data on the prevalence of domestic violence and was therefore able to more successfully launch campaigns against it and reform their legislation than Argentina was. She notes that states' efforts to evaluate and then *re*-evaluate the issues of gender violence are important: "effective

bureaucracies will implement policies better and thereby provide improved policy outcomes” (2). For this reason, Franceschet believes that the steps Chile is taking to prevent domestic violence are an example that other states should follow in, and that legislation is an important key to address the problems of violence when used effectively.

Tamar Wilson (2014:4) believes that there are often social causes contributing to violence against women as well. An example she gives in her review is how employed women are more vulnerable to violence than unemployed women (Wilson 2014:6). Research shows there are many social factors that perpetuate violence. A 2012 report from the Pan American Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used data from twelve different countries to study social factors that put women at greater or lesser risk of violence. The study revealed, for instance, that the women with the least amount of education were generally the most likely to experience violence (PAHO 2012:29). It found that women in higher wealth quintiles were less likely to experience violence (PAHO 2012:33). Urban versus rural living, age, and marital status were other factors the study examined that affected the rates of violence against women.

Wilson thinks there are also cultural and ideological causes reinforcing violence in Latin America (Wilson 2014:4). She defines cultural ideologies as ways of thinking that “call for the subordination of women and legitimize the violence against them that occurs if they challenge this subordination” (4). For instance, Rosa Cabrera (2014) cites how “the construction of womanhood and manhood and the socialization process of both men and women influence violence against women” (15). Cabrera found in her case study of women living in Fortaleza, Brazil that *machista* culture present there led men to believe they controlled and owned women, viewing their bodies as property (16). The men then leveraged these social norms to justify

threatening and violent acts towards women. Stefany Sterling (2018) also looked at the effects of machismo and patriarchal ideologies in a case study of intimate partner violence in Mexico. She noted that “deeply ingrained patriarchal society and gender hierarchies inscribe violence against women as an expected part of familial life,” (15) therefore normalizing violence against women and undermining efforts to prevent and stop it. *Marianismo* is another example of an ideology that researchers believe reinforces attitudes of indifference around the issue of gender violence. In a culture of *Marianismo*, the Virgin Mary is distorted as a stereotypically feminine model of spiritual and moral virtue for Latin women to emulate (Rondon 2003). In her 2003 study, M.B Rondon examined how “widespread social tolerance of violence and factors that perpetuate it are related to cultural attitudes and stereotypes that can be traced back to the Marianist tradition” (157). She explains how the characteristics of being nurturing, selfless, and submissive, which are idealized in marianist culture, lead women to account for violence as an expected part of the female experience that they should therefore resign themselves to. With the effects of *marianismo* in mind, Rondon notes that “efforts at improving quality of life and diminishing violent conditions for women and girls in Latin America should include consideration of local cultural, political and economic peculiarities” (157).

### **The modern movement.**

The legal, social, and cultural forces surrounding violence against women have greatly shaped women's experience in Latin America, and many women, it seems, have grown tired of this experience. Throughout the region, feminist movements are finding creative ways to push back against their governments. In 2015, Argentinian journalists organized a march against femicide using the hashtag #NiUnaMenos (not one less) (Barrero Jaramillo 2021). Women in Mexico also took to the streets protesting femicide in 2020 (Galdamez et al. 2021) along with

women in Nicaragua who declared November 25 as “un día de ‘luto’”—a day of mourning—for the victims of femicide in their country (El Diario 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has not stopped their momentum either; a collective in Venezuela has been using WhatsApp throughout the pandemic to hold educational forums for women to learn about things like “sexual politics” and “feminist self-care” (Mesones Rojo 2020).

Researchers have long studied and debated the functionalities of social mobilizations in societies to bring about change. Contemporary theories on protest, often referred to as “New Social Movement” theories, identify protests of “politics, ideology, and culture as the root of much collective action” (Buechler 1995:442). In the case of violence against women in Latin America, New Social Movement theories would identify the shared gendered experience of violence as the collective root of the social movements that unite women in their demands for change. Other social movement theories approach mobilization from a functionalist, collectivist, or cultural approach but some theorists see all of these as insufficient explanations of mobilization—namely because they do not acknowledge the role of emotion as a form of symbolic interaction in protest (Jasper 2011, Eyerman 2005). Jasper writes that “Emotions are present in every phase and every aspect of protest... They motivate individuals, are generated in crowds, are expressed rhetorically, and shape stated and unstated goals of social movements” (2011:286). In other words, many social movement theories identify what instigates protests (i.e. collective identity), but emotion explains what *sustains* the movement beyond the initial spark.

### **Music as an expression of emotion.**

Researchers Klaus Scherer and Eduardo Coutinho (2013) note how music “*represents*” emotion and for this reason is often even referred to as “the language of emotion” (121). This is multifaceted. Artists intentionally compose music with emotional elements, and the audience

assigns emotional values while they listen. In this way, music not only represents emotion, it also “creates” it (Scherer and Coutinho 2013:121).

There have been numerous case studies of social movements utilizing music in protests. In *The Revolution Will Not be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima*, Noriko Manabe (2015) describes mass gatherings of thousands of individuals in the streets of Japan chanting protest lyrics to techno beats as they mobilize against expanding nuclear power in the country. With censorship preventing the protests from being televised, Manabe writes how music was a powerful tool to transmit the message and information about the protests. In his analysis on the Estonian “Singing Revolution,” Warren Waren concluded that music in these mobilizations against the Soviet Union was not a “passive” expression of hopeful desires, but rather a “dynamic, unifying, cultural and political force,” and one that has the ability to realize hope (Waren 2012:448). This is similar to the Egyptian revolution where Anastasia Valassopoulos and Dalia Said Mostafa (2014:61) argue that protest music has been instrumental in “articulating” the demands and desires of the protestors: “[music] on the one hand is advancing the power of the people by giving them hope and confidence in their collective struggle and, on the other hand, articulating a cultural critique of the political landscape.”

In the midst of the marches and demonstrations against gender violence emerged lyrics and melodies both representing and creating emotion around the messages and demands of the demonstrations. LasTesis, for instance, first performed “Un violador en tu camino” (a rapist in your path), their protest song denouncing gender violence, in a plaza in Santiago in November of 2019 (Martin and Shaw 2021). In the following months, the song echoed throughout streets and plazas throughout Latin America as women connected with the song. In 2020, Vivir Quintana released her own protest song of violence, “Canción sin miedo” (song without fear), and it has

been performed widely across the region, including in Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru (Patiño 2021). These are far from being the only examples of protest songs surrounding the Latin American womens' movements, and it shows that feminist demonstrators see music as a powerful tool in their protests for legal, social, and cultural change.

## **Methodology**

In order to analyze *what female artists communicate about violence against women in Latin America through song*, I have created a sample library of the following six songs: “No estamos solas” by Ana Tijoux, “Brujas” by Eli Almic, “Se portaba mal” by Kany García and Mon Laferte, “Canción sin miedo” by Vivir Quintana featuring El Palomar, “Ni una menos” by Rebeca Lane, and “Un violador en tu camino” by the feminist collective LasTesis. These songs represent a variety of countries throughout the Latin American region—including Guatemala, Chile, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay—and were chosen because they contain lyrics that specifically and directly reference some or multiple forms of violence against women and how this shapes the female experience.

I will analyze the songs' lyrics for three main themes. The first theme is how loss is inseparable from gender violence. The second theme will look at feelings of guilt or shame and how the lyrics assign and reconcile with the emotions of blame and fault. The third theme will look at how women are resisting gender violence; more specifically, it will examine the feelings of necessity and responsibility that call women to act against violence.

## Lyrical Analysis

### **The nature of gender violence and its inseparability from loss.**

In many of the songs I analyzed, the artists identified and confronted the loss they and other women observe and experience as a direct result of violence. Some songs do this more indirectly. For instance, in “Un violador en tu camino”—“A rapist in your path”—LasTesis uses a satirical approach to discuss how state and police violence against women results in a loss of innocence for even young girls. The women chant, “Duerme tranquila, niña inocente/ Sin preocuparte del bandolero/ Que por tu sueño dulce y sonriente/ Vela tu amante carabinero” meaning, “Sleep peaceful, innocent girl/ Don’t worry yourself with the criminals/ For in your sweet and smiling dream/ Your loving policeman watches.” Earlier in the song, LasTesis calls out the police and the justice system for instances of violence like rape and femicide happening throughout the country. In this verse, LasTesis further criticizes the police for the lack of protection they give to women; the consequence of the failed and corrupt police force is that young girls now too must contend with violence. Their loving and smiling dreams are therefore taken from them, overshadowed by the police who are a threat rather than protection from violence. In “Ni una menos,” which translates to “Not one less,” Lane discusses the theme of loss indirectly as well. The title itself grapples with the language of more versus less surrounding conversations of loss. Throughout the song, Lane sings to reconcile and channel her anger in the wake of loss. Other songs deal with this theme more directly, for instance “Se portaba mal” and “Canción sin miedo.”

In “Se portaba mal” or “She behaved badly,” García and Laferte sing about the theme of loss more directly as they grapple with domestic violence and the loss that results from it. Through their lyrics they tell the story of a woman who is being abused by her significant other:

“Había que agarrarle y jalarle el pelo/ Pegar tres puños antes de ir a cama” which translates as “He had to grab her and pull her hair/ Hit her with three fists before going to bed.” The irony of this violence is the woman loses something no matter what. We, the listener, don’t know the circumstances of the relationship between the woman and her partner. We don’t know why she is with him—if it’s for love, security, obligation, or countless other reasons. The lyrics tell us that whatever this woman’s circumstances were, they led her to choose to stay with her partner; she “Tapaba la herida pa’ ir al trabajo/ Y si una amiga pregunta, dice/ “Por la escalera caí hasta abajo,” meaning, “She covered the wounds to go to work/ And if a friend asks, she says/ ‘I fell down the stairs.’” In deciding to lie and conceal her injuries, the woman inadvertently chooses one series of losses—the loss of her personal security and physical wellness, honesty and confidence in her friendship, etc—over another, like the loss of her partner. Either way she loses, and as the lyrics tell us, she continually loses more and more because of these violent experiences until it results in the ultimate loss of her life: “Y se apagó como se apaga una vela encendida/ Se sopla de golpe, se cierra la llama y se acaba la vida,” which means, “And she went out like a lit candle goes out/ With a sudden blow, the flame is gone and life ends.” This experience of loss is not limited to this one woman. In the closing stanza of the refrain, García and Laferte sing, “Y así murió/ Como se mueren miles cada día —“And so she died/ As thousands die every day.” In other words, while the artists are singing about one woman’s story and the loss of one life, they are acknowledging that this is not just her story, but the story of thousands. The woman in the song is nameless, but she is not a faceless victim; anyone who has been affected by domestic violence, either through experience or acquaintance, recognizes the woman. She may be a friend, a sister, a mother. She may be the person listening to the song. In this way, the song sings to fill the vacancy of all the lives of women lost to violence and all the

ones still here coping with that loss. For this reason, the loss that García and Lafert sing of is deeply personal and intrinsically tied to violence in more ways than one. Recognizing this forces those experiencing that loss to make a choice.

For Vivir Quintana, there is only one choice and that is to sing without fear. In “Canción sin miedo,” Quintana sings about loss, but she sees it as the social catalyst and cause for change. Quintana writes, “A cada minuto, de cada semana/ Nos roban amigas,/ nos matan hermanas/ Destrozan sus cuerpos, los desaparecen,” meaning, “Every minute of every week/ They take away our friends, they kill our sisters/ They destroy their bodies, they make them disappear.” In other words, the loss that Quintana identifies is so pervasively a part of the present, we can’t begin to quantify it. Quintana recognizes that if these acts of violence against women occur every minute, then every woman is affected by this loss. The difference for Quintana is the opportunity for choice and empowerment in the face of this loss. She writes, “Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma/ Nos sembraron miedo, nos crecieron alas,” translating to “We women had our peace taken away/ They planted seeds of fear but we grew wings.” And from Quintana’s perspective, women are responding to this violence with force, whether it’s “las compas marchando en Reforma” (for our friends marching in Reforma), “las morras peleando en Sonora” (for all the girls fighting in Sonora), “las comandantes luchando por Chiapas” (for the female commanders fighting for Chiapas), or “las madres buscando en Tijuana” (For all the mothers searching in Tijuana). In the face of profound loss of friends, sisters, and mothers, Quintana takes inspiration from the women who fight and refuse to accept that loss as an inevitable part of the female experience. That is why, Quintana proclaims that women, “Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia/ Gritamos por cada desaparecida”—“We sing without fear, we ask for justice/ We scream

for each missing woman.” It is their “canción sin miedo” because when you have nothing more to lose, you have nothing to fear.

Both “Se portaba mal” and “Canción sin miedo” identify the effects triggered by acts of violence—namely loss and how that loss affects the female experience. Once an act of violence occurs, it cannot be undone, and it has real, identifiable consequences. For this reason, and as these songs reveal, there isn’t one way to experience loss. Loss can mean a change in how one experiences life like the sleeping girl in “Un violador en tu camino” whose entire childhood and existence will take on a new form because of her violent social reality. In its most tragic and final form, loss can mean death like that of the woman in “Se portaba mal.” However, loss can also be what convicts us, what pushes us to fight like *las morras* and *las comandantes* so there is “ni una menos”—not one less, not one loss more. What these songs ultimately reveal is that gender violence, because of its nature, is inseparable from loss and therefore inseparable from the female experience in Latin America.

### **Who is to blame?**

As previously shown, there are many reasons researchers and theorists believe violence against women is taking place. There are political and social factors, legislative barriers (CITE), and cultural ideologies that distort what should be a clear moral line. Interestingly, the artists of these songs focus less on the reasons, and more on *who* is to blame. What the artists reveal through their songs is that those at fault or to blame for this violence are not always the ones who carry the guilt or shame of it.

García and Laferte’s lyric “Se portaba mal, muy mal” or “She behaved bad, very bad” illustrates this clearly. The woman’s male significant other is the one physically abusing her, and he *should* be to blame. Rather, the woman justifies her partner’s violent actions by assuming the

guilt for his actions; it is her “bad behavior,” not her husbands, that caused the violence. García and Laferte sing, “Me dijo: ‘Todo esto quizás lo merezco’” which translates as “She told me: ‘Maybe I deserve all of this.’” Here, García and Laferte establish the narrative voice of the song. The “me” isn’t a singular person, it is all of us who stand as witness—both active and passive—everyday. They never tell us what the woman did, and that’s part of the point they are trying to make. What she did or didn’t do doesn’t matter. No behavior, *bueno* or *malo*, justifies a violent response. Yet there are forces at play, likely social and cultural, that have convoluted what should be obvious—the partner is guilty. Several of the other songs build off this theme of women often taking the blame for violence against them. However, they do so in order to make a statement that the artists, as women, will no longer be allowing this.

The song that does this most poignantly is “Un violador en tu camino.” From the very first line, LasTesis begins to unravel the hypocrisy between guilt and punishment concerning violence against women: “El patriarcado es un juez/ Que nos juzga por nacer/ Y nuestro castigo/ Es la violencia que no ves” meaning “The patriarchy is a judge/ That judges us from birth/ And our punishment is the violence that you don’t see.” This is a provocative claim that clearly demonstrates how a society that allows violence, enables a reality in which violence is inseparable from the entire female experience. Women, as LasTesis is pointing out, are found guilty of violence they don’t commit from their first breath. This “punishment” LasTesis is giving name to reflects this violent reality: “Es femicidio/ Impunidad para mi asesino/ Es la desaparición/ Es la violación,” translating to “It’s femicide/ Impunity for my killer/ It’s the disappearances/ It’s rape.” However, in a society that ironically puts women on trial for the violence committed against them, LasTesis boldly pleads not guilty. They cry out, “Y la culpa no era mía, ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía” which translates as “And it’s not my fault, not where I

was, nor how I dressed.” They don’t just chant this affirmation once. They repeat it four times in a row until the audience believes it—until they, the women singing it, believe it. They reject any reason or justification society might use to blame them, and in turn they leave no room for speculation of who is actually guilty: “El violador eres tú,” meaning “The rapist is you.” If you thought you misheard them, they say it again, “El violador eres tú.” Narrative voice is once again important here to understand the claim LasTesis is making. When singing this line, the “you” that LasTesis is identifying is the audience, which incidentally, you as the listener are a part of. They are proclaiming that *you* are guilty of this violence. LasTesis doesn’t tell you specifically why you’re guilty; they want you to think about how you are a part of the patriarchal framework that judged and punished them as women. They want you to ask yourself why you are as much to blame as “los pacos/ Los jueces/ El estado/ El Presidente” or “the police/ The judges/ The state/ The President.” The song ends with LasTesis reminding you again and again, “El violador eres tu/ El violador eres tu/ El violador eres tu/ El violador eres tu.” They don’t want you to forget that you, the audience, are the one who should feel the blame and shame of the violence they will no longer assume for you.

LasTesis is not the only artist to very clearly identify who is at fault for the violence committed against women. Quintana tells us, “Que tiemble el Estado, los cielos, las calles/ Que tiemblen los jueces y los judiciales,” or “Let the State, the skies, the streets tremble/ Let the judges and the police tremble” for what they have done to women. In “Brujas,” Eli Almic calls out “el sistema,” the system, for how it “defiende y sostiene a asesinos aunque no lo diga,” meaning the system “defends and supports murders even if it doesn’t say so.” García and Laferte also acknowledge how the *true* blame and guilt lies within the fault unspoken: “Y entre este silencio la culpa es del hombre/ Pero también mía,” translating as “And within this silence it is

the man's fault/ But also mine." This echoes the reminder of LasTesis, that *you* are *el violador* and expresses the regret and remorse one feels once they've recognized that the fault is their own. Ana Tijoux, in "No estamos solas" also remarks similarly on guilt as LasTesis. She too finds that, "Nacimos [mujeres] culpables con todas las cruces," or "We [women] are born guilty with all the crosses," but she identifies that the real blame lies with "la iglesia," "el estado," the church, the state who are "Todo ese aparato cómplice, culpable" meaning they are all a "complicit, guilty apparatus." In this way, the artists leave no question of who is presently being blamed, and who actually is guilty. In establishing what culturally and socially is not always obvious, the artists are then able to explore what this means for how Latin American women can respond and push back against violence.

#### **A call to action.**

The artists of these songs are doing more than chronicling the violence that is happening to women or identifying who is to blame. This would not be true justice for these experiences. Recognizing that the man in "Se portaba mal" is at fault, for instance, doesn't undo his acts of domestic violence and femicide. There is no reparation that will bring that woman back. However, having acknowledged these important aspects of women's experience, like loss and guilt, the artists use their lyrics as a call to Latin American women to stop further violence from happening. In this way, the melodic voice that these artists have tapped into through these songs is a bold and radical sound. The artists in their lyrics bring forward from the shadows the worst of women's experiences to shed light on the history and atrocity of it. And in the midst of that voice, there is a collective notion of resilience.

Almic captures this powerfully in the chorus of "Brujas." She claims, "Somos las nietas de todas las brujas que nunca pudieron quemar"—"We are the granddaughters of all the witches

they could never burn.” Her statement is weighted with the implications of history. Quite literally, women are the granddaughters of the unburned witches. Almic is reminding us that violence against women is not a new phenomenon; it has been happening for centuries. The lives of women of the present are marked by the legacies of this violence. Almic is reclaiming this inheritance from the patriarchal rememberings of history and is reframing it through the lens of resilience. She shows how past violence has translated to the present, stating, “Te golpeaba, te quería encerrada, te decía que no valés nada/ Pedías libertad mientras él te decía ‘no digas pavadas,’” which translates as, “He hit you, wanted you locked up, told you that you are worthless/ You asked for freedom while he told you ‘don't say silly things.’” Almic never says explicitly that she will fight back against this denial for equality and protection. Rather, her threat echoes almost eerily in the repetition and reminder of her chorus—“Somos las nietas de todas las brujas que nunca pudieron quemar.” She is warning the “paradigma patriarcal,” the patriarchal paradigm, that they can burn women, but they can never extinguish the flame that it will ignite.

We see this “fire” in the artists’ conviction to fight. In “Ni una menos,” for instance, Lane channels her indignation at the violence she and other women have experienced to demand “not one less” victim. She sings “Quisiera tener cosas dulces que escribir/ Pero tengo que decidir y me decido por la rabia,” which means, “I would like to have sweet things to write/ But I have to decide and I chose to be angry.” Lane gives voice here to the internal conflict that has become inseparable from the female experience. Not all women are themselves the victims of violence. However, all women are affected by the consequences of violence, whether it's dancing in circles of women at clubs to keep away predatory men or fearing going anywhere alone at night or even in broad daylight. Gender violence is a constant risk. In a society that wants to cut its losses and ignore who really is to blame, there is a choice to be made on whether to respond to violence and

how to do so. For Lane, this isn't much of a choice when the consequences of not acting are so egregious: "5 mujeres hoy han sido asesinadas/ Y a la hora por lo menos 20 mujeres violadas/ Eso que solo es un día en Guatemala/ Multiplícalo y sabrás porqué estamos enojadas," which translates to "Today 5 women were murdered/ So far today at least 20 women were raped/ That is just one day in Guatemala/ Multiply it and you'll know why we're angry." The consequence of not doing anything is allowing this level of violence Lane is singing about to continue. That's why Lane feels she has to do something whether she wants to or whether she should even have to. If she doesn't, nothing changes.

There is another level to the internal conflict here, especially for those who are victims of the indirect consequences of violence, and that is in discerning what gives someone the authority to act and to give visibility to the victims who were intentionally made invisible by the systems and representatives that refuse to see them. Lane, in her lyrics, shows us how this authority, for her, is accessed through necessity. She *has* to decide and she chooses anger—she cannot carry on as if violence is not happening all around her. This is just one part of the injustice of Latin American women's experience—they have to be their own witness, their own advocate, their own savior and enforcer. And LasTesis tells us, in this culture, it's not going to be "you," the police, the state, the president, or anyone else who does something to end violence against women. Rather, it's the women crying out in these songs of protest who are doing something to stop the violence.

This is why, in addition to necessity, the authority women, as artists, have to act against this violence also comes from a sense of responsibility. Quintana captures this profoundly in "Canción sin miedo." She sings, "Soy Claudia, soy Esther y soy Teresa/ Soy Ingrid, soy Fabiola y soy Valeria," meaning "I am Claudia, I am Esther, and I am Teresa/ I am Ingrid, I am Fabiola,

and I am Valeria.” Quintana is not literally these women—she can’t be. Each of these women has a unique story, unique passions and struggles. There is however, a powerful salience in the experience of violence, one that becomes defining to all women, as Lane, LasTesis, Laferte, Garia, Alimac, and Tijoux have all communicated through their music. Quintana is showing how interconnected the experience of violence is with being a woman in Latin America. Because women’s lives are so shaped by the violence surrounding them, violence is no longer a threat—it is their reality. She experiences the reality of these women because they are inseparable from her own. For this reason, Quintana doesn’t have to *be* Claudia or Esther to understand the things that happened to them. And yet, because of how violence dominates Latin American women’s experience, Quintana is making the statement that she can identify not just *with* but *as* these victims. In doing this, she captures the urgency and responsibility she feels: “Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza/ Soy la madre que ahora llora por sus muertas/ Y soy esta que te hará pagar las cuentas,” which translates to “I am the girl that you raised by force and abuse/ I am the mother who cries for her assassinated daughters/ And I am the one who will make you pay.” In this way, Quintana, like Lane, offers her own voice and song to those who can no longer sing against injustice in order to fill the vacancies of loss and challenge their societies definitions of guilt.

Quintana and Lane are not the only ones doing this. All these artists are pushing back against the violence women in Latin America face. They are attempting to dismantle the framework of oppression enabled by a society that turns a blind eye to the violation and death happening on street corners and in homes. And they aren’t just attempting, they are demanding. Not as one individual, but as Claudia and Esther and the women with wings, as the granddaughters of the witches society could never burn, as the ones who are indignant and angry,

for the woman that was killed, and the innocent girl who should be allowed to dream. They call Latin American women to stand as a collective, to be rallied by the lyrics of these songs. They remind women that “No estamos solas,” we are not alone and with that knowledge to “Grita su nombre ahora, grita su nombre ahora”—“Scream her name now, scream her name now” (Tijoux).

## **Conclusion**

These songs are all examples of how female artists are using their lyrics to communicate about women's experience of violence in Latin America. The women and girls, for instance, that Lane sings of in “Ni una menos” who were murdered and raped, the woman who died in “Se portaba mal”—none of these are impersonal stories the artists are singing about. They are singing of a reality that they themselves and women throughout the region all experience personally. That's why there's a sense of loss and a tension between guilt and shame in their lyrics. That's why women feel compelled, by both necessity and responsibility, to respond and push back against their violent reality. This reality is shaped distinctly by legal, social, and cultural factors. The lack of effective implementation and enforcement of anti-gender violence laws in the region creates a culture in which violence persists rather than desists. This culture is reinforced by ideologies like *machismo* and *marianismo*, as well as a number of social factors, such as employment status and education, that are all distorted to legitimate violence against women. Ultimately, protest is at the very heart of each of these songs. Through the representation and creation of emotion, these female artists bring to light the experience of women. In singing of loss, guilt and shame, resilience and mobilization, their songs reject gender violence as an expected and acceptable standard for women's reality throughout the region. Their lyrics in this

way are an act of dissent, and their voices sound a melody that calls for change—that demands a non-violent experience for all women in Latin America.

### Songs Referenced

1. Almic, Eli. "Brujas."
2. Garcia, Kany and Mon Laferte. "Se portaba mal."
3. Lane, Rebeca. "Ni una menos."
4. LasTesis. "Un violador en tu camino."
5. Quintana, Vivir featuring El Palomar. "Canción sin miedo."
6. Tijoux, Ana. "No estamos solas."

### Works Cited

- Barrero Jaramillo, Diana. 2021. "How Latin American feminists shifted global understanding of gender-based violence." The Conversation US, Inc. (<https://theconversation.com/how-latin-american-feminists-shifted-global-understanding-of-gender-based-violence-173121>).
- Buechler, Steven M. 1995. "New Social Movement Theories." *The Sociological Quarterly* 36(3):441-464.
- Cabrera, Rosa. 2014. "Violence Against Women and Machismo A research study of how Machismo justifies cases of violence against women and the psychological process that influence women to remain in abusive relationships in the city of Fortaleza." Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection.
- Drysdale Walsh, Shannon and Cecilia Menjívar. 2016. "'What Guarantees Do We Have?' Legal Tolls and Persistent Impunity for Femicide in Guatemala." *Latin American Politics and Society* 58(4):31-55.
- El Diario. 2020. "Nicaragua, de "luto" por las 69 víctimas de feminicidios en lo que va de año." ([https://www.eldiario.es/politica/nicaragua-luto-69-victimas-feminicidios-ano\\_1\\_6460899.html](https://www.eldiario.es/politica/nicaragua-luto-69-victimas-feminicidios-ano_1_6460899.html)).

- Franceschet, Susan. 2010. "Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina." *Latin American Politics and Society* 52(3):1–29.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2005. "How Social Movements Move." Pp. 41-56 in *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Helena Flam, and D. King. N.p.: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Galdamez, Eddie, et al. 2021. "2020: The year of feminist struggles and political resistance in Latin America." *Global Voices*.  
(<https://globalvoices.org/2021/01/03/2020-the-year-of-feminist-struggles-and-political-resistance-in-latin-america/>).
- Global Americans. 2021. "Femicidio y los Derechos Internacionales de la Mujer." *Global Americans*.(<https://theglobalamericans.org/reports/femicidio-y-los-derechos-internacionales-de-la-mujer/>).
- Jasper, James M. 2011. "Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:285-303.
- Martin, Deborah and Deborah Shaw. 2021. "Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience: LasTesis and the Phenomenon of Un violador en tu camino." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 40:1-18.
- Patiño, Daniela. 2021. "Vivir Quintana: "Canción sin miedo" nos hermana a Latinoamérica en el dolor y la injusticia contra las mujeres." *CNN*.  
(<https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/03/08/vivir-quintana-cancion-sin-miedo-mujeres-8-m-orix/>).
- Manabe, Noriko. 2015. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

- Menjívar, Cecilia and Shannon Drysdale Walsh. 2017. "The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras." *Latin American Research Review* 52(2):221-240.
- Mesones Rojo, Gabriela. 2020. "WhatsApp is the new tool for Venezuelan feminists during the pandemic." *Global Voices*.  
(<https://globalvoices.org/2020/10/02/whatsapp-is-the-new-tool-for-venezuelan-feminists-during-the-pandemic/>).
- Pan American Health Organization; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2012. *Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A comparative analysis of population-based data from 12 countries*. Washington, DC: PAHO, 2012.
- Rondon, M. B. 2003. "From Marianism to terrorism: the many faces of violence against women in Latin America." *Arch Womens Mental Health* 6:157–163.
- Scherer, Klaus and Eduardo Coutinho. 2013. *The Emotional Power of Music: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Musical Arousal, Expression, and Social Control*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Sterling, Stefany. 2018. "Intimate Partner Violence in Mexico: An Analysis of the Intersections Between Machismo Culture, Government Policy, and Violence Against Women." *International Studies Undergraduate Honors Theses*.  
(<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/intl-std-theses/15.>)
- Widmer Mireille and Irene Pavesi. 2016. "A Gender Analysis of Violent Deaths." Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey.  
(<https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/gendered-analysis-violent-deaths-research-note-63>).

- Valassopoulos, Anastasia, and Dalia Said Mostafa. 2014. "Popular Protest Music and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution." *Popular Music and Society* 37(5):638-659.
- Waren, Warren. 2012. "Theories of the Singing Revolution: An Historical Analysis of the Role of Music in the Estonian Independence Movement." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 43(2):439–451.
- Wilson, Tamar Diane. 2014. "Introduction: Violence against Women in Latin America." *Latin American Perspectives* 41(1):3-18.
- World Health Organization (WHO). 2021. *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women*. Geneva: WHO. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.