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Reclaiming the Narrative: Gender, Sexuality, and Music in Pre-Contact Indigenous Civilizations and Afro-Latine Countries

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This article explores the profound impact of colonialism on gender, sexuality, and musical traditions of pre-contact Indigenous civilizations and Afro-Latine countries. Colonial powers not only disrupted these vibrant cultures but also systematically sought to erase them. Colonial powers obliterated musical traditions and silenced women and femme-presenting individuals, forcing them to mirror the values and culture of the conquerors. Despite extensive historical erasure, evidence from archaeological finds and archival materials suggests that these individuals played pivotal roles, with contributions likely equal to those of cis-gender, heterosexual men. This research reconstructs a more accurate narrative of pre-contact Indigenous music, highlighting the significance of gender fluidity and non-binary identities in these societies. Furthermore, the study discusses contemporary efforts to decolonize Afro-Latine music traditions, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming marginalized voices in the ongoing struggle for social justice, cultural pride, and educational equity.

Keywords: *Indigenous Gender Roles and Sexuality, Decolonizing Education, Afro-Latine Music, Colonialism and Music, Queer Indigenous Culture*

Introduction

The musical traditions of pre-contact Indigenous societies were far more than mere pursuits of auditory aesthetics. Instead, these traditions held profound cultural, spiritual, and social significance. Music was embedded in the daily lives and communal practices of all people—rituals, storytelling, community. Music was an expression of identity, serving purposes far beyond mere entertainment or artistry. To fully understand the roles of women, femme-presenting, and gender non-binary individuals within pre-contact musical traditions, it is crucial to recognize the great significance of music in their societies and how social hierarchies functioned prior to the arrival and influence of European colonizers. Evidence indicates that colonial powers not only disrupted these vibrant cultures through forced assimilation but worked to systematically erase them. Through the violent process of colonization, vast amounts of cultural knowledge and heritage, epistemologies were eradicated. Languages, religion, social structures, governance, familial structures and community cohesion were destroyed. All visible evidence of a People was extinguished, along with documents,

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oral histories, and anything that carried the collective wisdom or conocimiento[1] of generations. Art forms, including music, dance, and visual arts, were either altered or forgotten. Spiritual beliefs and customs were replaced with imposed religious doctrines and as a result, cultural traditions, social conventions and values, and gender and sexual dynamics shifted to mirror those of the conqueror.

This study seeks to uncover the profound impact of colonial interference on gender, sexuality, and the musical traditions of pre-contact Indigenous societies in Afro-Latine[2] America, despite the extensive destruction of historical evidence. What evidence remains, reveals that women and gender non-conforming individuals played pivotal roles in Indigenous pre-contact societies and musical traditions. These contributions, often omitted in colonialists' historical accounts, were likely as significant as those of cis-gender, heterosexual men. By analyzing archaeological finds and archival materials, this research seeks to construct a more autochthonous illustration of pre-contact music and gender roles. Despite the extensive loss of records, it aims to demonstrate that women and gender non-conforming individuals played pivotal roles in pre-contact societies and musical traditions. Furthermore, it argues that, prior to European influence, the landscapes of what are now Afro-Latine countries were rich with diverse voices and talents.

Contextualizing Pre-Contact Musical Traditions

In pre-contact societies, music was the very heartbeat of religious, social, and political life. Its importance is evident in codices, archaeological findings, and historical accounts, which show how music was essential for maintaining cosmic balance, reinforcing social structures, and preserving cultural memory. These sources reveal a deep understanding of music's integral role in sustaining the foundation of these ancient cultures.

The Chavín civilization, for instance, offers a glimpse into the deep-rooted connection between music and spirituality in Andean cultures. Dating as far back as 1000 B.C., the Chavín people engraved stone slabs at Chavín de Huántar, depicting

1. Conocimiento: Spanish word that translates to "knowledge." However, for Latine's it is more of an embodied knowledge gained from lived experience, wisdom.

2. In this paper, I use the term "Afro-Latine" as an inclusive designation that encompasses the three raíces—African, Indigenous, and European—that form the cultural and historical foundation of the peoples in Latin America. While the term "Afro-Latine" typically refers to individuals or cultures in Latin America with African ancestry, here it reflects the complex and intertwined heritage of Latin American communities, including all gender identities and orientations. Though it might seem anachronistic to apply "Afro-Latine" to pre-contact societies—given the absence of African influence prior to colonization—it is used here to acknowledge the full spectrum of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities that contribute to the region's diversity, while also exploring how these narratives evolved through historical contact and exchange.

elaborate processions where figures carried ritual objects like spondylus shells and shell trumpets. These scenes are reflections of how music was intertwined with religious ceremonies, serving as a bridge between the human and divine. As highlighted by Bernier, the Chavín's iconography shows "elaborately dressed figures walking in procession and carrying ritual objects such as spondylus shells, hallucinogenic cactus stalks, and shell trumpets."[3] For the Chavín, along with other Andean groups, music was essential not just in life but in death, with instruments frequently appearing in scenes related to funerary rituals, macabre dances, and the afterlife, such as those depicting "funerary processions and erotic scenes involving skeletons."[4]

Similarly, in the Caribbean, the Taínos of the Greater Antilles employed music as a vital component of their communal life. Their *areítos*—ritualistic gatherings that blended singing, dancing, and storytelling—were much more than festive occasions; they were vessels of cultural transmission, reinforcing social bonds and ensuring the survival of their spiritual traditions across generations. The term *areíto*, as Thompson explains, was a "sixteenth-century buzzword" used by Spaniards to denote these events.[5] These gatherings were "described as ritual, as celebration, as narration, as work song, as a vehicle for teaching a value system, as funeral observance, as social dance, as history lesson, as fertility rite, or as simply a drunken party."[6] For the Taínos, music and *areítos* were synonymous, used as tools for preserving their heritage and ensuring the endurance of their cultural and spiritual traditions.

The Aztecs, among the most renowned Mesoamerican civilizations, exemplified how music was deeply embedded in every aspect of society. According to Robert Stevenson, a leading ethnomusicologist, the function of music in Aztec life is documented in over forty codices and numerous other historical records. "Even late picture books such as the Codex Azcatitlan (painted ca. 1550 in the northern part of the Valley of Mexico) can yield extremely useful documentation on pre-contact Aztec music," Stevenson notes.[7] These documents reveal that for the Aztecs, music was an essential component of religious ceremonies, community gatherings, and the preservation of historical legacies and spiritual beliefs. Music accompanied everything from daily offerings to grand festivals honoring deities. Instruments like drums, flutes, and rattles were used to invoke divine presence, communicate with gods, and facilitate trance-like states. Musicians in Aztec society held a revered status, both pre- and post-contact, because of "their service to the community in preserving the

3. Hélène Bernier, *Music in the Ancient Andes*, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, originally published August 2009, last revised April 2010, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/muan/hd_muan.htm, para. 3.

4. Ibid., para. 5.

5. Donald Thompson, "The 'Cronistas de Indias' Revisited," *Latin American Music Review* 14, no. 2 (1993): 187.

6. Ibid.

7. Robert Murrell Stevenson, *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 10.

memory of past glories," Stevenson states.[8] He further emphasizes the sacred duty of musicians during ceremonies, noting that "at any ceremonial or religious feast, the Aztec musician could no more think of flying from his post, however grave the danger… It was his inescapable duty to continue playing until the last note of the preordained ritual, or until his own death."[9]

The Maya, another pillar of Mesoamerican civilization, placed significant importance on music within their social hierarchy. Although musicians were not considered part of the upper echelon, they were held in higher regard than commoners. Music was integrated into every aspect of Mayan life, including religious observances, funerals, and celebrations. "Music may have also been important to the conduct of war, not just to the celebration of victories," notes Paul Healy, acclaimed archaeologist and scholar of ancient Mesoamerican cultures.[10] Healy states that "the chronicles offer some suggestion that Maya warriors went into battle against the Spanish blowing whistles and conch shell trumpets and beating drums and hollow tortoise shells."[11] The Maya's adept craftsmanship in creating instruments that could manipulate pitch and perform complex musical pieces further underscores their sophisticated approach to music as both an art form and a means of cultural expression.[12]

Further back in Mesoamerican history, the Olmecs, often referred to as the "cultura madre (mother culture)" of the region, also revered music as a powerful means of communication with the divine.[13] Their ceremonial centers at San Lorenzo and La Venta were not just religious hubs but also the heart of musical and dance rituals that honored ancestors and maintained cosmic harmony.[14] The Olmecs' deep connection to music is evident in the way they treated musical instruments as sacred objects, capable of invoking the gods. Elizabeth Hill Boone, in her book *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate*, emphasizes that music was a critical subject taught at the *calmecac*—a "place of instruction for noble children and promising commoners"—where students learned a range of advanced subjects, including "orations, songs, and priestly responsibilities."[15] Boone underscores the importance of music in these teachings, referring to the "gods' songs inscribed in the books" as an essential part of the curriculum.[16] This

8. Ibid., 8.

9. Ibid., 10.

10. Paul F. Healy, "Music of the Maya," *Archaeology* 41, no. 1 (1988): 27.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 25-31.

13. Mary E. Pye and John E. Clark, "Introducing Olmec Archaeology," *Studies in the History of Art* 58 (2000): 14.

14. Mark Cartwright, "Olmec Colossal Stone Heads," *World History Encyclopedia*, March 21, 2014, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/672/olmec-colossal-stone-heads/, para. 1.

15. Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 28.

16. Ibid.

reverence for music as a spiritual force was passed down to subsequent cultures, including the Aztecs and the Toltecs.

The Toltecs, revered by the Aztecs, succeeded the Olmecs. The Toltecs placed significant importance on music in their ceremonial life. The Codex Borgia provides visual evidence of how music was used in Toltec rituals, highlighting its role in maintaining cosmic balance and reinforcing social hierarchies.[17] In Toltec society, music was not only a religious expression but also a tool for social education, where younger generations learned about their heritage, responsibilities, and the cosmos. The instruments they developed, like the *teponaztli* and the *huehuetl*, were considered divine entities and were governed by strict ceremonial rituals that ensured their spiritual significance was maintained.

Music in these pre-contact societies was a cornerstone component of religious, social, and political life. The creation of instruments like the *teponaztli* and *huehuetl* in Mesoamerican cultures, for instance, highlights the deep spiritual connection these societies had with their music. Instruments were revered as divine entities, believed to house the spirits of deities, and their creation, use, and eventual disposal were governed by strict ceremonial rituals. Arnd Adje Both, in *Aztec Music Culture*, reinforces this notion by stating that "Some musical instruments were considered to be sounding idols, indicating that ritual music could be perceived as a voice of the gods, and that the Aztec instrumentalist fulfilled the role of an expert mediator through whom a god sang."[18] Both explains that drums were considered "former court singers who resided at the house of the sun but then were stolen by Tezcatlipoca and manifested on earth in their present form," further underscoring the idea that music in the Olmec and later Aztec traditions acted as a bridge between the physical and spiritual world, essential for maintaining cosmic balance.[19]

Through their musical traditions, the Chavín, Taínos, Olmecs, Toltecs, and their successors, including the Aztecs, preserved their histories, reinforced social structures, and maintained a connection with the divine. The sophisticated cultural systems they developed through music reveal a rich legacy that continued to influence later civilizations long before European contact. As Boone emphasizes, music in these cultures was not just an art form but a fundamental aspect of life, ensuring the continuity of cultural memory and cosmic balance. Archaeological findings, codices, and historical accounts consistently illustrate that these societies viewed music as a vital mechanism for safeguarding their traditions, beliefs, and identities across generations.

17. Arnd Adje Both, "Aztec Music Culture," *The World of Music* 49, no. 2 (2007): 95.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

Gender Identity and Gender Roles in Pre-Contact Indigenous Societies

In pre-contact Indigenous societies, gender identity and gender roles were often fluid and multifaceted, contrasting sharply with the rigid binary classifications imposed by colonial and contemporary Western cultures. These societies often esteemed individuals who embodied both masculine and feminine traits, recognizing their unique spiritual and cultural significance. These individuals, referred to as "Two-Spirit"[20] in many North American Indigenous cultures, played crucial roles within their communities, contributing significantly to society and cultural life. Similarly, in many Indigenous African societies, gender fluidity was not only respected but celebrated, highlighting a broader, more inclusive understanding of gender identity and sexuality.

The term "Two-Spirit," though contemporary, reflects a historical reality where individuals with a blend of masculine and feminine qualities were seen as holding special spiritual power and accordingly, often held positions of authority within their societies. This concept was prevalent across various Indigenous cultures, each with its respective terminology and understanding. For example, in the Zapotec culture of Oaxaca, individuals known as "Muxes" have long been recognized for their unique blend of gender traits. Muxes occupy a special place in Zapotec society, often fulfilling roles traditionally associated with both men and women. The presence of Muxes in Zapotec communities is not just a modern phenomenon, but a continuation of pre-colonial traditions where gender fluidity was embraced as a natural part of the social fabric. Muxes challenge Western concepts of gender by existing as a distinct "third gender" in Zapotec culture. Dozono notes that in Oaxaca, "muxes are an indigenous third sex/gender category, which is less about sexuality, sexual identity, or doing transgender and more about retaining the language, cultural categories, practices, and worldviews of indigenous communities where they have been integral to community life and spiritual practices."[21] This acknowledgment of *muxes* as a third sex/gender and reverence for them as custodians of culture and heritage underscores a broader understanding and acceptance of gender diversity in pre-contact Indigenous societies.

In many African societies, gender roles were exemplified by practices like "woman-marriage," where women could marry other women and assume roles typically associated with men. Among the Lovedu people of South Africa, this practice was well-established and socially sanctioned, allowing women to acquire

20. The term "two spirit" was coined in 1993 at a conference of Indigenous Americans (from within the continental USA), scholars, and anthropologist. They adopted a formal statement endorsing the use of the term to reference both male-bodied and female-bodied Indigenous people who identify with the opposite of the sex they were assigned at birth, exhibit the qualities or traits of the opposite sex, or fluctuate between the roles of men and women as defined by the Western standard.

21. Tadashi Dozono, "Teaching Alternative and Indigenous Gender Systems in World History: A Queer Approach," *The History Teacher* 50, no. 3 (2017): 441.

wives and thus challenge traditional gender norms. E.J. Krige (1974) describes the female "husband" in these marriages as holding considerable social standing and power, effectively subverting rigid gender expectations. Krige notes, "any woman of means in Dahomey can marry a wife: she supports all payments and gifts decreed for full marriage as if she were a man, she builds a house for her 'wife' near her own home and chooses a genitor from among her husband's relatives or her male acquaintances. He visits the woman but cannot take her to his own home. The genitor makes no payment, is under no obligation of any sort, and the children that are born belong, not to him, but to the female husband."[22]

Similarly, the Yoruba people of Nigeria exemplified a society where gender roles were fluid and adaptable. Yoruba society embraced a more complex understanding of gender roles that extended beyond the domestic sphere. Women were considered central figures, "…the public domain was one in which both sexes were recognized as having important roles to play."[23] Leadership positions and decision-making roles were not exclusively male domains; women were influential in matters concerning family and community affairs. Sudarkasa (1986) explains distribution of authority in pre-contact African society and how that pertained to gender roles involved a complex system of social roles and responsibilities. It reflected a broader, non-Western understanding of marriage and gender, where roles were not rigidly defined but fluid and responsive to the needs of society.[24] These practices underscore a cultural landscape where gender was not a fixed binary but a living and changing dynamic whose flexibility was integral to the well-being of Indigenous African societies.

This analysis highlights a complex understanding of gender in pre-contact Indigenous societies, which differs significantly from the strict binaries imposed by colonial and contemporary Western frameworks. The examples of the Two-Spirit individuals in North American Indigenous cultures, the Muxes of the Zapotec, and the practice of "woman-marriage" among the Lovedu and Yoruba highlight a shared recognition across continents of the value and fluid nature of gender identities. These practices not only challenge Western conceptions of gender but also illuminate a broader, more expansive framework within which gender was understood in Indigenous societies. In these cultures, transcending the traditional gender binary was not merely accepted, but celebrated, with such individuals often holding significant spiritual and cultural authority. Gender roles in these contexts were malleable and adaptable, shaped by the needs of the community and deeply intertwined with social and cultural values. The reverence for this fluidity and adaptability highlights the essential role these concepts played in the social and

22. Eileen Jensen Krige, "Woman-Marriage, with Special Reference to the Lovedu," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 44, no. 1 (1974): 14.

23. Niara Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 99.

24. Ibid.

spiritual fabric of these communities. Gender, in these societies, was a living, dynamic construct, vital to sustaining social harmony and balance.

Women, Femme, and Gender Non-Conforming in Pre-Contact Indigenous Music

Music has always been a vital element of human culture, serving as a powerful tool for expression, communication, and the preservation of traditions. In pre-contact societies, the role of music was even more profound, deeply woven into the spiritual, cultural, and social fabric of these communities. Music was not merely an artistic pursuit; it was a vehicle for cultural transmission, a practice of spiritual significance, and a means of fostering social cohesion. In these societies, the creation and performance of music were essential acts that sustained the community's identity and continuity. Music played a central role in religious ceremonies, communal gatherings, and the preservation of historical narratives. The importance of music in these cultures cannot be overstated; it was a living, breathing part of everyday life.

Equally important in these societies were the roles of women, femme-presenting, and gender non-conforming individuals. These individuals were not only active participants in the musical life of their communities; they were often at the heart of it, revered. Their contributions to music, equally vital in the creation, preservation, and transmission of musical knowledge. Women and gender non-conforming individuals were custodians of tradition, spiritual leaders, and central figures in the social structure of their communities.

It stands to reason that women, femme-presenting, and gender non-conforming individuals, who played crucial roles within pre-contact societies, would have been equally vital contributors to the musical traditions that were integral to the spiritual, cultural, and social life of these communities. This connection is not speculative but is supported by historical evidence and visual representations found in African societies and Mesoamerican codices. These sources provide clear examples of how integral these individuals were to the musical and cultural practices of their communities. The evidence underscores the profound and necessary role that music, and those who created and performed it, played in the cultural life of these societies.

The Codex Borgia and the Florentine Codex, two of the most significant Mesoamerican documents, provide visual and historical evidence of the roles women and gender non-conforming individuals played in musical and cultural practices. The Codex Borgia, as previously mentioned, depicts numerous scenes of religious ceremonies where women are shown participating in musical rituals. For instance, Boone mentions "A throne appears in all the scenes, under Huehuecoyotl, the

drummer, or the female."[25] Similarly, Adje, mentions in the Florentine Codex, compiled by the Franciscan friar, Bernardino de Sahagún, "…a group of women played on little slit-drums with gourd resonators. In the Ochpaniztli ceremony a group of old priests played slit-drums in a procession to the skull rack, where the representative of the goddess Toci trampled on her drum, thus destroying it."[26] The two codices offer detailed descriptions of the role women played in Aztec society, including their involvement in music. The illustrations further reinforce the active participation of women in the musical and cultural life of their communities, indicating their central role in the preservation of cultural and spiritual traditions. These codices, alongside other historical records, reinforce the notion that women and gender non-conforming individuals were not passive participants, but actively involved in shaping the musical landscape of their societies. Their contributions were vital to the cultural, spiritual, and social life of their communities, reflecting a sophisticated understanding of the interconnectedness between music, identity, and community.

Decolonizing and Reclaiming the Narrative

The introduction of misogyny, sexism, and homophobia into Indigenous societies is a direct consequence of colonialism. Colonialism imposed rigid gender roles and patriarchal structures that were alien to Indigenous cultures, which pre-contact, embraced a fluid and inclusive understanding of gender, gender identity and sexuality. In these pre-contact societies, women, femme-presenting, and gender non-conforming individuals held significant cultural and spiritual roles. European colonizers brought patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies, which they enforced through violence and coercion. This reshaping of Indigenous culture undeniably and irrevocably altered the course of Indigenous musical traditions to this day. Colonizers destroyed evidence of Indigenous music theory, notation, and compositions, replacing them with the music of the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, the contributions, cultural, artistic, and scientific achievements, of Indigenous peoples were erased from the historical narrative.

Reclaiming the narrative requires critically examining and challenging post-contact, colonialist historical accounts. This process is crucial for restoring the voices and perspectives of those who have too long been silenced, particularly women, femme, and gender non-conforming individuals. As Simard notes, "It is important to recognize that due to the imposition of colonialism, religion, cis-gender heteropatriarchal culture, and misogyny, many Indigenous peoples do not have access to the language of diversity in gender and sexuality. This includes words in

25. Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 93.

26. Arnd Adje Both, "Aztec Music Culture," *The World of Music* 49, no. 2 (2007): 97.

Indigenous languages that culturally locate, describe, and define Indigenous gender identities, expressions, and sexual identities."[27] Decolonizing history means returning acknowledging Indigenous languages, voices and the full complexity and diversity of human experiences and contributions, regardless of gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or sexuality. Colonial histories continue to present a skewed perspective that perpetuates stereotypes, reinforces systemic inequalities, and contributes to the ongoing oppression of Indigenous and Afro-Latine people. By decolonizing history, we can promote a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the past, essential for fostering social justice and equity. For modern Afro-Latine people, understanding pre-contact histories and decolonizing historical narratives empowers them to reclaim their heritage, challenge colonial frameworks, and embrace their role as active participants in shaping and telling their own story.

As it pertains to music, contemporary efforts to decolonize are multifaceted and dynamic. One of the most visible efforts involves the revival and celebration of traditional music styles or genres that were suppressed or marginalized during colonial times, such as Afro-Cuban rumba, Puerto Rican bomba, Peruvian festejo, even Reggae, considered one of the precursors to Reggaetón. Reggae, an Afro-Caribbean genre originating in Jamaica in the late 1960s, significantly influenced the development of Reggaetón. The genre's rhythmic pattern, known as "dembow," is foundational in Afro-Latine music. Afro-Latine music is a product of the confluence of three cultural roots: Indigenous, African, and European. The blending of these influences over centuries has given rise to the rich tapestry that defines Afro-Latine music today. The African influence is particularly notable in the rhythmic complexity and percussive elements of the music, as mentioned previously, while European elements contribute harmonic structures, melodic forms, and stringed instruments. Indigenous cultures provided unique instruments and ceremonial purposes for music, all contributing to what Afro-Latine music has become. By acknowledging these contributions and educating students on the multifaceted nature of Afro-Latine music, we challenge the Eurocentric narrative that often dominates music history.

Schools have incorporated many of these popular genres into core curriculum, Conjunto and Mariachi for example, are core curriculum in schools throughout the Southwestern United States. Mariachi has been core curriculum for decades now. Cultural organizations and music educators are diligently documenting, preserving, and teaching traditional music forms to younger generations to ensure these musical traditions endure. This work goes beyond preservation; it serves as an act of resistance against the erasure of pre-contact Indigenous and Afro-Latine culture and heritage, reclaiming and revitalizing the cultural expressions that colonialism sought to silence and suppress. By passing these traditions on to future generations,

27. Fallon Simard, "Zaagi'diwin Inakinogewin | Love Law: A Policy Note For Protecting Two-Spirit, Non-Binary & Trans Indigenous Peoples," *Yellowhead Institute*, 2022, 1. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep42548.

educators are empowering communities to reconnect with their cultural roots and resist historical erasure. At the University of Texas at San Antonio, we have pioneered a unique Bachelor of Arts degree in Mexican American Studies with a specialization in Mexican American Music. This program promotes an authentic narrative by offering courses rooted in both traditional Mexican music and Afro-Latine contemporary genres like Urban Hip-Hop. By incorporating these subjects into our curriculum, we recognize them as valuable art forms worthy of academic study. This approach empowers students to engage deeply with music that reflects their cultural identities, fostering a sense of pride and ownership over their history and traditions.

This holistic approach creates space for a more accurate understanding of the evolution of these important musical genres. It is crucial for students, especially those from colonized nations, to understand that musical excellence is not confined to Western figures like Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. There are numerous significant genres and traditions from around the world, particularly those outside Western European origin and by composers and musicians who are women, femme and gender non-conforming, that deserve recognition and study. Acknowledging this diversity will broaden their appreciation of global musical heritage and contest the dominance of Eurocentric narratives in music education.

Another critical aspect of decolonizing Afro-Latine music is addressing the roles of gender and sexuality within these traditions. Colonialism imposed rigid gender roles and heteronormative structures that marginalized women and gender non-conforming individuals. Contemporary efforts are reclaiming the contributions of these groups by celebrating the legacies of Queer artists like Chavela Vargas, who came out as a lesbian later in life and whose interpretations of Mexican rancheras continue to resonate deeply with many. And Juan Gabriel, though he never publicly confirmed his sexuality, his flamboyant performance style and the subtle acknowledgment of his queerness through statements like "Lo que se ve no se pregunta," have made him an enduring icon in both the Latin music world and LGBTQ+ circles.

In recent years, contemporary Queer musicians such as Mon Laferte and iLe have also played significant roles in decolonizing Afro-Latine music. Mon Laferte, born Norma Monserrat Bustamante Laferte in 1983, is a Chilean singer-songwriter and actress known for her eclectic musical style that blends Latin pop, rock, blues, and bolero.[28] Laferte gained widespread recognition with her 2015 album "Mon Laferte Vol. 1. Recipient of multiple Latin Grammy Awards, Lafert is an outspoken advocate for women's and LGBTQ+ rights, using her platform to address social and political issues, making her a significant contemporary voice in Latine music.[29]

Similarly, iLe, born Ileana Mercedes Cabra Joglar, is a Puerto Rican singer and songwriter known for her deep roots in Puerto Rican music and culture. iLe, with

28. FactTit, "Mon Laferte," *FactTit*, 2024. https://www.facttit.com/mon-laferte.

29. Charis McGowan, "Mon Laferte: The Chilean Pop Sensation Challenging Repression," *BBC News*, April 27, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56899171.

her brothers René Pérez Joglar (Residente) and Eduardo Cabra Martínez, began as a member of the band Calle 13. iLe's music, a combination of Borinquen (traditional Puerto Rican Music) and more modern pop, incorporates themes of social justice and gender equality, bringing attention to the ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities, providing a powerful platform for cultural and political expression.[30]

The contributions of Queer musicians like Chavela Vargas, Juan Gabriel, Mon Laferte, and iLe play a crucial role in decolonizing Afro-Latine music traditions. These artists exemplify the resilience and evolution of this music, highlighting how it continues to thrive despite historical oppression. By using their digital and social platforms, these musicians have brought attention to voices that were long overlooked, ensuring that Afro-Latine music remains a vital force on a global scale. The rise of digital platforms has been instrumental in spreading Afro-Latine music, allowing artists, educators, and influencers to reach wider audiences and preserve these traditions. Through social media, streaming services, and online archives, Afro-Latine music is being shared and celebrated worldwide. Through the internet, "community-driven" music projects are now international, festivals, and educational initiatives reach a global audience, further contributing to the decolonization process by supporting artists from underrepresented backgrounds and promoting cross-cultural collaborations. These efforts create spaces where all musical voices are valued and celebrated.

Rationale

This research is driven by the urgent need to address and rectify the historical erasure of women, femme-presenting, and gender non-conforming individuals from the narrative of pre-contact Indigenous musical traditions. These communities, characterized by fluid and expansive views of gender and sexuality, were systematically disrupted by European colonizers who imposed rigid, patriarchal norms through forced assimilation. The colonial introduction of misogyny, sexism, and homophobia not only suppressed these vibrant cultural traditions but also diminished the contributions of those who did not conform to cisgender, heterosexual norms. This deliberate erasure has had enduring effects, distorting our understanding of these cultures and perpetuating a legacy of exclusion that continues today.

The rationale for this study lies in the urgent need to decolonize narratives and recover the contributions of historically marginalized groups, constructing a more accurate and inclusive understanding of history. This work seeks to reclaim and restore cultural identities systematically silenced by colonial violence, fostering social

30. Leila Fadel and Lourdes Quiroz, "Singer and Songwriter iLe's Third Album, 'Nacarile,' Finds a World Deeply in Flux," *NPR*, October 20, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/10/20/1129538563/singer-and-songwriter-iles-third-album-nacarile-finds-a-world-deeply-in-flux.

justice and equity by ensuring that all voices are acknowledged, celebrated, and woven into our shared historical narrative. Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of incorporating authentic narratives into educational curricula to empower future generations. With veritable resources that tell a real story, the whole story, rooted in the lived experiences and cultural practices of Afro-Latine people, educators can provide students with more truthful interpretations of history. This approach corrects historical inaccuracies and equips students with the knowledge to reclaim their narrative.

Methodology

This research employs a multidisciplinary methodology, integrating historical analysis, iconographic interpretation, and archaeological investigation to reconstruct an inclusive and genuine narrative of pre-contact Indigenous music traditions.

1. Historical Records and Archival Research: The study begins with a critical examination of primary historical records, including Mesoamerican codices like the Codex Borgia and the Florentine Codex. These documents provide visual and textual evidence of the roles women and gender non-conforming individuals played in musical and cultural practices. This analysis is complemented by a review of oral histories and ethnographic records that provide additional perspectives on these traditions.
2. Iconographic Analysis: Visual representations found in artifacts, such as those depicted in the Codex Borgia, are analyzed to understand the symbolic significance of music in pre-contact societies. This analysis includes an exploration of how music was depicted in religious ceremonies, community rituals, and social gatherings, with particular attention to the roles of women and gender non-conforming individuals in these contexts.
3. Archaeological Findings: The research incorporates findings from archaeological sites where musical instruments and related artifacts have been uncovered. These physical remnants provide tangible evidence of the musical practices that were integral to the spiritual, cultural, and social life of these communities. The study of these artifacts is critical for understanding the material culture of pre-contact societies and how music functioned within it.
4. Critical Theoretical Framework: The research is grounded in decolonial theory, which challenges the Eurocentric and patriarchal frameworks that have long dominated the study of history and culture. By integrating perspectives from Indigenous and Afro-Latine scholars, musicians, and cultural practitioners, the study seeks to dismantle these oppressive narratives and replace them with more inclusive and accurate accounts.
5. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: The methodology also involves collaboration with contemporary Indigenous and Afro-Latine musicians, cultural practitioners,

and scholars who are engaged in the ongoing work of decolonizing their cultural heritage. Their insights and expertise are invaluable for bridging the gap between historical research and contemporary practice, ensuring that the study remains relevant and impactful.

Conclusion

The findings of this research underscore the urgent need to reclaim and decolonize the narratives surrounding Indigenous and Afro-Latine music traditions. This project is an act of social justice that seeks to restore the voices and contributions of women, femme-presenting, and gender non-conforming individuals who have been systematically erased from history. These individuals were not passive participants but active creators, spiritual leaders, and custodians of their communities' musical legacies. Their contributions were vital to the spiritual, cultural, and social cohesion of their communities, and their erasure from the historical narrative has had far-reaching consequences.

Ongoing efforts to revive and celebrate traditional music forms are acts of resistance against the erasure of Afro-Latine cultural heritage. These efforts are about preserving the past and reclaiming a narrative that has been co-opted and distorted by colonial powers. The recognition and celebration of Queer artists like Chavela Vargas, Juan Gabriel, Mon Laferte, and iLe, among others, further emphasizes the importance of embracing the diversity of voices that have shaped these traditions. These artists have not only contributed to the rich legacy of Afro-Latine music but have fought to deconstruct the patriarchal and heteronormative narratives that have long sought to marginalize non-cisgender, non-heteronormative identities.[31]

Furthermore, the decolonization of Indigenous and Afro-Latine music traditions is an intricate endeavor that involves reviving traditional forms, creating new spaces for these traditions to thrive, and ensuring their accessibility to future generations through digital platforms, community-based projects, and educational programs. This work is about more than just preserving what was lost; it is about creating a living, evolving cultural identity that can adapt to the modern world while remaining rooted in its origins. By democratizing access to these traditions, we ensure they are remembered, celebrated, and passed down to future generations, thus safeguarding their existence.

The decolonization process is intrinsically linked to broader struggles for social justice. The erasure of Indigenous and Afro-Latine musical traditions is part of a larger pattern of cultural and historical marginalization that has been used to justify and perpetuate systemic inequalities and racism. By reclaiming these traditions

31. Ibid.

and narratives we work towards a more equitable cultural landscape where the contributions of all people are recognized and valued.

In conclusion, the decolonization of Indigenous and Afro-Latine music traditions is a powerful act of resistance against the legacies of colonialism. It is a call to embrace the full diversity of the human experience and to recognize the value of the contributions of all people, regardless of gender identity, sexuality, or cultural background. By validating these traditions through scholarly research and music education, and celebrating them through applied practice and performance, we can ensure they remain dynamic and integral to our global cultural heritage, offering pride, identity, and empowerment to future generations.

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