Uprising on the Dance Floor

New Chilean Pop and Protest in Postdictatorship Chile

by
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New Chilean Pop catalyzed and reinforced a queer exploration of social exclusion, an alternative and sometimes a counter culture. An analysis of Javiera Mena and Álex Anwandter's music and filmography reveals a musical scene that has been led by queer and feminist artists whose work has evolved alongside national social movements and a counter-telling of the political, social, cultural, and economic legacy of Augusto Pinochet's bloody regime (1973–1990).

El Nuevo Pop Chileno catalizó y reforzó una exploración queer de la exclusión social, así como una cultura alternativa y, a veces, contracultural. Un análisis de la música y filmografía de Javiera Mena y Álex Anwandter revela una escena musical que ha sido liderada por artistas queer y feministas cuyo trabajo ha evolucionado junto con los movimientos sociales nacionales y una contranarrativa del legado político, social, cultural y económico del sangriento régimen de Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990).

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On January 4, 2020, in Santiago, a video went viral on social media and flooded the news. Two women were driving a car while listening to Álex Anwandter's song "Paco Vampiro," a protest anthem against the country's military police, and were stopped by officers who proceeded to intimidate them with their firearms. As did other Chilean musicians, such as Ana Tijoux ("Cacerolazo") and Mon Laferte ("Plata-tá-tá"), Anwandter used the wide reach of his pop music as a platform for participating in the social uprising against the country's political and economic system, and the violent reaction his song prompted from the police left little doubt about its effectiveness as a form of protest.

Understanding the context for that moment in early 2020 is important for interpreting Anwandter's song and its critique. In October 2019, President Sebastian Piñera's announcement of an increase in the metro fare sparked an

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unexpected social reaction. What was first a demonstration of students—a group that has been one of the main actors in Chilean social movements during the past 30 years of democracy, such as the mobilizations for free university education—quickly brought together broad sectors of the population. The Chilean neoliberal "miracle" soon found itself overtaken by social unrest. After the government's violent reaction, the protest articulated a wider agenda of issues faced by those excluded from the democratic transition, among them low salaries and pensions, lack of access to education, and an extended system of repression. This triggered a demand for the sanctioning of a new constitution, pointing to the fact that the current Magna Carta was the social, economic, and cultural legacy of the bloody regime of Augusto Pinochet. In 2021, Gabriel Boric—candidate of a center-left coalition—was elected president in a second round with 55.87 percent against the right-wing candidate José Antonio Kast. During the same year, a constitutional convention elected by popular vote worked on a new constitution, which nonetheless was rejected in a 2022 referendum by 61.89 percent of voters.

Music has played an important role in these political developments; indeed, the Chilean music landscape has long been understood as a core field of political, cultural, and social struggle (Pino-Ojeda, 2021; McSherry, 2017). While rock is often positioned as the principal cultural scenario for Latin American youth rebellion during the twentieth century, previous studies in Chile have focused primarily on Nueva Canción Chilena as a platform for the democratic road to socialism (Rolle, 2002; Salas Zúñiga, 2003).

The opening scene of this article, however, shows the role that new popular music genres have played in the shaping of counter, alternative, and protest cultures in Chile and across the Americas (García Canclini, 2017). Since the 1980s, the mix of synthesizers and electronic sounds quintessential to pop music has also provided a musical means for expressing dissent from nationalistic and oppressive dictatorial regimes, particularly in the music of bands like Los Prisioneros in Chile or Charly García in Argentina (Contardo and García, 2005; Depetris Chauvin, 2016; Wilson, 2015). The turn of the twenty-first century and the democratization brought by the digital turn allowed a new generation of pop artists to shape music for the dance floor and expand the 1990s commercial repertoire of topics to express other experiences such as queer feelings and social exclusion. This article dialogues with recent studies that have focused on pop music and culture to understand the centrality of consumption in post-dictatorship Chile (in addition to the works previously cited, see Barros, 2013; Baker, 2020; Arenas Osorio et al., 2019).

This essay, then, explores New Chilean Pop as a platform for (queer) social protest in twenty-first-century Chile. While focusing on the discography and filmography of artists such as Javiera Mena and Álex Anwandter, it explores an expansive pop sensibility that engaged with social protest from LGTBIQ+ visibility (Mena) to an attempt to rebuild the link among a a historically male-centered left imaginary, working-class experiences, and queer radicalization (Anwandter)—something previously explored by other cultural projects such as the works of writer Pedro Lemebel. This perspective highlights the fact that major and sometimes contradictory cultural trends such as *latinoamericanismo* and transnational pop are far from being a binary expression of male-dominant

culture, instead constituting a complex and open mosaic open to queer interventions (Foster, 2014).

We argue that New Chilean Pop opened a cultural space of hybridization that articulated apparent contradictory aesthetics and references, ruptures and continuities, such as global pop and protest music; participated in the neoliberal promise of reaching wider markets while proposing alternative and sometimes counter tellings against social exclusion based on heteronormativity and classism; and, by embracing global music and also making explicit references to Latin American reality as a contrast to the Chilean nationalistic discourse of the "exceptionality" of their country, mixed aesthetic resources of global modernization with local traditions, among others (García Canclini, 2006). We point out how, by utilizing diverse artistic resources, pop music shaped a queer sensibility that brings the marginalized social groups generally invisibilized in mainstream cultural production to the forefront.

The essay is organized into two sections. First, it reconstructs the making of New Chilean Pop by focusing on Javiera Mena's output, studying how she widened the topical repertoire by incorporating liberal feminist and lesbian themes and representation into her melancholic electro-pop. Second, addressing Álex Anwandter's music and filmography, it explores the social class intersections of queer identities in Chilean pop music that have echoed in a younger generation of musicians.

JAVIERA MENA: THE MAKING OF CHILEAN QUEER POP

In the early 1970s, Allende's socialist democratic project was fueled by Nueva Canción Chilena, a reinvention of folkloric music with a direct political message of radical social change. Augusto Pinochet's military coup in September 1973 against the socialist government changed the country's soundtrack. Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990) was a turning point for Chile's economic, social, and cultural projects. By privatizing public services, opening economic frontiers, and promoting the free flow of capital in a context of financial market expansion, the regime built a model celebrated by the orthodox neoliberal establishment that identified it as the Latin American "miracle" (Solimano, 2012). Pinochet's government celebrated the incorporation of Chile into the globalized world by bringing international pop bands to perform at the Viña del Mar festival, which was considered the celebration of the neoliberal model (Contardo and García, 2005). During this period, some musicians used the aesthetic resources of Nueva Canción Chilena to respond to the dictatorial cultural apparatus, albeit with limited impact because of censorship and political persecution (Pino-Ojeda, 2021). However, the emerging pop scene that mixed synthesizers, samplers, and beats—endorsing the promise of neoliberal modernization and embracing the electronic aesthetics of globalization—also created a paradox, offering a platform for a language of dissent and issuing a call to pleasure in an oppressive atmosphere for those otherwise excluded from the emerging new Chile. Bands such as Electrodomésticos and Prisioneros employed a new language that, in contrast with the 1970s, did not always have an explicit protest message, using mechanisms such as repetition or including

sampled audio from television speeches to highlight the struggles of working-class life and reject the national promise of neoliberal salvation (Depetris Chauvin, 2016).

This transnationalization of the music scene was the soundtrack for the growing nonheterosexual leisure market. The oral history archive Investigación del Ritmo de la Noche reconstructs the vibrant scene in which homosexuals, lesbians, and trans people have been struggling to conquer a place of their own since the 1970s. The Chilean state has policed nonheterosexual expressions since the nineteenth century (Cornejo, 2011). In 1874 the penal code introduced religious and moral considerations against homosexuality such as the punishment of sodomy. In the twentieth century, medical discourse legitimated a reformulation of these policies that used police power to persecute queer people in public spaces (Alegre, 2017). In 1954 the state adopted the law of "antisocial states," which penalized subjects considered dangerous to the nation such as homosexuals. In this scenario, violence against dissident sexualities was legitimized by both the police and civilians themselves, who were often referred to as *colipatos, travestis, maracos,* and *yeguas sueltas* (Acevedo and Elgueta, 2009). During the government of Salvador Allende and the democratic road to socialism, anti-LGTBIQ+ legislation received a new connotation, the figure of the "new man" as the subject of a left culture influenced by the Cuban Revolution, which exalted the hypermasculine role of men in the revolutionary process (Acevedo and Elgueta, 2009).

According to the oral history testimonies from the archive Investigación del Ritmo de la Noche, in Santiago de Chile, the gay bar Fausto and the lesbian bar Quasar functioned as spaces for musical and performative dance experimentation; the bar fostered musical genres usually ignored by the straight mainstream circuit and drag shows. In fact, these spaces were also attractive to straight people seeking new musical experiences. The owner of one of them remembers that they received music on cassettes sent by Chileans living in New York City, including disco, pop, and electronics, which introduced disruptive artists such as the gender-nonconforming Afro-American singer Sylvester and popularized glamorous and flamboyant outfits (Investigación del Ritmo de la Noche, Testimony 6). In the 1980s, DJs introduced electronic music from Germany and popularized international pop music with artists such as Madonna, Raffaella Carrà, Cindy Lauper, and Boy George, whose music foregrounded self-expression and freedom (Investigación del Ritmo de la Noche, Testimonies 3, 4, 6, and 9). While the male gay scene was dominated by English-speaking music, lesbian bars were more open to Spanish-speaking music, such as Latin American slow-dance tunes and cumbia (Investigación del Ritmo de la Noche, Testimony 10).

Beyond the dance floor, LGTBIQ+ movements deployed different strategies of resistance. In 1973 a group of homosexuals and *transformistas* protested in Santiago's main square but encountered strong police repression (Robles, 2008). In the post-dictatorship context of the 1990s, the LGTBIQ+ movement emerged along with social and protest movements of women, indigenous people, and workers. The Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual Histórico (Historical Movement of Homosexual Integration and Liberation—MOVILH), created in 1991, fought for the decriminalization of sodomy and achieved it in

1999. In the twenty-first century, the LGTBIQ+ movement promoted a law against discrimination (Garrido and Barrientos, 2018).

After decades of a democratic transition marked by the continued influence of the dictatorship, in the context of a celebrated modernization through the entry of Chile as a provider of services and primary goods to the global market, a new generation of pop musicians developed New Chilean Pop both nationally and internationally. In the 1980s, pop music was a cosmopolitan challenge to Pinochet's nationalistic rhetoric of modernization. In the 1990s, it was gradually institutionalized via the private market. In the twenty-first century, however, the popularization of pirate music and the digital democratization of musical tools produced a renovation of the pop landscape (Arenas Osorio et al., 2019). In a context in which consumption (and the lack of access to it) became a major component of social life in Latin American societies, New Chilean Pop contributed dance music and expanded the repertoire of topics beyond love to other experiences as queer feelings.

From the Mexican singer Daniela Romo's "Yo no te pido la luna" to the Spanish group Mecano's "Mujer contra mujer" (also made popular in the Southern Cone countries by the openly lesbian Argentine duo Sandra and Celeste), the Chilean pop musician Javiera Mena has covered many 1980s and 1990s hits with underlying lesboerotic and/or queer themes from the Spanish-speaking world. Since 2006 she has been a trailblazer for the New Chilean Pop scene with her debut album *Esquemas juveniles* (Youth Schemes) and her participation in local festivals and collaboration with other Chilean musicians such as Gepe and the duo Dënver. As Daniel Party (2018) has pointed out, New Chilean Pop emerged during a period of innovation for music-listening devices. The popularization of gadgets such as AirPods among certain social sectors made possible new scenarios for active listening, such as sharing earbuds, which created new intimate experiences thematized in songs such as the 2010 "Un audífono tú, un audífono yo." Álex Anwandter, who at the time had recently separated from his band Teleradio Donoso and was working on his first solo project, Odisea (admittedly inspired by Mena herself), directed her music video "Hasta la verdad" on her second studio album, in 2010, titled *Mena*. It would be her third studio album, the 2013 Otra era, that launched Mena's futuristic electro-pop sound beyond the Andes.

Javiera Mena curates cover songs that were considered lesbian coming-out anthems in the 1980s and 1990s, placing her music in the core of queer Latin American pop. In her tribute to Daniela Romo, an actress and singer who was considered a Mexican lesbian icon, Mena works with contrasting images to express the idea of women's liberation. While the music references a 1980s soundscape, Mena's video shows her in classic female roles such as doing household chores, but in the chorus there is a direct reference to Romo's video as a space of liberty. The use of pink and green lights, as in Romo's video, could be considered visual evidence that the audience understood "Yo no te pido la luna" as a song that, without using clear gender pronouns, promoted nongendered passion and love.

In "Mujer contra mujer," Mena reshapes the Spanish-speaking lesbian anthem by using synth keyboards. The video starts and ends with a family made up of a mother, father, and children, facing two women holding hands,

presumably a couple. Then it shows the couple walking and hugging in public, focusing on society's judgmental point of view. However, the chorus of the song contrasts the visuals with the line: "What others think is irrelevant, who stops doves in their tracks." These images are combined with lyrics that reinforce the idea of a secret relationship disguised as a friendship that can no longer be hidden and point to the power of coming-out narratives in the 1980s as a political tool for making lesbianism visible. By reframing the struggles of lesbians in the 1980s and bringing them into the current Chilean context, Mena underscores the power of lesbian visibility in their pursuit of free expression of their erotic and romantic desires. At the end of the video, this message is reinforced by an image of the mother—presented as the head of the family—smiling.

While her version of "Yo no te pido la luna" still plays in LGBTIQ+ discotheques from Bogotá to Barcelona, it was her own 2014 single "Espada" that launched Javiera Mena to international fame. Though the album art for *Otra era* is black-and-white with a Björk-inspired Mena staring expressionless at her potential consumer, the first single released from the album was a colorful lesboerotic synth-pop dance track. The popularity of this track in Chile and elsewhere turned Mena into a prominent representative of the LGBTIQ+ community despite her reluctance to embrace the role. In 2016, asked by a journalist about the political implications of her work, she answered that her dance-pop was political, even without blatantly sociopolitical messages in its lyrics or the visuals based on her independent productions, because she was making art as a free woman. Even if Javiera Mena's music didn't openly align with students demonstrations prior to 2019, as that of her contemporaries Anwandter and Ana Tijoux did, she says that those protests serve a purpose just as her art does. However, more recently Mena had a more openly political intervention by for example calling queer people to vote for Gabriel Boric in 2021. That being said, "Espada" is not just a pop song with a lesboerotic reading of its lyrics; its visual themes and references to Chile's conservative but consumerist society appeal to the nostalgia and the melancholic view of the future of an entire generation of Latin Americans.

While Mena's feminist stance may be a literal interpretation of the slogan "The personal is political" (from the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s), her melancholic sound and lyrics presented from a lesbian perspective make her a transgressive figure on Chile's global music scene. After a decade and a half of post-Pinochet neoliberal policies, which privatized everyday Chileans' aspirations to social mobility, the pop scene that Mena helped to pioneer burst onto the airwaves at the same time that Chilean students began taking to the streets demanding education reform during the 2006 "Penguin Revolution" (Larrabure and Torchia, 2015).

"In this universe/this mountain range/I want your sword to cut only through me," Mena sings in the video for "Espada," from a white Ford Mustang in a green-screen-generated colorful, 1980s-inspired landscape. The lesboerotic lyrics are accompanied by a visually stimulating video of Mena in different scenes as a spectator of various women also traversing this vibrant pop world, surrounded by phallic objects such as swords (the title of the song), lipstick, fingers/hands, and a large black silicone cone-shaped object. A frame of a brilliant finger accessing a

deep black space was the first explicit representation of lesbian sexuality in mainstream Chilean music. Mena drives the Mustang full speed toward her sexual desire, a pair of computer-generated female legs straddling the highway. She does not formulate an obvious critique of the neoliberal order in Chile, although the video is saturated with pop iconography from the 1980s and 1990s, referencing the influx of imported commercial goods to the country at that time, including music, television programming, and consumerist aspirations (Tinsman, 2014; Contardo and García, 2005). This aesthetic choice is combined with the synth-pop sound reminiscent of this era, but the lyrics favor sentimental experiences and individual authenticity.

Although Mena may not be leading the pop revolution in Chile in a political sense, she has been able to intelligently craft an LGBTIQ+ perspective in pop and place it at the center of the genre. Other artists have followed, using pop's commercial characteristics to articulate more politically charged messages through their music. For example, Francisca Valenzuela—who performed her 2020 Viña del Mar show with a symbolic green bandana referencing the feminist movement's fight to legalize abortion in Latin America—has a repertoire of electro-pop dance hits with a clear feminist perspective, including her critique of sexism in her hit "Buen soldado" and her song against LGBTIQ+ discrimination, "Insulto." But it was Álex Anwandter, pointing to Mexican gay pop icon Juan Gabriel and Mena herself as his influences, who took queer pop and politicized it, framing it within a working-class experience.

ÁLEX ANWANDTER: THE (RE)MAKING OF QUEER PROTEST MUSIC

"I am walking to the factory/again, thinking of you," sings Álex Anwandter over a slow, repetitive piano riff, with the hi-hat and kick drum keeping the rhythm of the song, recalling the Mexican pop-rock artist Julieta Venegas. At a time when transgressive Chilean pop musicians framed their music in terms of individual experience—as in Javiera Mena's experimental song and video for *Otra era,* her self-reflection in the 2017 "Dentro de ti," and the nostalgic dance beat about lesbian sexuality of "Espada"—Anwandter turned outward to the streets to reflect a collective experience in the second studio album under his own name, the 2016 *Amiga*.

Álex Anwandter's name is now synonymous with LGBTIQ+ cultural activism, whether through his music or through his 2016 critically acclaimed first film *You'll Never Be Alone*. The latter was inspired by the tragic case of Daniel Zamudio, a young gay man who was beaten and murdered in Santiago in 2012 and whose death led to mobilization for the passage of an anti-discrimination law. The film portrays the experience of Zamudio's father, a working-class man who, after the attack on his son, faces Chilean social inequalities such as the lack of access to a free health care system. Along with his music, then, Anwandter's filmography explores working-class precariousness and masculinity with a queer lens. Anwandter's career began during the mid-2000s as the frontman for the band Teleradio Donoso, and he later began a solo career under the title Odisea until finally releasing his first album as Álex Anwandter, *Rebeldes*, in 2011. Along with Mena, he never attempted to hide being a member

of the LGBTIQ+ community. The title of Teleradio Donoso's most successful album, the 2008 *Bailar y llorar* (Dancing and Crying), is a synthesis of the New Chilean Pop sound of the latter half of the first decade of the twenty-first century, melancholic dance beats with sentimental lyrics. In fact, his first band's name is a nod to the Chilean writer José Donoso, best-known for the novel *Hell Has No Limits*, whose protagonist is a transgendered prostitute in the town of Talca, where Chile's declaration of independence was signed.[1] It is, however, on his album *Rebeldes* that Anwandter's songs begin to express a collective queer experience that aims to be pluralistic, diverse, and intersectional.

The 2011 album opens with a question: "How can you live with yourself?" This first track has a lively disco beat that invites listeners not only to dance but to vogue to its lyrics of queer empowerment and self-acceptance. The song's English title, "How Can U Live With Yourself?," appears across the screen in the track's 2012 music video, directed by Anwandter himself; an ode to Jennie Livingston's 1991 documentary *Paris Is Burning*, which portrays the underground black and Latinx drag ball culture of 1980s Harlem. "I am not wearing a disguise. . . . Only being what I am do I understand what is real," Anwandter sings while the gender-bending dancers compete in a Santiago-based ballroom competition. Here he not only translates the ballroom culture of New York's marginalized Latinx and black gay and trans community to a Chilean context but also plays with the significance of being "real" versus the performance-like "realness" of the ballroom competitions portrayed in the film.

Participating in ballroom competitions in the heyday of New York City's queer underbelly of working-class and poor queers, gay men, trans folks, and sex workers meant performing in drag, in which one would have to "pass"—act out an authentic representation of established categories ranging from traditional male-to-female drag performances to categories based on white culture, heterosexuality, and social class. In her analysis of *Paris Is Burning*, Butler (2011: 88) explains that "'realness' is not exactly a category in which one competes but a standard used to judge any performance within the established categories. And yet what determines the effect of realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect." That being said, what Anwandter's characters perform is not an upper-class South American "realness"; rather they are all dressed in an overtly gender-bending kitsch fashion.

While the working-class and poor queers of New York were performing upper-class heteronormative realness, the Chilean queers portrayed in Anwandter's music video are showing off their own unique realness, echoed in the song's lyrics. By doing this, Anwandter is signaling that Santiago has its own very real working-class and poor LGBTIQ+ community, which has been invisibilized in the images of daily life—"I disappear on TV," sings the musician in the second verse—and faces the violence of a society that systematically oppresses it. In contrast, the lyrics reaffirm and celebrate a queer identity despite what society or its institutions say—"even if they say it's bad/I feel I'm in heaven . . . even if it's a sin/I feel like I'm in heaven." The song title's question, which is repeated in the chorus, presumably directed toward LGBTIQ+ individuals, is reflected back on Chilean society and its institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, with regard to its treatment of this community. Not only does Anwandter accept his own homosexuality as

something to be celebrated, he does so despite its being deemed wrong or a sin. The video includes stills of a cross that, near the end of the video, is inverted (a symbolism that he returns to on his second solo album).

Other than the opening track, most of the *Rebeldes* album corresponds to a style of Chilean pop that was not necessarily sociopolitically engaged, despite many of the videos' featuring representations of gay relationships. (The cinemaphotography for the "Tormenta" music video is particularly beautiful in this regard in showing a variety of queer and heterosexual relationships.) After performing during the student occupation of universities and colleges, however, Anwandter decided that his music should take classic pop topics such as love into a new dimension by incorporating lyrics and aesthetics from the social movement. It was in his 2016 album *Amiga* that he began experimenting with a more politically charged pop exemplified in its first single, "Siempre es viernes en mi corazón." The upbeat song, which features the iconic Argentine pop duo Miranda!, revisits the stress of everyday working-class life while the chorus repeats, as the title states, "It's always Friday in my heart" (Friday being a night in which one is free to party and forget the stress of the work week). However, Anwandter's workers also belong to the LGBTIQ+ community and must confront the homophobic history of Chile's institutions: "The Church is sending me to hell /Congress thinks I'm sick." The song eventually calls for setting these institutions on fire, while the music video turns a factory into a discotheque and the image of the inverted cross is used again—a symbolic embrace of the heresy by which queer identities are socially constructed/understood. By using a repetitive and sticky pop rhythm, the song points to working-class precariousness as a legacy of Pinochet's regime. During the music video, Anwandter burns a photograph of Jaime Guzmán, a close collaborator with Pinochet's regime and one of the main architects of the 1980 constitution, who is widely regarded as the cornerstone of Chile's neoliberal order and a principal target of the later 2019 social uprising.

On November 17, 2016, Anwandter took the stage in Las Vegas, Nevada, for the seventeenth annual Latin Grammy Awards and performed a political manifesto before his colleagues in the Latin American music industry. Despite the fact that his single "Siempre es viernes en mi corazón" was the biggest hit of his career—still holding the top spot as his most streamed song on Spotify at over 8 million listens at the time of writing—he chose to perform his song "Manifiesto" as a ballad, accompanied only by a piano. While all of the songs on *Amiga* have a clear political message, this sixth track from the album works as an artistic declaration about his role as a pop artist: "Today I am a woman / the town faggot /even if they set me on fire," Anwandter sang on the Latin Grammy stage. The allusion to such a violent act is no accident; rather, it is a clear reference to one of the most infamous forms of gender violence, one routinely covered in the Latin American news media. This is especially the case since the first #NiUnaMenos march in Buenos Aires on June 3, 2015, which quickly went viral and was replicated by feminist movements in countries all over Latin America, including—and especially—in neighboring Chile (Palmeiro, 2018; Martin and Shaw, 2021).[2]

Moreover, "Manifiesto" could be linked to Pedro Lemebel's poem "Hablo por mi diferencia (Manifiesto)," in which he challenges leftist imagery by

identifying homosexuals as subjects of revolutionary radical politics (Blanco, 2010). Latin American scholars have explored how the consolidation of the figure of the hypermasculine "new man" as a symbol of the subject of leftist culture since the Cuban Revolution fueled conflicts with other liberationist projects beyond working-class and male-based guerrilla mobilization. Anwandter's representation of lower-class flamboyant queer Chileans reconnects with a long tradition of artists such as Pedro Lemebel who have challenged leftist heterosexual politics and reclaimed queer participation in emancipatory projects by connecting social and sexual oppression.[3]

By invoking the imagery of Chile's most defining geographical feature, the Andes, Anwandter interrogates his homeland about a more just future for it. While the song "Cordillera" is written in the present tense with a vision of the future of Chile, the music video clearly roots the country's current problems in its bloody past. As Anwandter has explained, the song was a tribute to Victor Jara, an icon of the leftist cultural liberationist Nueva Canción Chilena project in the 1970s, who was tortured and murdered by the Pinochet regime. While the singer wanders through a uniquely composed Chilean landscape, the orange Atacama desert floor surrounded by snow-capped mountains with the occasional Patagonian glacial lake, Anwandter's look (suit and tie and thick-rimmed glasses) evokes memories of the students of the 1960s and 1970s, and the glasses could even be read as a reference to Salvador Allende, the socialist president overthrown and murdered in the 1973 CIA-backed coup led by Pinochet. The mountains provide the perfect frame for images of Chile's violent past, including soldiers on the streets, the bombing of the Moneda palace, and figures like Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, responsible for the United States' complicity in the violence that unfolded in Chile.

While the video proposes a revision of the past, the lyrics propose a fight for a better future for Chile's next generations. Anwandter points out problems and critiques major media conglomerates such as the Santiago daily *El Mercurio*. As Electrodomésticos did on their 1986 track "¡Viva Chile!" in the middle of Pinochet's regime (Depetris Chauvin, 2016: 62), Anwandter evokes lines from Chile's national anthem when he sings of "that calm sea that still bathes the children on the coast." While the singer expresses his will to fight, he also criticizes some of his colleagues—"the singers sing la-la-la-la-la-la and nothing else"—as if to call his fellow artists to action. The music video for "Cordillera" was released in June of 2017, the last single released by Anwandter from his *Amiga* era. His next album would look beyond the Andes to incorporate Chile within a regional identity that tends to be rejected or avoided by the national culture.

In October of 2018, Anwandter released his last full-length album, *Latinoamericana*. The title reflects the artist's attempt to express a transnational experience that is not confined to the Andes and the Pacific. Anwandter, along with his colleagues Mon Laferte, Gepe, and Natalia Lafourcade, among others, clearly influenced by the Trumpian context of the world, began to explore traditional folk music and different musical genres from throughout the region. However, Anwandter is one of the few whose projects transmit an explicitly political message in a clear return to the Latin Americanist turn that influenced music production in the region in the twentieth century, in particular the one that characterized the regional renovation of folk music in the region during the 1960s and 1970s.[4]

Anwandter released the first single of this album, "Locura," in September of 2018, contextualizing his project in terms of a state of global political madness: "Hey, mom, tell me the truth/What is this madness?/Is it real or did I imagine this hell?" The music video uses globally recognizable icons of Latin American identity such as the Mexican mariachi or Brazilian Carnival dancers and an older woman, listed as "Chilean Lady" in the credits, who plays the cowbell when Anwandter sings this line. Anwandter, who recorded *Latinoamericana* in Los Angeles, California (where he has resided since late 2017), explained in an interview:

> I wanted to choose hyperclichés of certain countries of South America. The woman with the cowbell is called "Señora Chilena" in the credits because she very much looks like all our aunts or mothers/grandmothers. A woman like that is traditionally thought to have no role in the power plays of politics or history, but I think she does, and this is me invoking her in our current dark context. Who elects these clowns but people around/close to us?

Some of the "clowns'' that the artist is referring to here make appearances in the music video. While images of Donald Trump play on an old scrambled television, the singer speeds down a highway in a blue Ford Mustang with a shotgun in hand while applying lipstick. Near the end, the image of Trump becomes more scrambled and his voice fades out: the spectators suddenly begin to recognize the voice of Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, whose scrambled image starts to enter the frame where Trump's once was.

Anwandter's Latin Americanist aesthetic turn is also expressed on the album's cover, in which his portrait with a tropical landscape and two flowers recalls Frida Kahlo's self-portraits while the title uses a mainstream font of Latin American design from the 1970s. Along with the song and the videos, the album's concept seeks to put Chilean national identity in dialogue with the regional context, challenging the rhetoric of the "Chilean model," which touted the first "developed" nation to emerge from a region labeled the "Third World."

The concept of the album *Latinoamericana* realizes Anwandter's proposal to renovate protest music by using pop as a Trojan horse. As he has explained in recent interviews, the musical decisions of his albums work as a whole—aesthetic decisions such as the use of a CP80 piano, in a clear reference to the Argentine rock star Charly García (an important figure in the pro-democracy cultural movements of the 1970s and 1980s), instruments of Brazilian samba like the cuica, and references to the Mexican singer and queer icon Juan Gabriel— paint a political, cultural, and musical landscape of Latin America. The inclusion of a Brazilian Carnival dancer in the music video for "Locura," the combination of traditional Brazilian instruments with synth-keyboards, and the incorporation of two covers of Brazilian songs in Portuguese reinforce the inclusion of Brazil in the Latin American imaginary and recover a long tradition of musical integration performed by internationally recognized artists such as Mercedes Sosa and Caetano Veloso. While it has become quite uncommon to include Portuguese-language songs in Latin American albums, Anwandter covers Antonio Carlos Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes, and Chico Buarque's 1971 "Olha María" and Lô Borges's 1972 "Um girassol da cor de seu cabelo," through which he

expresses solidarity with regional movements confronting the election of the anti-LGBTIQ+, racist, and ultra-neoliberal Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in Brazil.

The opening single of the album, "Malinche," addresses Anwandter's feminine approach to Latin America. Considered a crucial myth of Mexican nation-building, Malinche was the indigenous translator and lover of the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés. While some people have considered her the central figure of mestizaje in the making of the bronze-race narrative, for others she represents colonialism and female treason to indigenous communities (Romero and Harris, 2005). Anwandter's song mixes cumbia and samba rhythms and instruments like the guiro and cuica with pop modernist aesthetics, a metaphor for the hybridization between tradition and modernization in the making of Latin American cultures. This song proposes a redefinition of Malinche not only as a traitor to the homeland but also as a sector of society whose advocacy of an unjust economic and cultural model for the nation betrays the people. Today's conquistadores are capitalists, and the neoliberal political representatives and the middle classes that continue to vote for them are the new Malinches of Latin American societies. Anwandter points out that people in the streets of Latin America's cities are saying this: "They say in the street/Everyone's saying it . . . and from what they say/it must be true." He points to the streets of cities like Valparaíso (Chile), Hermosillo (Mexico), and even Port-au-Prince (Haiti) as spaces frequented by the people, reflecting the resistance of Latin America's working-class masses to the return of right-wing neoliberal policies across the region in recent years.

Anwandter composed the album's title track, "Latinoamericana," as a reaction to Latin American representation on social media sites like Instagram. The opening "I can no longer stand those images/of white kids with blue eyes" is a clear criticism of the region's own history of colorism and, specifically in Argentina and Chile, a clear cultural project of a whitening of national identity, contrasting it with "And I am black with love." He goes on to challenge standards of beauty as a vestige of colonialism ("Before the Spanish came/Nobody threatened you with their judgment") while exalting Latin American beauty with natural figures such as flowers, also portrayed in the album's cover art: "Entirely perfect/For me you are like a flower." Anwandter then reaffirms his "American" identity, which at once recognizes Latin America's diversity and constitutes a political speech act in the context of Trumpism both globally and also in Los Angeles. By using this term, which can refer to any national from the American continents but is generally reserved for someone from the United States, he essentially places Latin American citizens as semiotically equal to those of the United States.

Anwandter addresses the tense relationship between Latin America and the United States on "Canción del muro" (Song of the Wall), the seventh track on *Latinoamericana* and an obvious reference to the border wall on which Trump had built his political campaign and eventual nationalist/fascist political movement. While the reference to "the wall" undoubtedly points to the aggressive policies of the Trump administration toward Latin America and its discriminatory and inhumane policies toward immigrants and refugees in the United States, the song never actually names the U.S.-Mexico border wall. Rather,

Anwandter advocates for knocking down "the wall" metaphorically as a collective knocking down of boundaries globally or at least regionally in pursuit of a unified Latin American identity in an increasingly hostile world.

While the album deals with global politics in a sentimental way with synth-pop disco tracks, Anwandter also highlights the queer experience in the region on tracks such as "Axis mundi," the album's second single. The song begins by exploring family rejection and suicide among LGBTIQ+ friends, grounded in the silence of not being to express openly the conditions that led them to that situation. Hetero-patriarchal norms are turned on their heads in a line from the chorus: "because the world always looks down on those who don't avoid being different." In other words, being different is a natural state that one must make an effort to avoid.

In the song "No te puedes escapar," Anwandter uses remixed Brazilian and Caribbean percussion and police sirens to express gender-fluid expressions of sexual dissent in the region. While narrating how men's eyes control his gender expression ("I jump out of bed to the street/but I don't find myself/Eyes on the corner/ask me if I'm a man/or a girl"), Anwandter recovers traditional queer cultural references to working-class characters as sexual objects of desire: "I feel the snake on my neck/when I see the men from the port/that look me up and down." This theme is also taken up by other Chilean pop artists such as the young singer Francisco Victoria, whose debut album *Prenda* was produced by Anwandter in 2018; in his song "Marinos," after singing "I am nothing special/I don't have money or family names" in a clear challenge to Chilean conservative hierarchies, the chorus repeats "Tengo miedo Marino" in a reference to the famous Pedro Lemebel's novel *Tengo miedo torero*, which also explores the tension between leftist working-class discourses and homosexual eroticism. In this novel as in the influential work of the Argentine writer Manuel Puig, *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the love between a leftist man and a queer character acts as a metaphor for the difficult relationship between leftist heterosexual imaginaries and the queer liberationist tradition.

Anwandter's release of singles from the *Latinoamericana* album was seemingly cut short in order to release "Paco Vampiro" in early November 2019. It quickly became a symbol of challenging the *pacos* (military police), which came under international scrutiny for human rights violations because of their apparent strategy of shooting rubber bullets directly at demonstrators' eyes, blinding hundreds. Mixing police sirens and a hi-hat rhythm, Anwandter expresses criticism of Pinochet's economic and repressive legacy: "A country that smells like tear gas/It's been 30 years, and he won't leave." Other musicians, among them Ana Tijoux, also emphasized that legacy; her "Cacerolazo" highlights the protest slogan "No son 30 pesos, son 30 años" in reference to the 30-peso raise in the metro fare that had sparked the uprising but also to the 30 years since Pinochet left office, during which the constitution enacted during his regime has continued to structure Chileans' daily, political, and economic lives. Anwandter's song catalyzed popular anger against the state violence deployed by Sebastian Piñeira's government, which decreed a state of siege and announced a war against the demonstrators, bringing to the forefront of public debate the country's authoritarian transition to neoliberalism as part of Pinochet's legacy.

CONCLUSION

Pop music, dancing, and social struggle have usually been imagined as irreconcilable. In this article, we have explored the articulation of apparently contradictory aesthetics and cultural trends in the genealogies of Chilean protest music. We have analyzed pop as a shifting platform of individual and collective protests, from the emerging LGTBIQ+ nightclubs to songs in direct protest of social inequality. The association of pop with globalization and feminization often clashes with a normative leftist straight-male political imagination that associates social transformation with the figures of the male worker and, since the Cuban Revolution, the guerrillero. The queer intervention over radical-leftist politics has, however, always been present in Latin American radical liberationist projects. The Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel, for instance, whose works echo today in the music of Álex Anwandter, incorporated a romantic friendship between a queer character and a radicalized leftist into his novel *Tengo miedo torero*, and in the 1980s the activist Víctor Hugo Robles impersonated a gay version of Che Guevara in an attempt to stitch together two arenas of conflict that then seemed irreconcilable. Analyzing the articulation of apparently contradictory aesthetics and musical, visual, digital, and rhetorical resources, we have highlighted the way in which pop catalyzed and reinforced a queer exploration of social exclusion and the emergence of the working class as an alternative and sometimes counter culture of a neoliberal Chile. Although the crowds burning Santiago's metro cannot be explained solely in reference to the country's popular culture, cultural production is central to an understanding of the multiple sources of discontent that have long been circulating on the dance floor.

NOTES

1. "Teleradio" also has more ambiguous but significant weight in the band's name in connection with the history of queer art in Latin America and its use of the mass media as vehicles for its message such as the Argentine writer Manuel Puig's use of popular film or radio dramas, thus expressing a common queer experience through the collective experience of pop culture consumption.

2. This is a popular theme in contemporary Latin American cultural production. The most important literary example is the Argentine writer Mariana Enriquez's (2017) collection of short stories *Things We Lost in the Fire*.

3. Several studies on the history of Latin American homosexual radical movements since the 1970s have explored the unpleasant relationship between the Latin American left and the radicalization of sexual claims (see Dehesa, 2010; Caro and Simonetto, 2019).

4. On the invention of "Latin American music," see Palomino (2020); for an argument on the particularities of Latin American music, see Gonzáles (2013).

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