

*Canción Sin Miedo- Juntanza de Mujeres Indígenas Colombianas:
An Indigenous and Feminist Protests*

Andrea Bernal, Arizona State University, United States

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Abstract

The protest song genre in Latin America has gained significant momentum during periods of democratic threat, gaining popularity through contributions from countries like Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and others. This phenomenon has given rise to movements such as "canción nueva" or "nueva trova." Notably, these songs are often performed in Spanish and Portuguese, imbued with a poetic language (Miryam Robayo, 2015). Moreover, certain genres, like "canción nueva," incorporate string instruments like the guitar, as well as indigenous or regional instruments (Robin Moore, 2006), infusing them with specific meaning and intent within the realm of protest. However, a limited engagement with indigenous languages in Latin America has been observed within protest songs. As a result, this proposal seeks to analyze the Cover of "Canción sin miedo," performed by indigenous women in Colombia. The aim is to delve into the protest's intent by utilizing indigenous languages in a composition originally written in Spanish. To accomplish this, the song's lyrics are initially dissected in relation to the issue it denounces (violence against women). Subsequently, the song is contextualized within the framework of the Colombian version's lyrics. Lastly, I explore the incorporation of indigenous languages within the song and their significance in the feminist protest. This endeavor seeks to illustrate that the song, beyond being a feminist protest, also represents a challenge to the system from the perspective of indigenous women, presenting the marginalization of indigenous women within the state.

Keywords: Protest Song, Indigenous, Feminist, Indigenous Protest

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Introduction

The Song “Canción sin miedo” by Vivir Quintana was originally performed by Vivir Quintana and the collective El Palomar. The piece originated in Mexico in 2020 as a commemoration of international Women’s Day on March 5th of the same year. The song addresses the topic of femicides and the problem of violence against women that Mexico faces as, according to Blanca Ivonne Olvera (2020), femicides in Mexico increased by 1.6% from 2019 to 2020. Due to the increase in the violence against women, the song carries a political message and serves as a denunciation to this social problem.

Since its release, “Canción sin Miedo” has spread throughout Latin America with various covers and versions performed by other artists. In Colombia for example, there are two versions of the song. One in Spanish, sung by various artists, with the lyrics adapted to fit the Colombian context, mentioning groups and events that take place in the country. The second version of the song is sung in 6 indigenous languages spoken in Colombia (Embera Chamí, Nasa Yuwe, Inga, Duelegaya, Namtrik and Qwatsu). This version has the same lyrics from the Colombian version in Spanish and its difference remains in the performance as it is performed by indigenous women, each singing in a different language.

This paper aims to analyze the song performed by indigenous women from three perspectives, indicating that, beyond its feminist protest, this piece carries a indigenous protests within its message, specifically addressing the marginalization of indigenous women. Consequently, the initial segment of this essay delves into the song’s lyrics, highlighting its condemnation of femicides and violence against women. The subsequent section centers on the Colombian context, elucidating the connection between the song’s message and the prevalent issues within the country. The final section explores the significance of the song when performed in the indigenous languages, emphasizing on the use of these languages as a form of protest.

“Canción Sin Miedo” A Feminist Protest

The reading of the song’s lyrics as a feminist movement, can be made through an analysis of its discourse. Veronica Escobar (2020), developed an analysis of its content by using a discourse analysis framework in which she asserts that the lyrics portray women as primary agents in this protest. This can be seen in several verses such as “hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma”¹ casting women as central figures and thematic focus of the song. This agency bestowed upon women permeates the entire composition, as it can be seen in other verses “Nos sembraron miedo, nos crecieron alas” or “Nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas”. Additionally, the song adopts multiple protagonists narrators, using the first person plural, referring to “we” to the women narrating. Escobar further explains that the song through declarative and imperative sentences claims for social justices. This assertion is exemplified in the following lines “Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia / Gritamos por cada desaparecida /Que resuene fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas! /¡Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida!”. There is also another crucial segment when the song issues a plea for social justice, directing it specifically to the governmental authorities. “no olvide sus nombres por favor, señor presidente”.

¹ English translations can be found in https://lyricfluent.com/lyrics/vivir_quintana_cancion_sin_miedo_mon_laferte_english

To add to this idea, Escobar underscores how the choice of verbs in the song mirrors real-life events experienced by women. When Quintana sings "A cada minuto, de cada semana /nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas/ destrozan sus cuerpos, los desaparecen" she chronicles, through the choice of tense and action verbs, the various forms of violence endured, such as killing or stealing. Importantly, the verbs in this context do not portray women as the active agents but rather as the recipients of these actions. While women remain the central theme of the song, they are not positioned as the actors. Escobar further suggests that the deliberate use of this language and the naming of individuals in the song aim to preserve their memory collectively or evoke empathy among other women. This is achieved through the naming of victims of violence in Mexico. In the Colombian version, names are altered to those of girls and women who fell victim to violence in Colombia, including cases of sexual abuse (Brenda, Ariana, Xiomara, Rosa Elvira, Alejandra, and Yuliana).

From another point of view, according to Sophie Yanik (2016), music serves as a medium for identity creation, shaped by both the lyrics and interpretation of the song and the audience's reception. At this stage, the song shapes identity in two key ways. Firstly, through the lyrics expressing solidarity towards women in specific events within the Colombian population, evident in the stanza: "Por todas las nasas luchando en el Cauca/ Por todas las mujeres reincorporadas/ Las niñas embera que han sido violadas/ Por las campesinas todas colombianas." By using the phrase "for all," the song makes a sweeping statement that the protest is on behalf of women facing violence and those actively resisting it, conveying a message of unity and acknowledgment. Secondly, the song's identity construction, as per Yanik's perspective, lies in its adaptability to the Colombian context as the grim reality of femicides is not different between both Latin American countries. As of August 2022, the Observatory of Femicides in Colombia reported 392 cases of femicide.

The melody of the song also takes on a political stance. The composition starts with a rhythm orchestrated by wind instruments and percussion, evoking an Andean beat. It then seamlessly transitions into the guitar and saxophone, harmonizing with the voices of the performers. This combination of instruments and rhythms in protest songs has historical precedence, seen in other genres like the Nueva Trova, where an emphasis on valuing folk traditions was pivotal (Moore, 2022). Another illustrative example comes from some creations in Bolivian hip-hop, where indigenous artists from the Bolivian highlands fused hip-hop rhythms with those of their ancestors, delving into the exploration of Aymara and Bolivian identity (Juan Dolce and Emanuel Talancon, 2017).

The Colombian Context

María del Pilar Espinosa (2020) reports that in the year 2020, 3951 women and girls disclosed instances of experiencing various forms of violence, whether physical or sexual, during the pandemic. Michael Vergel and Lizeth Martinez (2021) explained that indigenous women not only endure physical and sexual violence within their communities but also suffer the abandonment by the Colombian government and are victims of forced displacement due to the armed conflict. However, the precise figures for these cases remain elusive, given that indigenous women hesitate to report, fueled by the fear of societal stigma within their communities. Besides, Daniela Echeverri (2015) introduces another facet, focusing on women in guerrilla movements. According to Echeverri, the majority of women in the FARC guerrilla group are forcibly recruited between the ages of 13 and 15. She further reveals that around 80% of these women undergo forced abortions during their time in the guerrilla, facing abuse, beatings, and even fatalities, not only at the hands of male counterparts but also

from women in higher-ranking positions. This information underscores that women in Colombia confront various types of violence, including systemic oppression.

With this contextual shift, the song introduces another notable distinction by grouping women according to what we could term as identity labels—fundamental aspects of their lives that form a crucial part of their identity, such as race, gender, or social condition. This is a departure from Quintana's version. The lyrics now include verses like: "Por todas las nasas luchando en el cauca/ Por todas las mujeres reincorporadas" "Por las chicas trans que han sido asesinadas/ Las mujeres negras luchando en gayar/ Todas las wayuu defendiendo sus tierras/ Las niñas embera que han sido violadas/ Por las campesinas todas colombianas" It's noteworthy how, in this segment, the use of the word "all" generalizes the nationality of all these groups of women, thereby contributing to collective memory, identity, and the solidarity discussed earlier.

“Canción Sin Miedo” and Indigenous Protest

The version of "Canción sin Miedo" in indigenous languages stands as an artistic composition in terms of music and visuals, infused with protest messages. Crafted by the SentARTE group in 2021, the piece unfolds with each verse performed in a different indigenous language, with one stanza in Spanish. This prompts two questions: firstly, what is the intent behind interpreting this song in Colombian indigenous languages? And secondly, why are each stanza in different indigenous languages? SentARTE addresses one of these questions in the video description, stating:

From the sonic force that propels us as indigenous women, always accompanied by our indigenous and non-indigenous siblings contributing to our struggles, we adapt Canción sin Miedo based on our cosmogonies, feelings, and pains to six of our mother tongues and Spanish as the language that unites us.

Thus, departing from indigenous identity and the unifying force of Spanish, the language contributes a protest dynamic that can be divided into three facets. Firstly, in alignment with José Zanardini's (2013) perspective, indigenous languages play multiple roles within their communities. Initially, they foster connections within the community, followed by the construction of an identity and cultural principles they fiercely defend. Ultimately, the language becomes a sanctuary, shielding them against oppressive forces seeking to marginalize them. In essence, the song becomes an act of resistance and visibility, spotlighting Amerindian languages and affirming their existence in society.

The second facet alludes to the fact that a composition originally written in Spanish and adapted to indigenous languages serves as a unique form of protest. This adaptation reinforces the acknowledgment of their languages and signifies the continuous evolution of their ethnicity as they navigate the currents of globalization and societal impositions. Indigenous women, in this way, empower their ethnicity by taking a song in the imposed language and interpreting it through the lens of their linguistic and cultural characteristics.

The third and final facet involves a resolute denouncement of violence against indigenous women. In assuming the role of protesters, they direct their voices against various governmental figures. Isabela Figueroa and Noriana Franco (2020) argue that indigenous women represent one of the most vulnerable groups in Colombia, confronting social and political discrimination. This stems from their lack of inclusion and consideration in the

formulation of policies concerning gender and ethnicity. The indigenous rendition of "Canción sin Miedo" thus becomes a powerful tool for advocacy and a poignant expression of resistance.

Before proceeding, it's crucial to note that the reasons behind singing each stanza in a different language and the specific selection of these languages for the song remain unclear. Moreover, the motive for choosing these particular languages is unknown, especially considering that Colombia, as outlined by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, has over sixty five indigenous languages spoken throughout the country. Possible explanations could include selecting languages with a higher number of speakers or those with established alphabets, facilitating the translation process. Another consideration could be that these languages were spoken by the individuals actively engaged in the project. To know the specific reasons it would be necessary to communicate with the creators of this production.

This song can be seen as a tool of resistance with two primary objectives: to denounce and to include. Luz María de la Torre de Amaguaña (2010) recounts the challenges faced by indigenous women to break free from their domestic roles, confined to the "field of servitude" and limited by "systematic processes of racism, domination, exclusion, and annihilation of their identity as a social-public subject". In this case, the song denounces their invisibilized figures while reinforcing their identity through symbols that identify them as indigenous women. Furthermore, the song grants them a different agency, a fighting agency evident in the third stanza "por todas las nasas luchando en el cauca" and in the seventh stanza "todas las wayuu defendiendo sus tierras". The song also gives them a voice unafraid to seek justice, as expressed in "Si tocan a una respondemos todas" To clarify this argument, I'd like to quote one of the members of the SentARTE group, Francly Silva, who states, "Through the arts, I seek to decolonize thought," aiming to use this production as a means to shift the role of indigenous women from the colonial legacy that remains in our current society.

De la Torre Amaguaña further describes how the use of traditional attire (the anaco or huipil), is not only a tool to reaffirm identity, but becomes a political and protest act against discrimination created by the vision of the otherness. In this way she adds, "Through these spaces, we have begun to shout to the four winds that we want to be subjects with rights in each of the spaces that have systematically been denied to us" (3). Language, like clothing, becomes a tool of protest that allows them to raise their voices, demanding "Justicia, Justicia Justicia" at the end of the sixth stanza.

This rendition of "Canción sin Miedo" is one of many examples where songs or genres typically performed in dominant languages are adapted to indigenous languages. This indigenous representation in popular rhythms, primarily distributed in dominant languages, gives rise to a new genre of music and a novel distribution phenomenon. Joseph Cru (2017) presents a similar example where young indigenous individuals rap in their languages, and as the author notes, the use of their languages "has served as motivation for these young people to reclaim their language and strengthen their ethnic identity" (1). In this new movement, Dolce and Talacon (2017) express that the adaptation of these genres and rhythms by indigenous artists is part of the globalization and ethnic construction process, where ethnicities are in a constant state of formation and transformation. That is that the artist, by using their symbols, seeks to create a space in which they can represent both elements in their identities, their indigenous ethnicity and their latin American persona. This song allows us to

witness the blend of the imposed and the inherent through three elements that shape the musical piece: the melody, which integrates Andean rhythms, the video featuring indigenous women in traditional attire, indigenous flags, natural elements, typical instruments, and dances, and finally, the use of indigenous languages.

However, the song doesn't only protest from the perspective of languages; it also empowers indigenous women. Regarding this statement, De la Torre (2010) enounces, "We must teach the world and show them that many of us have achieved success in the midst of the worst and harsh ways; harassed by fathers, husbands, bosses, males, a patriarchal, exclusive, and violent country and society" (4-5). This sentiment aligns with the assertions of Figueroa and Franco regarding vulnerability. Therefore, it's reasonable that, indigenous women become the principal agents fighting for their lands "Por todas las nasas luchando en el cauca," for the girls in their communities "Las niñas embera que han sido violadas" and for women in general "Cantamos sin miedo pedimos justicia / Gritamos por cada desaparecida," assuming the role of the primary accuser, the victim raising her voice, "hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma/ nos sembraron miedo nos crecieron alas." The indigenous women are not longer a statistic discussed by others. The have become their own advocate, expressing their protest as a women who no longer wishes to endure violence " Yo todo lo incendio yo todo rompo /Si un día algún fulano te apaga los ojos/ Ya nada me calla, ya todo me sobra/ Si tocan a una respondemos todas."

Conclusion

The Colombian versions of "Canción Sin Miedo," both in Spanish and indigenous languages, when adapted to fit the Colombian context, transform and generate a different kind of protest message—a protest against the Colombian government. To achieve this, they employ various strategies that convey protest messages and denounce not only femicides but also other social issues. In the realm of lyrics, the composition seeks to appeal to solidarity and create a collective memory. Additionally, it denounces the state and government for their lack of action regarding cases of violence against women, implying another type of violence—state violence through negligence. This is done by placing women as the focal point of the song, not as the main actor but as the one receiving the actions (in this case, violent actions). The piece also aims for the development of a collective identity by narrating violent events referring to specific groups.

In addition to the feminist protest, the version in indigenous languages presents an indigenous protest. This adaptation allows indigenous women to use their identity elements for their message and grants them a position of protest against social problems. In essence, the song protests against three types of invisibilities: the invisibility of women, the invisibility of indigenous women, and the invisibility of the indigenous community and its value, giving rise to the theme of the reclamation of indigenous narrative tradition by addressing the problem in their languages rather than the imposed language.

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