



Maquinal Ensembles in Fugue: feminisms and performativity in two Andean music groups from Argentina

Adil Podhajcer^I
Alejandra Vega^{II}

^IUniversidad de Buenos Aires – UBA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

^{II}Universidad Nacional de las Artes – UNA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

ABSTRACT – Maquinal Ensembles in Fugue: feminisms and performativity in two Andean music groups from Argentina – In this article we describe and comparatively analyze the performances of two community Andean music ensembles that represent two regions of Argentina with contrasting characteristics, and that constitute the two most important referents of groups of women and dissidents in Argentina. In this opportunity, we will focus on the performative practices of the women's Band from Tilcara *Nuestra Señora de Fátima, Jujuy*, and the *Mama Quilla Community*, from the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. The objective is to understand the relationship between the experience-in-the-world understood as a projection oriented towards a cosmogony with Andean roots and the aesthetic-political qualities that reinstate the question of the scope of dissident feminism to produce other modes of action and political consciousness.

Keywords: **Dissident Feminisms. Gender Performativities. Andean Music Ensembles. Desiring Machines. Argentina.**

RÉSUMÉ – Ensembles maquiniques en fugue: féminismes et performativité dans deux groupes de musique andine d'Argentine – Dans cet article, nous décrivons et analysons de manière comparative les performances de deux ensembles communautaires de musique andine qui représentent deux régions d'Argentine aux caractéristiques contrastées et qui constituent les deux référents les plus importants des groupes de femmes et de dissidents en Argentine. Les pratiques performatives du groupe de femmes *Nuestra Señora de Fátima de Tilcara, Jujuy*, et de la *Communauté Mama Quilla*, de la zone métropolitaine de Buenos Aires. L'objectif est de comprendre le rapport entre l'expérience-dans-le-monde entendue comme une projection orientée vers une cosmogonie aux racines andines et les qualités esthétique-politiques qui réinstaurent la question de la portée du féminisme dissident pour produire d'autres modes d'action et conscience politique.

Mots-clés: **Féminismes Dissidents. Performativités de Genre. Ensembles Musicaux Andins. Machines à Désirer. Argentine.**

RESUMEN – Ensembles Maquínicos en Fuga: feminismos y performatividad en dos agrupaciones de música andina de Argentina – En este artículo describimos y analizamos comparativamente las performances de dos ensambles de música andina comunitaria que representan a dos regiones de Argentina con características contrastantes y que constituyen los dos referentes más importantes de grupos de mujeres y disidencias de la Argentina. En esta oportunidad, nos centraremos en las prácticas performativas de la Banda Femenina Nuestra

Señora de Fátima de Tilcara, Jujuy, y la *Comunidad Mama Quilla*, del Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires. El objetivo es comprender la relación entre la experiencia en-el-mundo entendida como proyección orientada hacia una cosmogonía de raíz andina y las cualidades estético-políticas que reinstalan la pregunta por los alcances del feminismo disidente para producir otros modos de acción y conciencia política.

Palabras-clave: **Feminismos Disidentes. Performatividades de Género. Ensamblés de Música Andina. Máquinas Deseantes. Argentina.**

Analytical and methodological-theoretical approaches

This article offers an analysis and reflection on the aesthetic-political strategies of women and dissidents belonging to *siku*'s bands and ensembles in Argentina. The aim is to contrast their performative actions and the ways in which they construct new subjectivities, challenge, and deconstruct sex-gender inequalities in their performance spaces. The starting point is a joint research on Latin American feminist movements of women and dissident performers of autochthonous and folk music in community ensembles of panpipes or *sikus*. As part of their musical training, the authors have actively participated in this type of ensembles¹, from where they began to develop different ethnographic experiences involving participation-action-creation and performance-research methodologies. These methodologies explore and reflect on the ways in which corporealities are generators of knowledge and agencies, critically examining the logocentric thought of colonial modernity (Citro; Podhajcer; Roa; Rodríguez, 2020)². Within this framework, open-ended, in-depth, and recurrent interviews were conducted with different key informants of *sikus* ensembles, both mixed and integrated by women and dissidents exclusively, prioritizing creative actions and significant political demonstrations.

The *siku* ensembles of women and dissidents that we decided to compare represent performance experiences enacted through the musical execution of the *sikuri* and *siku*. As numerous authors have analyzed (Valencia Chacón, 1982; Bellenger, 2007; Vega, 2014; Podhajcer, 2012; 2015; Carlos Sánchez Huaringa, 2015; Pérez de Arce, 2019, among others), a *siku* is a direct blowing wind instrument, made from a row of pipes of varying lengths fixed together, consisting of one or two rows, with different features. This instrument of pre-Hispanic origins has undergone modifications throughout its history. However, the permanence of its performance among

various Amerindian groups, as well as the dispersion of Pan flutes made of non-perishable materials (stone, pottery or bird bones) in the Andean and Altiplano regions of Bolivia, Peru, northern Argentina and Chile give support to the emblematic character of this instrument in the Central Andes. Subsequently, the practice settled in urban areas, reproducing and bringing back traditions that reinforce the recreation and recovering of indigenous identities, while allowing to share community experiences.

The technique of playing in complementary pairs (*tocar contestado* or *trenzado*) prevails in these ensembles. Valencia Chacón also called this complementary mode of Andean musical dialogue bipolarity. The structure of the instrument made complementarity a requirement: the scale degrees - usually natural E minor/G major- are divided between two instruments, so that the adjacent pipes of a *siku* proceed by intervals of thirds. The pipes of the complementary pair complete the thirds that form the degrees of the diatonic scale. For this reason, a melody requires at least two *sikuris* in close collaboration to come to be successfully performed. In this complementary pair of instruments, one is called *ira* -the one that leads- or *seis* -in reference to the six pipes that compose it-, being the second name more common in Buenos Aires. The other component of the complementary pair is called *arca* -the one that follows-, or *siete*. Colloquially, *sikuris* call this modality of playing *tocar contestado*. As we have pointed out, this characteristic permeates the mere technical requirement of coordination between two individuals, being perceived and made explicit, at least among those who subscribe to indianist and indigenist proposals, as a metaphor for the dualistic functioning of indigenous societies before the arrival of the Spaniards in America.

A signifier shared by a large part of the *sikuris* is that the complementarity of their performance puts reciprocity into action at the level of sound, an exercise of *Buen Vivir* or Good Living proposed as an alternative to the individualistic model of Western modernity, which was adopted by national societies after the processes of independence from the Spanish Crown. In this sense, complementarity would function as a model for organizing the internal management of the bands. The metaphor of the *sikuri* round synthesizes, through its performativity, a series of utopian imaginaries of *community* and *ancestry*, that the *sikuris* define and materialize within and from

the discourses on *Buen Vivir* or *Sumaj Causay* and *chacha-warmi*³ (Vega, 2013; Podhajcer, 2015; Podhajcer; Vega, 2021).

The ethnography addressed in our research referred to specific performances, and was carried out between 2012 and the present (2023), in two ensembles of *sikuri* women and dissidents, whose constellations of meanings and performative practices allow us to establish two models of feminisms linked to *the Andean*. The research allowed us to observe the permanence and resignification of notions related to complementarity, Good Living, and the sense of community, which, in turn, are taken up by other *sikuri* ensembles, specifically women and dissidents, and feedback the challenge of patriarchal colonial modernity in two contrasting contexts: the devotional bands of Jujuy and the urban women's bands of feminist activists and dissidents.

In order to approach the analysis of the genealogies and performances of the two bands, we will make use of the concepts of molarity and molecularity, which refer to different modes of segmentarity corresponding, roughly speaking, to macropolitics and micropolitics (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Guattari; Rolnik, 2006), and, above all, to the conceptualization of desire, not as subordinate to absence, but as a creator/producer of objects: “The order of desire is the order of production; all production is at once desiring-production and social production” (1997, p. 296)⁴. This creative potential of desire is at the antipodes of the moralizing and shameful censorship that, according to Guattari and Rolnik (2006, p. 255), is imposed by Freudian psychology and dominant institutions. “Desire crosses the social field, both in immediate practices and in more ambitious projects. In order not to confuse complicated definitions, I would propose to call desire to all forms of the will to live, to create, to love; the will to invent another society, another perception of the world, other systems of values”. This conceptualization of desire offers the possibility of analyzing the discourses of the founders of the first *sikuri* women's band in Argentina in its historical context -1996- related to the creation of their ensemble as well as the permanence of its basic features despite the profound changes that have taken place in the country -and in Latin America- in terms of gender politics. Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p. 13; p.42) distinguish between “machinic agencements of desire” and “collective agencements of enunciation”⁵ that

relate to and are included in a rhizomatic logic (Deleuze; Guattari, 2004); such a distinction is useful to compare the genealogies and performances of the Tilcara band and the Buenos Aires band, *Mama Quilla*.

Feminist theories are also useful because they offer several tools that allow us to understand the reluctance of the members of the band from Jujuy to identify with hegemonic feminism, which they simply call “feminism”. Among these theories, the concept of “intersectionality” by Williams Crenshaw (1989) could be a starting point to introduce other factors that discriminate and oppress women, in addition to gender, such as race and class. This seminal idea has been taken up by Francesca Gargallo (2012), who argues that “Hegemonic ideas [of Western feminism] represent a risk for reflections and practices, and are not their own...” and “[Western feminist ideas] represent a set of ideas managed by the dominant classes”. These are the same sectors that in the Quebrada de Humahuaca have monopolized, commodified, and essentialized various aspects of local culture through the process of patrimonialization. Gargallo (2014) makes a comprehensive analysis based on her ethnography collected in 607 villages in Latin America, which provides elements for the analysis of the emancipatory ideas and practices of the members of *Banda Nuestra Señora de Fátima* to confront gender oppression. Complementing some of the ideas offered by Gargallo, who focuses on the study of indigenous feminisms, Ansaldúa (2016) reflects on the liminal situation of mestizo women, which finds resonance in the hybridized culture of the Humahuaca Ravine that combines Spanish and indigenous elements, and provides the context of action and emergence of *Nuestra Señora de Fátima*. Another aspect to consider is the development of hegemonic feminisms: Sonia Alvarez (1998) reports on the gap created by the “NGO-ization” of feminist groups, which became part of the global agenda and nation-states, far from the problems and interests of the rural and peasant sectors in Latin America.

On the other hand, the group, *Comunidad Mama Quilla*⁶, more recently founded (2016) reasserts *sikuri* women and dissidences as political subjects that manifest themselves through their performances, sharing many of the features that characterize the so-called fourth wave of feminism (Chamberlain, 1997; Kubissa, 2020; Varela, 2019, among others). According to their own identity positions, the conformation of the community

emerges as the main icon that agglutinates meanings, from which its members performativize the political, primarily related to sex-gender inequalities, to confront the patriarchal violence of a hegemonic model that prioritizes individuality, racism, and exclusion, where interculturality becomes more important as a liberating and effective practice. In Catherine Walsh's terms (2019, p. 91), it would be a “critical interculturality” as an epistemic-ethical-political project of transformation and creation within a decolonial pedagogy rooted in subalternity.

Aesthetic-political genealogies. Two assemblages, two becomings in flight

The history of *sikus* bands of the Quebrada de Humahuaca dates back to the 1930s. It is related to the migration of *sikuris* from Bolivia, which borders the Argentine province of Jujuy to the North. Our Lady of Copacabana is the patron saint of Bolivia, where the tradition of playing *sikus* is part of the Virgin's devotion (Machaca, 2011). The pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Copacabana del Abra de Punta Corral, celebrated in the department of Tilcara, brings together *sikus* bands from all over the province during Holy Week: it is the largest *sikuris* gathering in the country. The Catholic celebration of Holy Week in Tilcara, which mixes pre-Hispanic ritual elements, attracts tourists from all regions of Argentina and involves most of residents, who prepare and decorate the streets with flower arches to welcome the pilgrims, who descend with the image of the Virgin on Holy Wednesday, after having climbed up 3,500 meters on foot along a road about 20 km long to the sanctuary on Holy Monday. In addition, the streets of Tilcara are decorated with large paintings that frame the circuit of the Via Crucis at each of the 14 stations. The incorporation of *sikuri* bands into the Easter celebrations in Tilcara, which begin on Palm Sunday and culminate on Easter Sunday, began in 1930, when Bolivian migrants formed the first band to accompany the pilgrimage to the Punta Corral sanctuary in Tumbaya, a department bordering with Tilcara (Machaca, 2011). The pilgrimage from Tilcara became massive in 1972, when a new sanctuary called Abra de Punta Corral was built in the Tilcara Department.

The *sikuri* bands from the Quebrada and other rural areas perform in a context of Andean Catholic celebrations. The bands play at local and regional religious events, some of which are organized by *prestes* and *pasantes*

of various saints and advocations of the Virgin. Women and girls were not allowed to play *sikus* until just over 25 years ago. Prior to that, they participated only in activities that reproduced their gender roles, such as caregivers, cooks, or they contributed to the bands due to the *grace and beauty* that women would *naturally* have as dancers, and that -in a group without dancers- was limited to carrying the “varita” (a baton of command or *guaripola*). The prohibition was based on indigenous beliefs linking the *siku* to dryness and wind, associated with the masculine. Violation of this taboo would mean infertility for women, abortions and breastfeeding problems, and climatic imbalances that would affect the entire community, in addition to the inconveniences associated with carrying out their domestic activities (Vega, 2013; 2014). In this traditional context of exclusion from the role of *siku* performers, the first women's band in Argentina was formed in 1996: it was called “Banda Femenina Nuestra Señora de Fátima” (Machaca, 2011; Vega, 2013, 2014), in response to the repeated refusals of men to include them as *sikuris* in their groups.

On the other hand, the *Comunidad Mama Quilla* (Mother Moon in Queshua language) which describes itself as a “band of women and lesbians”, was founded in 2016 in Moreno, on the West of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. Its members, originally from Buenos Aires, belong to families that migrated from places where the *siku* is not part of the musical tradition, such as Santiago del Estero province, or countries such as Paraguay, or are second-generation Bolivian descendants, as its founder and musical leader, Aymara, whose grandmother is from Humahuaca (Argentina) and grandfather from Tarija (Bolivia). These young women realized there was a need to create an environment of authentic bonds of solidarity, far from the harassment that they had to face in their mixed-gender bands of origin, a band that includes the diversity of sexual orientations that the *chacha-warmi* discourse of complementarity left out⁷.

In addition to proclaiming a break from heteronormativity from the beginning, they have also adopted the purple color that characterizes feminism and its demands, such as the fight for legal, free and unrestricted abortion, which is another point of conflict with members of ideological groups related to indigenism that are becoming fewer and fewer. Another characteristic that they have incorporated in their constant search to reconstruct

the links with their past of indigenous/peasant roots to find their own identity is the interest in environmentally sustainable practices, such as the creation of community gardens, the exchange of seeds free of transgenic manipulation, conscious nutrition and the use of medicinal herbs⁸. As mentioned by De La Cadena (2020, p. 280), shamanic knowledge and the use of herbal knowledge are actions that empower women, who appeal to non-human entities, which become part of indigenous and political concerns as they act in the public sphere⁹. In this sense, it is crucial to emphasize that, according to its founders, playing the *khantus* style -an emblematic musical genre of the Kallawayá region- is linked to ancient healing practices¹⁰, as Aymara conveys it. In addition to openly speaking out on its website and actively participating in feminist calls, *Comunidad Mama Quilla* has publicly advocated for the redefinition of Argentina as a plurinational state, and called on other women's and mixed bands to unite in common causes against gender oppression, racism and xenophobia.

Becoming being – machinic – assemblage. From feminine desire to a political ontology

The gender performative actions of both groups are different, and they have some distinctive features in terms of their constellations of meanings. Based on a more detailed analysis, the embodied experience understood as embodiment (Csordas, 2010 p. 83) implies a sonorous-musical dimension that interrelates desire as embodied aesthetic enjoyment with the world in unexpected ways through epistemic-political actions and the intense levels of affectation of the sonorous-musical repertoires. In this *becoming-woman*, reciprocities and complementarities typical of *sikuri* music are performativized through the way of playing the instruments and the round-dance choreography, as an indexical-political icon of Andean cosmogonic thought (Podhajcer, 2012; 2015). We argue that this becoming-woman, as argued by Guattari and Rolnik (2006, p. 91-92)¹¹, installs the economy of desire amidst the existing power relations between the subject and the games of truth, whose sets of rules and procedures, as an imposed cultural scheme, dictate the possibilities of being a subject of law (Foucault, 1984). This rhizomatic becoming, on the other hand, builds strategic practices that can

lead to political struggles of great intensity. This is expressed by a member of the group.

Mama Quilla is sort of specialized regarding this political position. We play the *siku* and we want to do it great, and we want to be great blowers and everything you want in terms of technique and whatever you want, we strive for that, but it is not the only thing. And there is a whole political positioning that has to be expressed through the *siku* (Cecilia, blower of *Comunidad Mama Quilla*, 2022)¹².

One of the many questions we ask ourselves is which desire drives this becoming-woman as political agents. When we began to inquire, the *female energy* acquired a potentiality that manifests itself in a bodily state, a being-in-the-*sikuri*, to paraphrase the Merleau-Pontian concept (Merleau-Ponty, 1945), composing a *liberation* ontology that fuses its ramifications not only in the experience lived by the situated body, but also in the musical instrument itself,

When you live together in a more communitarian way, you open yourself to others, you show, of course, your most intimate things, your vulnerability... I don't know what happened to you, what hurts you, what makes you happy, I don't know, everything generates that complicity, then the other understands why you are, I don't know, blowing, I don't know, the sense of what you give in that moment of the round, so for me it generates a kind of magic that is good [...] (Aye, drum player of *Comunidad Mama Quilla*, 2022).

From an ontological conception of corporeality, the desire associated with the feminine and the dissident emerges in the performativity of a sound movement oriented towards an aesthetic-political action. Considering a *realizational act* as a reiterated action of the word (Austin, 1998), performativity expresses the capacity to turn expressions into actions and, through this reiteration, to transform them. From Derrida's (1989) conceptual development, and then with Butler's (2002) gender performativity, the term acquired another value linked to efficacy and effects on bodies. Thus, Butler argues that our behaviors and actions have the power to construct the reality of our sexed bodies, allowing a rich discussion on the material construction of meanings and modes of meaning.

In this sense, the desiring machines are empowered by internal and external impulses that contribute to a rhizomatic, decoded and deterritorialized becoming. Far from the binary logic of the arborescent structure, which reproduces a *de facto state* – that is, a perspective that replicates what is already consolidated, constrictive and repressive –, the authors attribute

creative processes to the sphere of the processual, of dialogue, multiplicity and the rhizomatic (Deleuze; Guattari, 1977). As these authors mention, “Siempre que el deseo sigue un árbol se producen repercusiones internas que lo hacen fracasar y lo conducen a la muerte; pero el rizoma actúa sobre el deseo por impulsos externos y productivos [As long as desire follows a tree there are internal repercussions that cause it to fail and lead it to death; but the rhizome acts on desire through external and productive impulses]” (Deleuze; Guattari, 2004, p. 19). Likewise, according to our ethnographic research, this desire-in-becoming is performativized through the reiteration of the norm or social discourse of sex and gender, while obstructing its regulation through the creation of the abject (Butler, 2002). The materialization of the body to which we refer also implies the embodiment of new sex-gendered modes, which particularly includes claims of dissident and decolonial feminisms¹³, linked to inequalities related to heteronormativity, class and race (Gargallo, 2014). On the other hand, this process is hyperbolized by the dialectical incorporation of the emotions of blowing and listening through a sensitive body in motion, which marks its own rhythm by means of shouts of joy and particularly provocative texts denouncing, among other things, gender violence. In this sense, one of the resources that contributes to the actions and the narrative lies in the power of the musical instrument, as an *active force* (Comaroff, 1992, p. 77), materialized in the body of the performer, whose movement through the public space gains relevance as a metaphor of “the autochthonous” in the city, as a gestural, physical form of strategic appropriation by the participants, legitimizing the effectiveness and power of the performative musical practice.

The performative *interventions* thus become micropolitical aesthesics and machinic agencements that self-regulate and come into tension with spaces of enunciation, such as the demonstrations of the Working Women's Day (8M) or the Mathapi Aptapi Tinku¹⁴. Although they are different, the performativities of the group in both events can be understood analogously in the light of certain distinctive symbols that refer to a specific identity density. In a context of ethnic revitalization and cultural revaluation, participants choose to wear their own identifying signs, dressing entirely in black with the group's logo on their backs. The logo shows the symbol of fire as a formal structure, crowned by the *kintu* of coca leaves¹⁵ on a scenic back-

ground of a full moon. On the foreground, three participants carry *sikus* in the posture of performers, and among them, at the center, the drum player is wearing a skirt with the *chakana*¹⁶ symbol on it, while she raises the mallet with vehemence and exhales an intense scream that seems to be heard. The drum player's hood and plume evoke the condor, which is also represented in one of the masks, in complementary opposition to the jaguar, both dominant and sacred animals of the Andean world (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Current logo of the “Mama Quilla Community”.
Source: Authors.

Through this logo emerges an aesthetic-political position that evokes an organic, vital and powerful world transferred to the blowing female bodies, whose exhalation denounces systematic gender violence. The aesthetic arrangement is significant in that it is materialized in the performances that the group reenacts every year through a micropolitical, spiritual and cosmogonic ritual of release and transmission of the *siku*. This is how one participant expressed it:

The dissidences that participate [...] we are always the targets of everything, of all the bad things, like death, like violence [...] Our intervention was through torches; the mask, and the fire was that, wasn't it? It represents our feelings, then everyone joined in the middle and then we held hands and entered without playing with a beat that was like the beating of the heart. We started playing *khantus* but we held hands when we reached the center of the *chakana* and we joined in a scream, right? In a visceral scream. We released everything [...] We released our feelings, right? The past of our violated, murdered ancestors (Aymara, founder of *Mama Quilla Community*).

The emblems, banners and meanings representative of the Andean world are present in the handmade and popular costumes of the *sikuris* and, above all, in the dancers. Similarly, the gesture of the *tinku*¹⁷ dance with the arm in a horizontal position and the elbow bent forward embodies and represents a posture of self-defense and advance forward, with the left foot to the front, which is present both here and in the performances of the Mathapi Apthapi Tinku, with its reference to the EZLN¹⁸ (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2 – *Comunidad Mama Quilla* at the Mathapi Aptapi Tinku (2019).

Source: Photographic material property of the group.



Figure 3 – *Comunidad Mama Quilla* and *Killapunchay* dance group at the 8M demonstration, 2023.

Source: Photo taken by the authors.

Precisely at this 8M demonstration, the body accompanies a sound-corporal repertoire through the performative genre of the *tinku*, and the lyrics of the song:

Desde el Oeste

Desde el Oeste vamos gritando
No tendrán ya más impunidad.

Ante el macho que viene violentando
Nuestra furia nos va convocando
Ante el macho que viene violentando
Mama Quilla se está organizando

No es delito defenderse de un chabón
Autodefensa y absolución

[From the West

From the West we are shouting
They will no longer have impunity.

Against the macho that comes ravishing
our anger calls us
Against the macho that comes ravishing
We are getting ready

It is not a crime to defend oneself against a guy.
Self-defense and acquittal]

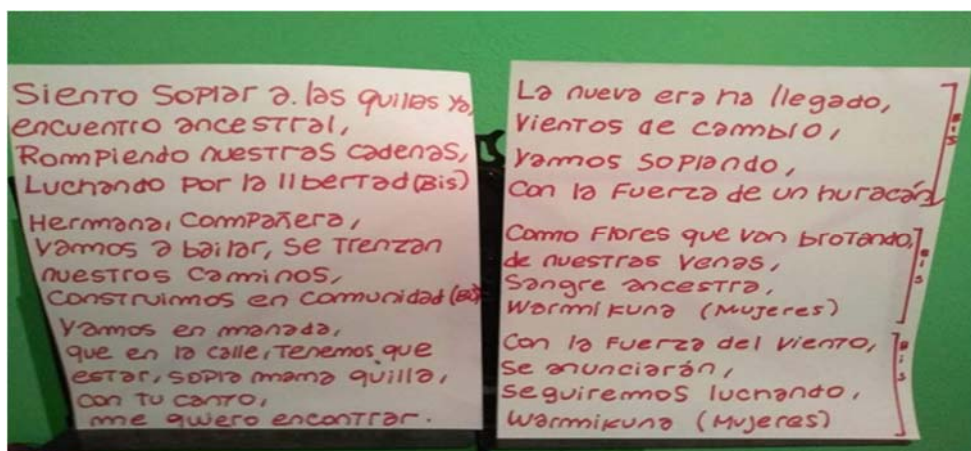


Figure 4 – From the West. Source: Provided by Aymara, founder of *Comunidad Mama Quilla*.

The repertoire itself, which consists mainly of the performance genres of *italaque* and *tinku*, but also includes *khantus*¹⁹, shows a choice for a differ-

ential identification mark that distinguishes this ensemble from others, and the lyrics created by the group function in the same way. Group co-creation is based on the same collective micro-political proposal of building spaces of horizontal levelling. Thus, we can see that, among their stylistic features and associated signifiers, they prioritize, beyond the search for gender equality, their *inner strength*, which they associate with *fire* in the sense of feminine energy. On the other hand, they support the legalization of abortion and denounce the Church and the Argentine State from an anti-patriarchal stance. This is shown by green scarves and violet clothing, and denotes a practice of bodily freedom that, through the technique of sound, materializes the feminine experience. In this sense, the rhythmic strength implies communitarian and emotional links connected to the support and learning of Andean music, which reconnects them with other dimensions: reciprocity through medicinal plants and as an essentialist mode of the Andean.

From the theories of performance, several authors have already pointed out the importance of understanding the connections between different aesthetic languages and the ways in which they facilitate the construction of social identities as well as the transformation of the subjects who practice them (Turner, 2002; Schechner, 2000; Taylor, 2011, among other authors). This can be understood from the multisensoriality implied in gender performances, which, as strategic scenes in spaces of action, bring up to date and embody an identity from the past. In this multidimensional environment, just as the body is activated by different stimuli, sound can be a reality experienced with the whole body, as if it were penetrating it. Early on, Steven Feld (1996, p. 93) argued that in addition to *embodiment*, the experience of one's own body provides an even more intense sensory and sensual dimension of presence that can better synthesize the transition from the active body to the process of memory making. According to the author, the mechanisms that the body uses to generate sound involve emotional connections derived from muscular tensions, breathing, and others that heighten physical and physiological sensations, which are then exhaled in sound. But when space is interpreted through these sounds, it is also embodied and signified in multiple ways.

From these theoretical-methodological approaches, *Comunidad Mama Quilla* can be thought a priori in terms of strata and rational classifications

to understand its evolution from molecularity to molarity; being a *semillera* -seedbed- of new groupings that through a matrilineal transmission establish a phylogeny of common knowledge linked to *sikuri* philosophical thought and a cultural ancestry acquired by (intercultural) identification, that goes beyond ethno-cultural transmission. In turn, these rhizomes acquire relevance in the field of cultural creativity to think about the claim to build a new relationship between men and women, of complementarity, non-violence, affectivity and symmetry, without which the equally careful relations with the materialities of the world would be only discourse and not utopian horizons to build new realities, as the group declares.

Contrary to the case of the *Comunidad Mama Quilla*, and without any precedent of women's *sikuri* ensembles, the members of the Banda Nuestra Señora de Fátima chose, from the beginning, to dispute a masculine space following the same models that codified the musical and extramusical aspects of the ensembles of *sikuri* from Quebrada. These circumstances explain why there have been no changes in the structure of the band, the instruments, the members' roles -in which a strong influence of the military bands is evident (Machaca, 2011) -, the selected repertoire, the type of name that identifies the band, the emblems that represent the group, its clothing, or the religious context in which the ensembles of Quebrada perform. Likewise, the assessment of the sound quality of its performances follows the same criteria as those of the men's bands.

The clothing features are the same as those of the male bands: a cap with a visor with the emblem of the band on the front -the image of Our Lady of Fatima with the three young shepherds at her feet and the name of the band-, a jacket with the same emblem on the back and a T-shirt with the same picture on the front. The image of Our Lady of Fatima and the shepherds is repeated on the band's banner, which is placed at the front of the band when it performs during pilgrimages and processions, so that the public can identify it, and on the drum head. The colors that distinguish the band combine earthy tones from beige to dark brown (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – Banda Femenina Nuestra Señora de Fátima, 2022. Source: Photo taken by the authors.

In the case of the drums, the image of the Virgin appears in a scene that replicates the landscape of the Quebrada and the Puna of Jujuy (Figure 6). These practices of relocating saints, advocations of the Virgin and Jesus in the local environment, are strategies of appropriation that are widespread in the region, and are common on the *ermitas* (hermitages) that frame the *Via Crucis* of Tilcara, which are made collectively by families and neighbors of the community (Figure 6)²⁰.



Figure 6 – Image of a bass drum head of the female band *Our Lady of Fatima* (2013).
Source: Photo taken by the authors.



Figure 7 – Image of an *ermita* of the Via Crucis in Tilcara (2012).

Source: Photo taken by the authors.

This attire, in addition to its functionality for climbing mountains and long pilgrimages, resembles miners' and men's work clothes in general. Few bands deviate from these norms to incorporate elements associated with the Andean indigenous, such as the *aguayos* from Bolivia or the *wiphala*, which respond to the new aesthetics of the region. Contrary to the general trend, the outfit of the women's band María Rosa Mística is characterized by a short purple poncho with pink fringe, as purple and pink predominate in the rest of the clothing. The comment made by a foreign member of the María Rosa Mística band, who emphasized the femininity of her band's wardrobe by proudly showing off her pink gaiters, was followed by jokes and sarcasm from *las Fátimas*²¹, who quickly drew conclusions about the subjugation of gender roles expressed through clothing, contrasting it with the rebellious nature of their own group. They also emphasized the musical quality of the *Fátimas*, especially in relation to the power of sound against the excessive concern of *las Rositas*²² for aesthetic-visual aspects to the detriment of sound.

The names of the *sikuris* bands from Quebrada de Humahuaca and the whole province of Jujuy are usually related to holy figures of Catholicism, such as saints or advocations of the Virgin Mary, to military life and patriotism, to the place of origin of their members, and, more rarely, to their work place or profession. The band Our Lady of Fatima took its name from a dream that Juliana, one of its founders, had in the early days of the band.

Her group mates found in this Marian advocacy a complement to their Quebrada identity, relating the little shepherds who had the vision of the Virgin in Portugal to shepherding, a traditional productive activity that is also carried out by children in Jujuy. The colors of the brown palette, though chosen later, also worked as an addition to the harmony of the shepherds' scene, constituting another aspect that reinforces local identity, as well as the social class identity associated to the jackets and caps with visors.

Another aspect that highlights a continuity with the male ensembles that preceded the creation of the band is the music: the repertoire of the first women's band in Argentina is the same as that of the *quebradeño sikuri* ensembles. It basically consists of the stylistic adaptation of popular melodies of different genres, which the bands perform according to a series of musical characteristics (Vega, 2012) that we will not describe in this article. Among these different genres, *adoraciones* have a slower rhythm and are performed inside the church, some are traditional melodies, while others are taken from the repertoire sung in churches.

It is very unusual for the *sikuri* to compose the pieces they play. However, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the band, two of its captains (María Luz and Jéssica Cruz) composed an *adoración*. Its theme reflects the religious devotion to the *Mamita del Cerro*, the effort of the pilgrimage, and celebrates the collective identity of the members of the group:

A las alturas voy,
llevando mi caña, mi carga y mi fe.
Ni las piedras ni el frío,
ni las espinas acusan dolor.
Al cerro me voy,
de Fátimas soy.

Hermana del viento soy
por largos caminos sin pena andaré.
A tu encuentro voy Madre,
Virgen del Cerro, espérame.
Con fe y devoción,
de Fátimas soy.

Que suene fuerte este canto
que sale del corazón.
A las alturas voy llegando,
Mamita del Cerro, bendíceme.
Al cerro me voy,
de Fátimas soy.

[To the heights I go,
carrying my cane²³, my burden and my faith.
Neither the stones nor the cold
nor the thorns cause pain.
To the hill I go,
I am from *Fátimas*.

Sister of the wind I am
I will walk long roads without sorrow.
I go to meet you, Mother,
Virgin of the Hill, wait for me.
With faith and devotion
I am from *Fátimas*.

Let this song that comes from the heart
sound loudly.
I am reaching the heights,
Mamita del Cerro, bless me.
To the hill I go,
I am from *Fátimas*].

This composition meets the musical characteristics of the genre and its theme is also fully integrated into the religious environment that unfolds during the Holy Week in Tilcara, in accordance with other peculiarities of the band previously described. In terms of identity, the verse *de Fátimas soy* has taken on a life of its own, and the members of the band use it in the most unexpected contexts: as a humorous ending to a dialogue, an exchange of ideas or a reflection, or simply as an expression of joy, without its melody or with alternative melodies.

In terms of the aesthetic evaluation of sound quality, the identity of the band is associated with power. The *strength* that characterizes the band's performance – an essential attribute that must be present in the performances of all *sikuri quebradeños* – needs to be demonstrated in every per-

formance, along with the cohesion and unity of the music performed: “It doesn't matter if we are six *cañeras*, the band is going to sound strong, girls...we are *Fátimas*, aren't we?” (Susi, *sikuri* member of the band, 2022).

The ability to play the instrument with determination and strength, attributes that in the past were used to justify the absence of women in the bands within the framework of biological sex differences, became evidence of the double meaning – as a right and an ability – that the founders of *las Fátimas* attribute to a phrase repeated by its members almost as a band motto: “We can do it too!” However, unlike the Mama Quilla community, this *strength* is not associated with the feminine, but as an aesthetic characteristic common to all *sikuri* bands.

As the male members of the bands had denied them the opportunity to join as *sikuri*, the young women organized their own group with the same requirements (and characteristics) as the existing bands. In this sense, placing themselves on an equal level meant accepting the challenge of adequately playing a musical repertoire known to the entire community of Tilcara and Quebrada, and its characteristics associated with sonorous power and rhythmic and melodic precision, where sonorous intensity is more closely linked to the masculine. And it is this aspect that the *sikuri* of the female band emphasize when referring to their expertise as players: “We can do it,” they repeat, recalling the original challenge they successfully faced when they made their first climbing as a band to the Abra de Punta Corral. There, although their band was supported by other pilgrims, they received a bitter welcome from many male *sikuris*, who tried to *make them fail* by playing at a higher volume so that they could not hear each other as they marched in front of the crowd, with the intention that their mistakes would be an embarrassment: for these men, the women's audacity deserved to be punished. For some of the first *Fátima's* members, this fury went beyond the rivalry existing among the male bands, who demonstrate their superiority over other groups when their sound stream bursts out, overshadowing the bands in their vicinity. Their underlying purpose would have been to reaffirm male superiority associated with strength, a symbol of masculinity that many felt threatened by these women who dared to usurp their roles.

As for the members of Our Lady of Fátima, reaching the standards required to any *sikuri* band provided them with a prestige that allowed Til-

cara society to deconstruct the gender roles in the groups. A goal that is expressed in terms of getting men to respect them as performers, having demonstrated that they can compete musically as equals:

I think we evaluate how much we carry out and how far we go [...] all with respect, always. [...] That led us to so many women's bands in Tilcara coming down [on pilgrimage]. Because we came out as a *sikuri* band because we wanted to be included. And from there, the inclusion of women in [the rest of] the *sikuri* bands (Amancay, member and founder of the band, 2023).

The founders of the band agree on the centrality of desire as a key element in the genesis of the band. Desire produced a new reality, disruptive at the time, which, spreading like a rhizome (Deleuze; Guattari 2004), made possible the emergence of new women's bands and the inclusion of women and girls in spaces they had not been able to access before.

The pilgrim can go alone [...] and in this case we did it as women, alone, playing and without thinking [...] When we went out it was just to go to the Virgin and to play, to be in a *sikuri* band. [...] I never thought that 20 years later I would be talking about it. I even find it funny when they say: 'girls who created feminism in La Quebrada' [...] hum, and others say: 'revolutionary girls'... it wasn't like that. [...] We were rather busy during those years, learning how to play the *siku* and learning all the melodies to be in that world of the *sikurero* [...] And it was about learning the musical genres of the *sikuri* band... (Julia, member, pioneer and ex-captain of the band, 2023).

Desire burst in with its irrepressible potential to provoke a rupture in the patriarchal tradition, without any programmatic proposal generated from an ideological point of view.

We didn't ask for permission. We went out. There wasn't an [explicit] 'ban' that women could not go out. There just weren't any women saying, 'Hey, let's go out'. (Amancay).

Today we have many mixed bands, a lot, but we also have all-female *sikuri* bands. [...]. And that [is important], that you can choose (Amancay, member and founder of the band, 2023).

In spite of not having planned everything that happened after the irruption of the "Fátimas", the arrival of a new normality is recognized in the *sikuri* scene:

At this moment, when we, the women, are also so strong, I think the focus has to go beyond gaining rights to the question of being able to break structures without

damaging anything. I know it is difficult [...] We no longer need to be included. We have to build [...] so that we the genders are -and we are various, let's say- in all possible structures. [...] a change of vision, a change of perspective, and I believe a very big social change. And I think what we did was a social change. [...] a social change in the *sikuri* bands (Amancay, 2023).

Like a rhizome, this new norm must be the starting point for new “lines of flight” (Deleuze; Guattari 2004, p. 14) that break with heteronormativity. The need to permanently cultivate anti-systemic attitudes is also emphasized.

Breaking the existing structures, yes, I think that Fátimas made those changes [...] The question of whether we are feminists or not, I think we have always been free women. And I think that is the most important thing. To have the idea, to be able to carry it out, without having the eyes of a superior on us. Simply to feel that in this world we are all equal, with the same rights, and with the same possibilities. [...] And it seems to me that if that means being a feminist... well... we are feminists! (Amancay, 2023).

The reflections of this and other members of the band allow us to understand the resistance to conforming to the agenda of *white* feminism, which is associated with hegemonic sectors that, since the patrimonialization of the Quebrada de Humahuaca (Bercetche, 2010), have continued the dispossession and exploitation of the local population that started in colonial times. These tensions, arising from the intersection of gender, class and ethnic inequalities, lead to a constant questioning of the proposals of the governments' globalizing gender agenda (Alvarez, 1998). This questioning is frequent in indigenous and rural communities in Latin America, and has driven territorially generated practices and theories (Gargallo, 2012; 2014). In the Argentine province with the highest rates of gender-based violence²⁴ and the fifth highest rates of femicides per capita²⁵, women consider gender oppression as one of the multiple forms of violence they face in their daily lives.

What is new in the dialogical analysis of feminism is the awareness of having generated a new norm, a new structure that must be overcome. A machinic agency that began 26 years ago with the desire of some free-spirited young women who achieved what they were looking for, and that today, contrary to the utopian horizon postulated by the feminisms of the *Buen Vivir*, is aware of the need to seek new lines of escape to overcome the different forms that oppression takes.

Final Reflections

Is it possible to think of desiring machines as infinite bodily materializations in constant flux and reflux? Is it possible to reflect from dissident and decolonial feminisms a new rhizome of utopian *sikuri* desire? Throughout this paper, we have highlighted the relevance of the study of gender performativities to know and understand the particularities of two musical groups of Andean roots, as well as the instrument and the type of ensembles that take place from the choice of the *siku*. The groups formed around the communitarian and at the same time complementary performance of the instrument combine, through a symbolic intersection, the philosophical thought of cultural ancestry, the feminine and dissident, and an embodiment as a life drive oriented towards cultural creativity.

The lines of flight²⁶ or deterritorializations that we have highlighted are presented as practices of freedom in a context in which there is a notorious reluctance to the emergence of indigenous and mestizo identities. This rhizomatic specificity constantly prevents the risk of reification and cultural assimilation that emanate from the policies of hegemonic groups. Likewise, we are interested in highlighting that the strategic use of the indigenous-mestizo culture -as well as the Andean- by these groups inhibits the cultural essentialism that, through multiculturalism, emphasizes hierarchies and socio-cultural asymmetries by exoticizing difference. Multiculturalism, unlike the critical interculturalism described above, prioritizes a project of structural power, whose factors maintain, from a privileged universal position, imaginary and closed cultural patterns, which are far from the changing socio-cultural reality, crossed by conflicts, disagreements and negotiations (Zizek, 1998; Segato, 1999, among others).

We found that both ensembles have found ways to challenge hegemonic feminisms based on their territorialized experiences. This kind of questioning of the various forms of patriarchal and heteronormative oppression is expressed through constituting ideologies linked to decolonial feminisms. In the case of the band *Nuestra Señora de Fátima*, the resistance to call themselves *feminists* responds to a decision not to align themselves with the agenda of *white* feminism, which homogenizes the female subject and renders class and ethnicity differences invisible. The violence experienced by women in Ju-

jury together with their partners, carried out by groups that have benefited from the patrimonialization of the Quebrada de Humahuaca, cannot be ignored. In the face of these inequalities, the path they propose is the generation of new lines of flight that allow them to access a world in which equity is possible beyond sex-gender claims. Mama Quilla community's reading of feminism, on the other hand, is part of what can be called the Fourth Wave of Feminism, which includes performance as a way of challenging patriarchy and building alternative ways of relating within the framework of sexual diversity. This type of epistemic-political performativity conceives complementarity and reciprocity as Andean principles and values, but also as ideological, making them relevant to their life project. These proposals are common in indigenous and rural communities in Latin America and have driven territorially generated practices and theories (Gargallo, 2012; 2014).

In the case of the Mama Quilla community, this interpellation of hegemonic feminisms starts from a politically oriented interpretation of the sex-gender inequalities that take place within the mixed *sikuri* ensembles, which, despite maintaining the narratives related to the *Sumaj Causay* as a discourse of Good Living, complementarity and reciprocity, create a reality in which the hierarchies that oppress other becomings are reinstalled; becoming-woman, becoming-lesbian, becoming-trans and transvestite. We found that, by appropriating the *siku* as a tool for creating and expressing, these desiring machines set in motion new realities from which other lines of flight can be projected, in order to continue to oppose the oppression generated by the structures of power. In the case of Our Lady of Fatima, these changes, which allowed girls and women to access gender roles that were part of male privilege, must become new starting points.

These tensions, arising from the intersection between gender, class and ethnic inequalities, are manifested in performativities as desiring machines where the political and the religious-ceremonial are not only the means and driving force for agency, but also the final goal. Hence, these constellations of meanings appeal indexically to a communal and "traditional" memory, while at the same time attempt to subvert gender inequalities and stand, not only for the popular sectors, but also as women, lesbians and transvestites, among others, legitimizing a place in Argentine society that has been historically denied from them.

Notes

- ¹ Currently, the authors are actively involved in generating discussions, congresses, meetings and joint writings linked to *Andean* music and feminisms, through collaborative and committed ethnographies, and continue their activities as performers in different sikus bands and ensembles.
- ² This research in the case of Adil Podhajcer was carried out with the support of a doctoral scholarship from the University of Buenos Aires (2006-2009), a postdoctoral grant from CONICET (2010-2013) and the research within the framework of the Anthropology of the Body and Performance Group (Equipo de Antropología del Cuerpo y la Performance, EACyP) from the University of Buenos Aires (2015-current). Finally, this article is the result of the research of Alejandra Vega and Adil Podhajcer within the framework of a Gender and Arts Research Project Community music and counter-hegemonic feminisms: the sikuri women's and dissidence movements in Argentina and Latin America (2022-2023) from the National University of the Arts.
- ³ The indigenous concept *chacha-warmi* refers to the male-female duality; it is often translated as *man-woman*.
- ⁴ Deleuze and Guattari use the terms “molar” and “molecular”, taken from physics, to refer to two modes of organizing the social, associated with verticality and horizontality, authority and consensus, the arborescent and the rhizomatic, respectively. Molar is related to reason and a more rigid, hierarchical, and normalizing organization, while molecular is expressed through desire and emotion.
- ⁵ According to the authors, both agencies circulate across semiotic, material, and social flows, through their rhizomatic multiplicity, and can be understood as “enunciates-acts” (2004, p. 83) that compose and decode the micropolitics of the social field.
- ⁶ Mama Quilla (in Quechua, lit. *Mother Moon*) is the female deity of the moon.
- ⁷ More detail on the genealogy of *sikuri* women and dissidents' bands and can be found in Podhajcer and Vega (2021).
- ⁸ They are currently (2020) dedicated to growing and using native plants.
- ⁹ De La Cadena, “Cosmopolítica indígena en los Andes: reflexiones conceptuales más allá de la ‘política’”.

- ¹⁰ A *kallawaya* is a traditional medical-religious specialist of the Charazani region, called upon to restore health with herbs and/or rituals. In 2003, UNESCO declared the Andean cosmovision of the Kallawaya a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*.
- ¹¹ *Becoming feminine* (as well as becoming homosexual, becoming black and becoming a minority, among others), understood as a process of singularization of identity, is defined by Guattari and Rolnik as an ontologization of the subaltern, of minorities, through which there is a rupture with the dominant stratifications, as well as the possibility of producing other processes of subjectivation.
- ¹² Cecilia is a founding member of the group.
- ¹³ Decolonial feminisms are expressions of counter-hegemonic feminisms and emerge in Latin America as an intersection between feminism and decolonial critique. They place importance on ethnic and class inequalities. This critical analysis was carried out by María Lugones (2008), who introduced the term in 2011.
- ¹⁴ Annual regional meeting of *sikuri* ensembles in Buenos Aires that started in 2005.
- ¹⁵ Offering or *pukuy* ritually used throughout the Andean world, directed to quasi-human or non-human entities, as well as existing materialities such as the wind, rivers, and other forms of nature.
- ¹⁶ One of the oldest symbols of the Quechua-Aymara cultures, it symbolises the relationship between worlds (Hanan-Hunin), humans, and other entities. As well as coca leaves, *chakanas* are especially used in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, and also have some degree of popularity in Argentina.
- ¹⁷ A typical dance of Macha, a town located to the north of Potosí. The term *tinku* is translated as *encounter*.
- ¹⁸ Zapatista Army of National Liberation.
- ¹⁹ The three performance genres mentioned here are currently performed in the Departments of La Paz and Potosí, both belonging to the Plurinational State of Bolivia.
- ²⁰ On figure 6, one of the *ermitas* exhibited on the *Via Crucis* in 2012, shows the face of Christ in the sky and a family of local shepherds contemplating and pointing at his image.
- ²¹ *Las Fátimas* is the nickname that the members of the band Nuestra Señora de Fátima give to themselves and that the community of Tilcara uses to refer to them.

- ²² *Las Rositas* is the informal way of referring to the members of the band María Rosa Mística, the second female *sikuri* band of Tilcara.
- ²³ As the instrument is made of canes, *caña* (cane) is a local and informal term for the panpipe.
- ²⁴ Data taken from the Encuesta de prevalencia de violencia contra las mujeres (2022).
- ²⁵ Observatorio de femicidios en Argentina *Adriana Marisel Zambrano* (2022).
- ²⁶ Translator's note: in both Spanish and Deleuze and Guattari's original French, "fugue" retains its double meaning as both a musical form and a means of escape. Although the latter meaning is not commonly used in English, I prioritized the polysemy of "fugue" in the translation of the article's title.

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Adil Podhajcer holds a BA and PhD in Anthropological Sciences from the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires. She has specialized in anthropology of music, religion and visual languages, her doctoral thesis consisted in analyzing the socio-religious and community practices of *Andean music* in the city of Buenos Aires. Currently, she is a researcher of the Equipo de Antropología del Cuerpo y la Performance y de la Red de Investigación de y desde los cuerpos, where she works on new methodologies of performance-research/creation, incorporating the ritual and political dimension on her collaborative ethnographies, in connection with sacred, sonorous and visual materialities. In this sense, she co-coordinates networks with indigenous communities, migrants and governmental institutions. She is a regular professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires y la Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7144-5293>

E-mail: adil.po@gmail.com

Alejandra Vega holds a BA in Folklore with a specialty in Traditional Instruments from the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA) and a Master's degree in Culture and Society from the Universidad Nacional de las Artes. She is a musician, researcher and assistant professor at the Folklore Department of the UNA, Director of the PIACyT project *Las prácticas de canto colectivo tradicional en la construcción de identidades y redes de reciprocidad entre mujeres del NOA. Los Jueves de comadres* from 2020 to date. In the area of ethnomusicology, she researches the music of Bolivian migrants and sikus bands of Buenos Aires since 2003 with special interest in and narratives of women sikuris. In 2011 she began her ethnography with *sikus* bands in the pilgrimage of the Virgin of Copacabana from the Abra de Punta Corral, Jujuy, Argentina, focusing mainly on women's bands.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0534-3916>

E-mail: alevegac@gmail.com

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