



# Rap al Caudillo Trend: TikTok's Queer Subversion of Spanish National Imagery

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**Abstract:** After its peak in popularity, TikTok has become one of the preferred platforms for users of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Due to its extremely accurate and personalized algorithm, the application has generated a phenomenon that allows us to explore new horizons in the formation of online communities. With the implementation of sounds, users can find profiles of other users with whom they share more than a single interest. By using someone else's voice in a lip-sync or an acting scenario, users can connect on the basis of broader life experiences, shared feelings, or other references. Consequently, certain sounds are more likely to be used by similar users, creating various subgroups based on repeated topics, such as experiences of queerness. In Spain, queer TikTok has become a space for activism and for sharing personal stories of resilience. Currently, the main representative of non-binary identities in national media is Samantha Hudson, a multidisciplinary artist and performer known for their controversial lyrics and out-of-context social media content. One of Samantha's singles, "Por España," released on the National Day of Spain, or Día de la Hispanidad, in 2021, uses deep-rooted national imaginary to depict a rise in extreme-right militancy linked with an increase in homophobic and transphobic aggression in Spain. Part of this song, in which the artist refers to Spanish dictator Francisco Franco with subversive lyrics that pay homage to people killed in the Spanish Civil War, became one of the most popular TikTok trends among the national LGBTQ+ community. The videos under the sound Rap al Caudillo feature normative moves from other dance challenges in the mainstream heterosexual spheres of the app to enhance the powerful lyrics as a way of reclaiming space not only on the platform but also in Spanish national culture and imagery. Moreover, this article aims to show how the trend epitomizes Generation Z humor. In sum, this article proposes an analysis of the impact of Hudson's "Por España" and the subsequent TikTok trend that evidences the impact of internet culture in Gen Z's humor and empowerment.

**Keywords:** TikTok; Queertok; Samantha Hudson; "Por España,,"; Rap al Caudillo; folklore; hispanicity; online communities

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## Objectives and Methodology

As a general user of TikTok and consumer of queer content on the app, I have been able to experience the generally safe space that the online community offers to relate to other users on the basis of deeply personal experiences of gender and sexuality. The knowledge shared there by the creators and users who interact in the comments section became key in my own process of self-exploration. Having lived this firsthand, I find it important to share my online experience and to give more insight on the construction of communities on TikTok involving music by dissident artists. In this light, the main purpose of this article is to understand the impact of Samantha Hudson’s song “Por España” on the younger generations and how the trend created around it became a space for the queer community to use key assets of the platform in order to perform activism.

The methodology used for this study is mainly qualitative, as I will focus on the cultural context of the song and trend, as well as the reception among the general public. For this purpose, I draw from the methods of Juan Bermúdez’s proposed “E<sup>3</sup>thnography.”<sup>1</sup> In his work, Bermúdez reinforces Christine Hine’s idea of an “Embedded, Embodied and Everyday experience [of] the E3 internet”<sup>2</sup> to propose a new conception of ethnography that considers the experience of music in the digital space as more than just interaction with a screen. Instead, as he suggests, there are far more elements that have agency in the process of creating, sharing, consuming, and interpreting the piece (see Bermúdez in this Issue). Therefore, my analysis departs from the idea that physical and virtual spaces are not separate but contribute together to the process of *musicking*.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, this study proposes, first, an approach to the original song and its complexity as a piece of activism in a context of rising extreme-right beliefs in Spanish society. Once I have carefully considered the background information, I will delve into an examination of the trend through my perspective as consumer, before drawing final conclusions. For the last

section, I have selected four videos from the Rap Al Caudillo trend on TikTok on the basis of the popularity of the profiles, their following, and the overall impact of their video. During this process, it was also important to find TikTokers who portrayed the trend in diverse ways, whether through their acting or the setting of the video, so as to present a wider perspective on the different interpretations and reactions to Hudson's song.

## **An Introduction to TikTok and Online Communities**

Social media features encourage unique ways of relating to other users online, as is the case with Instagram stories or hashtags on Twitter. Although most of these are shared across platforms, TikTok has introduced a new system for building communities with the "Sounds" option. Sounds work similarly to hashtags, as viewers can click on the name of the sound at the bottom of the video to be taken to a new page, where all clips using the same sound will appear. This means that new dynamics have emerged in the phenomenon of becoming viral, as well as new opportunities to connect with like-minded people through shared experiences. According to TikTok, "Sound is the universal language of TikTok that sparks global trends, inspires endless creativity, and unifies communities around the world."<sup>4</sup> Further, Serrano et al. add that "for many videos, the music serves as part of a dance routine, a lip-syncing battle, or as the backdrop for a comedy skit. However, sound can also function as a story builder and can be used to deliver a precise message."<sup>5</sup> As we can see, sounds also carry a meaning and construct a shared narrative, usually established through a *trend*. On TikTok, a trend is the association of a sound with particular video content, whether it be choreography, certain gestures while lip-syncing, or the portrayal of a given scenario to share personal stories on a specific topic.

Unlike hashtags, which are usually specific to only one interest depending on the broadness of the terms used, sounds may appeal to very distinct communities and even be shared across groups, each of which will give it a nuanced meaning by adapting the narrative and video performance to their mutual experiences. Once these have reached a certain level of success on the app, typically measured by user engagement through comments, likes, and shares, the trend is considered to be established. Thanks to the algorithm, trends are key to establishing online communities that are

not based solely on an artist or a product, as is more likely to happen on Instagram. Instead, TikTok subgroups are built around distinct references that allow users to create a shared culture. For this, the app's algorithm works with another essential feature of TikTok, the "For You" page, which has become a key component of the platform's experience. As Herrman observes, "The most obvious clue is right there when you open the app: the first thing you see isn't a feed of your friends, but a page called 'For You.' It's an algorithmic feed based on videos you've interacted with, or even just watched."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, analyzing the relation between this page and communities on the app, Messner claims that

this algorithmic curation centers the purpose and function of TikTok around the individual user's consumption of content. This contributes to a broader phenomenon on the For You page: the formation of online communities, or "sides," of TikTok. There are many different types of communities on TikTok, each centered around a topic, and each encompassing a wide variety of characteristics that are particular to themselves. These communities produce and share content that is unique to their own experiences. This content includes the medium of sound.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Dunja Nešović shares in an article her experience on TikTok as a queer woman. Regarding the finding of a lesbian community on the platform, she says:

The re-using of the sounds encourages lip-synching, which affirms the norm of performance on the platform. Moreover, it also allows for the proliferation of memetic content, which in turn affirms the cultural and social context of the content creators and consumers. As the sounds can be re-used by a multitude of users, they become a social, or a vernacular affordance, since in some cases certain sounds reflect specific ideas or identity communities on TikTok that appropriate those sounds for individual and cultural expression.<sup>8</sup>

As she mentions, there are multiple communities on the platform based on the content they share. These communities may be more or less stable depending on what they have in common (see Merlin, and Burkart in this Issue). For instance, a group of users that connected by following the latest details on the missing submarine that attempted to visit the remains of the Titanic formed a community that lasted the few days until the case lost mediatic impact. However, we could consider that the core community that was already united by their interest in the Titanic was a more stable unit that existed before the incident and remained together after the impact of the

submarine accident. This space is known as TitanicTok, a word created by adding the suffix “-tok”—in reference to the app—to the name of the subject that unites the users, a common process for naming core communities on the app, as evidenced by BookTok or QueerTok. It is evident that the rapidly changing nature of online spaces is reflected in the app, making these communities vastly variable in content but also more likely to be volatile. However, it is important to note that these are not exclusive to TikTok but are shared across platforms.<sup>9</sup> Most creators on TikTok also generate content for other platforms, such as Instagram or YouTube, in personal profiles that are usually linked to their TikTok accounts, which makes it more likely for communities to stabilize. What is particularly interesting here, however, is the way narratives are constructed in an app that favors short audiovisual content and thrives on novelty. As artist Bo Burnham describes in his song “Welcome to the Internet” (2021), “Could I interest you in everything? All of the time / A little bit of everything / All of the time / Apathy's a tragedy / And boredom is a crime / Anything and everything / All of the time.”<sup>10</sup>

In order to answer this question, I will focus on Spanish QueerTok, a greatly diverse community in which activism is particularly prominent, mostly due to the exponential growth of anti-trans content seen among other groups, from trans-exclusionary feminists who deliberately target trans creators to streamers who make repeated homophobic remarks in front of millions of viewers. One of the main figures of queer activism in national pop culture is Samantha Hudson,<sup>11</sup> a multidisciplinary artist and performer known on social media for their out-of-context content. She has also appeared on different spaces of mainstream TV, from chat shows to reality shows like *MasterChef Celebrity*, becoming one of the only representations of non-binary identities in Spanish media. It is for this reason, together with her usual comedic yet powerful tone, that many of her statements have gone viral in national queer spheres, making her one of the main voices of national QueerTok trends. One track received outstanding praise among LGBTQ+<sup>12</sup> communities inside and outside TikTok following its release and the release of its music video. The song “Por España” will be the focal point of this study, as its impact online was unprecedented.

## **“Por España,” the New Queer National Anthem and Its Cultural Background<sup>13</sup>**

Written by Papa Topo as the soundtrack to the film *¡Corten!* and first published on October 12, 2021, National Day of Spain, the single “Por España” (In the name of Spain) quickly became celebrated in queer spaces, given its critical and vindictive tone and its use of deep-rooted national imagery. Proof of this is the fact that various drag performers used the song in their shows on the day of the release. In Candy Darling, a queer bar in Barcelona, I had the opportunity to see drag artist Jourdan Mcdaniel performing a lip-sync to the song with the message “paguen la deuda colonial” (pay the colonial debt) on a prop. Other examples of the song’s popularity are some of comments on the music video uploaded to the artist’s YouTube page on the day of the release. User @angelasegura1099 says, “This is not a song, it is a manifesto. How lucky are we to have such a brilliant brain. You are wonderful”<sup>14</sup> (posted in 2022).

As for its release, it is not by chance that the artist chose this date, seeing as the National Day of Spain is heavily associated with the values of the Francoist regime (1939–1975), still upheld today by nostalgic nationalist parties and National Catholic groups. Día de la Hispanidad is a bank holiday in which the country commemorates the arrival of Columbus in America. The festivity has long been used by right-wing parties and extreme Catholic groups to publicly uphold fascist and Francoist symbols under the premise of celebrating Spanish national culture. David Marcilhacy explains that it “had an exceptional assimilating ability, which allowed [the regime] to agglutinate and articulate disparate values that constituted the ideological foundations of the Francoist regime: all through the dictatorship, it was the best support of a nationalist cult that celebrated precisely the homeland, the nation, the pure race, the empire and Catholicism, ingredients of National Catholicism.”<sup>15</sup> This has created a rather tense atmosphere in which many anti-racist groups and activists use their platforms and organize demonstrations every year to shed light on the reality of colonialism, its past devastation, and the present abusive links that Spain still has with the colonies. Esther Mayoko Ortega writes in an article for *Pikara Magazine* that Spain “can only be understood [as white] through a narration that has denied and ignored the operation of homogenization and ‘racial hygiene’ executed from 1492 on in the [Iberian] peninsula.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, she states that “the black or Afro-descendant population received the systematic obliteration of our bodies’ presence,

which also revealed the implication of the Spanish Kingdom in the trade of African people, by kidnapping and enslaving them since the beginning of the sixteenth century.”<sup>17</sup>

The concept of Hispanicity or Spanishness, related to the idea of a national belonging and a national identity, is the focus of the song’s criticism, as it is still currently used by conservatives to create social hierarchies of Spanish-ness according to one’s adherence to traditional, conservative values of the regime. Through satirical and extremely complex lyrics packed with references to Spanish history, the artist claims back traditional symbols appropriated by fascist and Catholic nationalist groups, like folklore music. Moreover, Hudson also reclaims the Spanish identity that has been denied her and others for being queer in the song. In this regard, Ion Goikoetxea mentions in his study of Hudson’s music video the artist’s intention to criticize extreme-right notions of Spanish patriotism by summarizing her own words in an interview prior to the release of the song.

[Samantha Hudson] focused on identity politics, namely the political strategies related to the Spanish identity carried out by extreme-right and neofascist parties who call for a patriotic sentiment, the sentiment that everyone belongs to the same territory but that, at the same time, fixes certain items to determine who is excluded from being a true patriot or a true Spaniard: feminists, the LGBTQ+ community, right-wing voters, etc. Therefore, she denounces the exclusionary nature of these Spanish identities, since they ignore many Spanish citizens who do not abide by [their] established canon of normativity.<sup>18</sup>

This criticism is present throughout the music video, from which we can extract key frames that perfectly depict the reality of conservative values in Spain through irony. The first image is shown on figure 1, in which we can see Samantha surrounded by a group of four other drag performers. All of them are well-known drag artists in Spain—from left to right, Gad Yola, Hornella Góngora, Sergio Satanassa, and Venedita Von Däsh—who present different and diverse images of queerness. The artist that I want place emphasis on, nonetheless, is Gad Yola, dressed in a dotted yellow dress (arguably reminiscent of traditional *sevillana* dresses) over a shirt with the word *castiza*. This term was used in colonial times to refer to the child of a Spanish colonizer with a “mestizo/a”, a person of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. With time, the word started to be used as a symbol of purity and belonging to the idea of a Spanish race.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is clear that her presence is a claim for her belonging as a Spanish citizen despite the racist threats that she must

endure on a daily basis.



Figure 1: Samantha Hudson surrounded by a group of four other drag performers in the music video "Por España" (screenshot)

After the presented scene, Samantha and her group enter a recreation of the bar Don Pepe, known for its decoration with fascist symbols, like pre-constitutional Spanish flags or pictures of dictator Francisco Franco (1892–1975). Once their presence has been acknowledged, a fight erupts between Samantha's crew and the men who were on the premises. This is, once again, extremely meaningful, as the fact that dissident people—more specifically, migrant drag artists—are the ones receiving pain in this scenario clearly alludes to their vindication at belonging to Spanish society despite being marginalized and continuously targeted. As this scene plays, the lyrics of the song call in a brilliant play of irony for violence to be exerted: "Oh for Spain / Make me suffer in the name of Spain / Cause me pain in the name of Spain / Get rowdy with me for Spain / Give me martyrdom with unmeasured pain / To me and the ones of my kind / Give us pain in the name of Spain,"<sup>20</sup> the chorus claims. At this instance, the pain is received "in the name of Spain," evoking the idea of the transmutation of pain. Those who can bear the pain and move forward can claim Spanish-ness. It is clear, then, that Hudson and her fellow drag artists are assuming the position of martyrs in an allusion to the notion of suffering and the worship of pain associated with Catholicism, very present in Spanish culture. What is more, this pain is clearly eroticized in the images shown in the video, as well as in the lyrics and the tone of



the singer, reminiscent of a sexual tension between extreme-right and fascist men and the gay men and trans women whom they feel so outraged by (“I’m the fag you dream of”<sup>21</sup>).

Following up on this idea, sexual tension is drawn particularly towards the image of dictator Franco, as there are many instances in which Hudson appears in intimate situations with him. The image of the dictator in the video represents an ideology that still lives on in Spain through fascist and National Catholic groups, but also in a system that has been deeply impacted by a fascist and imperialist past. An example of this can be found on the next key frame, shown in figure 2, in which Samantha is dressed in a traditional gown and uses bullfighting material with the colors of the Spanish flag as a headdress.



Figure 2: Samantha dressed in a traditional gown (screenshot of “Por España”)

This image is particularly impactful, given that the artist evokes a scenario in which she is alone with Franco while she performs a private show in a rather flirty manner. Moreover, the lyrics playing over this scene are an original version of a good-night prayer, edited to say “four corners to my bed / four angels that keep me safe / four bars to my window / and I wait for you on all

fours”<sup>22</sup> over a *copla* sound. As can be seen, Hudson makes a clear statement by using traditional symbols, both with the clothes and musical choice, at a time when she is seducing the dictator as he watches her with a certain expression of desire. However, it is Hudson who symbolically has the power by appearing with a bullfighter cape, insinuating that she can fight him like a bullfighter does the animal.<sup>23</sup> After this intimate moment, the video cuts to a dance interlude that plays *bakalao* music, a type of electronic dance music that originated in Valencia, Spain, in the 1980s and became the sound of a generation that used parties and nightlife as a way of freeing themselves from routines and looking forward to a democratic future after the repressions of the dictatorship, before the music style was appropriated by Nazi groups.<sup>24</sup>

The culmination of this scene returns to the private show scenario. There, the video offers yet another powerful instance of how the artist uses irony to denounce the anti-LGBTQ+ values upheld by the regime and inherited by conservative parties and neofascist groups. As shown in figure 3, Samantha shoots dictator Franco in a sort of poetic justice image immediately after singing “Against the wall, come shoot me / In the name of Spain, daddy / Make me look pretty / Make me look charming / In a ditch.”<sup>25</sup>



Figure 3: Samantha Hudson mata a Franco “por España”, en su pasodoble contra la lgtbifobia | Europa FM

Samantha shoots dictator Franco (screenshot of “Por España”)

During the civil war that preceded Franco’s dictatorship in Spain, many executions took place. They were targeted toward those who did not uphold the Francoist values, including queer people, among many others. The bodies of the people killed by Francoist troops were buried in ditches, and no information was given to the families. Still today, many deaths have not been accounted for and families are seeing their efforts wasted, as they receive no answer in their quest to find the remains of loved ones and cannot properly grieve for them. Moreover, the law against “the lazy and the miscreant” (*ley de vagos y maleantes*), passed in 1933 to control—and consequently persecute—homeless citizens and migrants was modified in 1954 by the regime to include queer people, who faced up to five years in medical institutions or even prison. This law was not completely abolished until 1995. Hence, the fact that Samantha, an openly trans non-binary person dressed in a traditional gown, is executing Franco sends a clear message of rejection to a regime that remains alive in the ideology of contemporary political parties, but it also represents the rage of many citizens who are made to feel as though they do not belong in Spanish society, as perfectly summarized in the above quotation by Goikoetxea.<sup>26</sup>

One final image from the video stands out for its critical and moving quality. It is shown in figure 4.



Figure 4: Final image (screenshot of “Por España”)

After Hudson shoots dictator Franco, a *sevillana* starts playing as the soundtrack to an impeccable depiction of the current Spanish political



situation. In the background, the parking lot that appeared during the *bakalao* interlude shows a brutal fight between all the characters in the video: the group of trans women, the men from the fascist bar, the group of people from the electronic dance scene, and dictator Franco. Hudson appears wearing nipple covers in the form of the Osborne bull, a symbol associated with fascist-nationalist ideologies, as well as a tight thong and high heels. She is also waving a Spanish Republican flag, a symbol of resistance against the Franco regime and fascism in general, imitating the action of a bullfighter. While maintaining eye contact with the camera, Samantha approaches Franco and tosses the flag over his face, all the while singing "Look at the caliber, Paco / Oh, One, Great and Free,"<sup>27</sup> a phallic reference that maintains the aforementioned sexual tension between the two characters and also paraphrases the Francoist motto used as propaganda for their project of a nation that upheld colonial, conservative, and Catholic values in reminiscence of imperialist times (One, Great and Free). In addition, the outburst she leaves behind is extremely indicative of today's social context. Military forces appear as a threat to the trans group, as do the other men and a new group of cis women holding a poster that reads "Boys have penises, girls have vaginas," a slogan from the extremist Catholic group Hazte Oir, with which some feminists have allied. This link emerges from a trans-exclusionary movement within feminism which has been especially notorious in Spain as a response to the proposal of a new trans law, which will grant fundamental rights to minors and propose new bureaucratic processes to de-medicalize transitions.<sup>28</sup>

In view of this context, Hudson becomes a symbol of resilience as the song ends. The last image we see is of her gazing intensely at the camera before the credits roll in to the sound of her distinct laugh. This choice is, once again, not a coincidence. As mentioned, the tone of the song is satirical, yet the message is quite pungent. It is precisely a trans person performing in drag that is able to release this piece, since the performance seen on a non-normative body is often not regarded as serious. Therefore, a drag queen, a *travesti*, can use a performative license to send a subversive message because it is not understood as anything other than comedy.<sup>29</sup> It is Hudson's position as both martyr and prophet, as well as the reclaiming of space within national imagery, that has made of this song an LGBTQ+ anthem and a cathartic product. The fact that the response of the audience at concerts and queer clubs when the song plays is a collective chant, as I have been

able to experience firsthand, only further proves that the song has become a cornerstone for the community that has allowed listeners to channel fear and anger in view of the increasing homophobic aggression and the rise of the extreme right in a space where they feel safe. This catharsis does not only exist in physical spaces but also online. One of the most popular trends on Spanish QueerTok during the months of October and November 2021 was the Rap al Caudillo trend, created around an extract of “Por España.”

## Rap al Caudillo Trend: Reclaiming Space on TikTok

*Paco, Paquillo, sexy Caudillo / You'll be my bishop and I'll be your altar-boy / I'm your slave, I'm your submissive / Leash me up and take me to Mass / I'm not boring, make me a noose / With the necklaces, the necklaces of your wife / I love your eaglet lots and lots like jelly tots / In the name of Spain, Paco / You make me horny / Against the wall, come shoot me / In the name of Spain, daddy / Make me look pretty / Make me look charming / In a ditch<sup>30</sup>*

This is the section that user @begaywithgirardi<sup>31</sup> chose for their sound, which later became part of a major trend on TikTok. Writing “the best part of the national anthem” over the video and with the caption “what a rush #porespaña #[rainbow flag] #samanthahudson #lgbt #nonbinary,” this user uploaded the *bakalao* section of “Por España” and registered it as a sound that was then used in 1,998 other videos.<sup>32</sup> Although the reason for this choice could be merely aesthetic, I believe there to be two main reasons for its popularity. On the one hand, we are seeing an increase in the use of electronic dance music in mainstream music, which makes it more likely that young listeners will relate to it. In Spain, for instance, pop star Aitana Ocaña organized a tour of clubbing sessions in early 2023 to promote her new album, *Alpha*. Moreover, directors Javier Calvo and Javier Ambrossi released an eight-episode show called *La Ruta* in November 2022, available on Atresplayer Premium, about the culture around *bakalao* music, also showing a growing interest in the scene and its cultural impact. On the other hand, it is also undeniable that the ironic, yet provocative, lyrics have played a major role in the viralization of the segment. In just a few lines, the artist manages to touch on various controversial topics that have affected Spanish society in the last several years.

The lyrics chosen for the trend start by mentioning the relationship between the singer and the dictator (Caudillo), depicted as a bishop. While it is evident

that there was a strong link between the Francoist ideals and the Christian Church, these words are, in fact, a reference to the sexual harassment scandal in Spain. For decades now, many people have come forward to share their personal stories on the abuse they suffered during their time studying at religious institutions, in which adults, all linked somehow to the Church, approached children in predatory ways, even inflicting physical and sexual abuse on them. Following this, the song goes on to provoke the dictator by mentioning a noose made with the necklaces of his wife. Carmen Polo, Francisco Franco's wife, became known as "the necklace woman" (*la collares*), given her love for pearl necklaces, which she mostly took without paying from shops all around the country. This line precedes what seems like a playful scene in which the artist invites Franco to engage in a sexual encounter. However, this playfulness continues with an innuendo about the dictator's body in which his phallus is identified with the eagle that represented Francoism. Then, a seemingly innocent popular expression reminiscent of an innocent love ("I love you lots and lots like jelly tots") is turned into a different love declaration. In the last lines, the singer changes the foolish, playful tone. In a much more ardent manner, the artist asks the dictator to make love to her in a violent way and, most importantly, in the name of Spain, recurring once again to the idea of suffering to claim national belonging. Finally, the verse culminates with Hudson demanding in a highly ironical sentence to be shot and buried in a ditch by her lover. What is more, the powerful image in the music video makes this section stand out even more. As described above, following this interlude, Hudson appears in an intimate moment with the dictator dressed in a traditional dress, wearing bullfighter's weapons as a headpiece and dancing seductively for him. At the end of the scene, when the singer addresses Franco after singing the first part of the section to him, she asks him to kill her while making a reference to the mass killings of people who did not represent his idea of Spanishness, including LGBTQ+ people who were shot and had their bodies carelessly thrown into ditches. Before Hudson has even had time to finish singing, she is shown shooting the dictator in a sort of poetic justice image that is followed only by a moment of silence and the last piece of folkloric music.

After the TikTok sound was created, a few people started uploading their own videos lip-syncing to it, mostly to show that they related to the lyrics, as users @soctontu and @virgleo did.<sup>33</sup> A few days later, creator @odcary2<sup>34</sup> uploaded a video with choreography that displayed dance moves commonly

used in many TikTok dance challenges. It was then that more profiles imitated the dance routine in their own videos, shaping the popular trend and thus creating a community around a sound that users felt close to while having a sense of safety and inclusion. Regarding the choreography, I am particularly interested in the moves chosen by the original creator, who selected dance steps from mainstream TikTok trends, mostly associated with heterosexual spaces. As Laura Cervi exposes, most trending dance routines follow the same aesthetic: “almost entirely choreographed from the hips up, with the dancer staying in one place.”<sup>35</sup> She also mentions one of the key aspects of dance, which involves direction. She observes that contrary to other styles of dance, in which diagonals, for instance, are a central part of the routine, dancers on the app must be facing forward toward the camera and thus do not usually change their spatial focus. Furthermore, since most videos do not show the creator’s entire body, dances concentrate on arm movement and are heavily reliant on facial expression.<sup>36</sup> Some of the most popular dance moves on the app include the “woah,” “when a dancer makes a quick, small circular motion with his/her fists and leans into a freeze position when the beat drops,”<sup>37</sup> or the “dice roll walk,” when a user takes a step forward while mimicking a dice roll with one hand by their hip.<sup>38</sup> These had barely appeared on a notorious Spanish QueerTok trend before, most videos consisting of lip-syncing or performances of specific scenarios sharing personal experiences. By including influences from other mainstream spheres, often associated with heterosexual trends that tend to be overly sexual, the choreographer manages to subtly reclaim space in an online culture that is being created and of which queer people are part, just as Hudson reclaims a sense of belonging to national folklore imagery for queer people. Moreover, these overly sexual moves are taken out of their original heterosexual context and inserted into a sound like that of “Por España,” including dancing to lines that reference the singer becoming intimate with dictator Franco. This only further highlights the subversive aspect of the song and the catharsis experienced by the audience, who also use TikTok videos to channel their frustrations with a system that has allowed fascist and National Catholic groups to rise and pose a threat to their identity and gender expression, or even because it is simply a fun and easy way to connect with other LGBTQ+ users who have become part of a community by participating in the trend. An example of this can be found in @hugoarcones’s video, which shows him doing the dance routine with the words “for those who played the Spanish anthem in class and are fans of

Franco, for you [pink heart emoji]" over the image.<sup>39</sup>

The seemingly light-hearted tone of the dance in combination with the complexity of the lyrics and their subversive undertones led to many complaints alluding to an alleged lack of consciousness of the dictatorship's context. For example, creator @joanrafart, known for his activism on the app, used the sound as background to a video of him answering a comment that read, "what would happen if I made a song against la veneno<sup>40</sup>?? Or any other person of the lgbt [sic] AAAAH okay."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, user @lucirodritt uploaded a video with the comment, "I am sure that if all republicans who died [during the civil war] listened to this, they would switch to the nationalist side." This video was then deleted, after the creator received multiple comments and duets from queer people like @bollokinki, who said in their video, "tell me you didn't understand the music video without telling me you didn't understand the music video."<sup>42</sup>

These complaints were made mostly by conservatives who do not seem to understand the need for reclaiming space within national folklore or current online culture, but also by people who do not fully grasp the pungent nuances of the song. As music journalist Fernando Navarro mentions, "'Por España' is pure provocation ahead of the advance of the Spanish extreme right and amidst a social atmosphere in which hate speech and homophobic aggressions are proliferating."<sup>43</sup> This same idea is brought up by Hudson in the article, who states, "This song would make no sense without its consequences. Provocation is useful for revealing that there is still a long way to go," to which she later adds, "without a shadow of doubt, the goal is to provoke the reaction that highlights that fascism remains alive."<sup>44</sup> To counter this, I propose a brief study of TikTok's use of irony, mostly influenced by Gen Z's humor, a key component to making this debate more complex. Although humor on digital spaces is not new or exclusive to TikTok and Generation Z, as a great part of the irony and satire displayed on the app has notorious links to the meme culture of the 2010s, it is interesting to analyze how younger generations apply these references through their own lens in order to obtain a more complex vision of trends happening in an app used mostly by teenagers.<sup>45</sup> According to Trevor Boffone, "the app is largely synonymous with Generation Z, or so-called Zoomers, given that teenagers and young twenty-somethings were the first community to adopt TikTok en masse. They continue to be the platform's trendsetters, dictating TikTok's larger, mainstream culture."<sup>46</sup> Regarding TikTok's comedy, Chloe Partlow and



Patricia Talarczyk propose absurdism as a form of humor that allows Gen Zers to cope with the uncertainty of their future following the economic crisis they lived through growing up, together with the threat of climate change and other social crises that they are still enduring.<sup>47</sup> Denisova, who understands TikTok humor as an extension of meme culture, makes a particularly fitting remark on the reactions to this trend. She argues that “those who are unfamiliar with the rules of digital discussion and styles of the internet slang, or possess limited awareness of the broader socio-political context, may consider memes meaningless.”<sup>48</sup> This is, to my belief, one of the key reasons why people who criticized the content of the trend may have disagreed with the videos. Still, one may wonder what exactly these rules that operate in the app and that lead to such a style of comedic videos are. I believe that Spanish YouTuber Ter’s new meaning of the concept of *performance* could be useful in answering this question. In her words, “A performance consists in channeling one single emotion in the most intense way possible in order to make a point, without nuances or disclaimers. It’s taking an idea all the way through to the end and being fully committed, while simultaneously feeling detached from the idea.”<sup>49</sup> This is exactly what users have done with the selected fragment from Hudson’s song. They have taken the irony from the lyrics and applied a coat of Gen Z humor, which they then channel through a seemingly fun and cheerful dance published on their profiles, without the need of adding a disclaimer any nuances in the description of the video.

In addition, the YouTuber follows up on her idea of irony according to Gen Z in another video, in which she specifically mentions the use that younger artists have made of Catholic symbols and how internet culture has helped us find new meanings to traditional imagery. She suggests, “For me, and I think for many people of my generation, [Catholic symbols] have acquired a completely new, but not less profound, meaning. We have turned Catholic iconography into emojis.”<sup>50</sup> Taking this new meaning of emojis closer to the study of “Por España” and the Rap al Caudillo trend, it becomes evident that the detachment that allows Ter’s idea of performance to surface does not imply disregard for a traumatic past context, like a dictatorship, but rather a different way to connect with it. Users @pabsperez and @lacuchillos<sup>51</sup> appear together in a perfect example of how turning fascist or religious iconography into TikTok characters, like Ter’s mention of emojis, is not simply an attitude of mockery. Instead, it is a way for a generation that did not live under those circumstances to connect with the past from their own perspective

as queer people who today live in a reality deeply influenced by a fascist past. Furthermore, the YouTuber also touches on how relating to historical or religious characters is yet another form of relating to and resignifying symbols that are deeply rooted in national culture. In the same video, while talking about Spanish trap artist La Zowi, she says that “with this mentality, the patience of the Virgin Mary is completely equivalent to the patience of La Zowi when her crush doesn’t call her.”<sup>52</sup> For users, taking on the role of the martyr present in the song therefore becomes an opportunity to momentarily embody the ideas of resilience and resistance in order to symbolically claim their space and feel as though they belong in QueerTok, a community of like-minded others.

## Conclusions

Social media and internet culture have shaped new ways of relating to others and, more importantly, of creating communities. With this study, I have aimed to provide a complex account of online communities and how they are forged through TikTok performance. As described, the unique “Sounds” feature plays a key role in the way people relate to each other and establish links with each other. The narrative function of Sounds, which allows users to associate certain ideas and experiences with a fragment of a dialogue or song, is essential to the understanding of trends. These can be understood as the ritualization of a performance<sup>53</sup> in which all users reproduce the same video to share their personal stories, which allows groups of people to connect with each other and, as a result, to form online communities based on their particular interests and even their identities, as happens on QueerTok. In Spain, Papá Topo and Samantha Hudson’s song “Por España” became the center of a new trend, named Rap Al Caudillo. As explored throughout the study, the artist’s rejection of conservative values associated with traditional Spanish culture and the reclaiming of a sense of belonging to national society and imagery serves as relief for queer people who share experiences of fear and rejection. This was also paralleled on TikTok through the trend, where conservative and trans-exclusionary creators started to share false ideas related to queer people. Furthermore, the trend has received immense

criticism from both users and non-users of the app, who claim that the dance routine is insensitive toward victims of Francoism. In contrast, different ideas of humor have been presented with the aim of explaining how younger generations have modified meme culture together with satire and camp. By using bold analogies and expressing themselves in a seemingly uninterested and provocative manner, young people have found a way to externalize their anxieties through the irony of memes.

While this study was limited to the analysis of one specific trend, I find it would be useful to expand the ideas developed here to other mainstream trends across TikTok subgroups. Similar studies have already been provided by scholars like Trevor Boffone, who has published multiple excellent works on TikTok and its functioning. By further analyzing TikTok content as an extension of meme and internet culture, we would be able to better understand the limits of humor among the younger generation so that we can hear their voices and understand their activism. Although it is true that not all sections of TikTok use humor in favor of social justice, it is important to remember that the world as we know it is becoming less physical and more hybrid every day. This means that online trends—and by extension, online activism—do not always remain on apps and platforms, and they can achieve real impact in other non-online spheres. As Tandon et al. correctly point out, “social media has not only helped in exploring various ways of engaging with the political discourses but also in terms of sensitizing people at a more personalized level through social networks.”<sup>54</sup>



## Notes

1. Juan Bermúdez, *Musicking TikTok: A Musical Ethnography from a Glocal Austrian Context*, *New Approaches to Sound, Music, and Media* 15 (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025); Juan Bermúdez, “Virtual Musical.ly(ties): Identities, Performances, & Meanings in a Mobile Application; An Ethnomusicological Approach to TikTok’s Musicking” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2022); Juan Bermúdez, “¿Qué música? Si nadie toca... si nadie sabe...: Reflexionando el etnografiar de un musicking digital,” *Boletín Música* 52–53 (julio 2019–junio 2020): 51–60.
2. Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (Abingdon and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
3. Juan Bermúdez, “It’s All About ‘Being There’: Rethinking Presence and Co-Presence in the Ethnographic Field during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of World Popular Music* 10, no. 1 (2023): 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jwpm.26375>.

4. "Creating Content Just Got Easier with TikTok's Sounds for Business," *TikTok, Newsroom*, August 16, 2019. All links accessed on January, 21, 2025.
5. Medina Serrano, Juan Carlos, Orestis Papakyriakopoulos, and Simon Hegelich. "Dancing to the Partisan Beat: A First Analysis of Political Communication on TikTok," *12th ACM Conference on Web Science*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3394231.3397916> .
6. John Herrman, "How TikTok Is Rewriting the World," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2019.
7. Ellen Messner, "The Queer Sounds of Tiktok" (MA diss., Bowling Green State University, 2022).
8. Dunja Nešović, "Now You See Me: Visibility of the Lesbian Identity on TikTok," *Institute of Network Cultures* (blog), October 8, 2021.
9. Juan Bermúdez, "Performing Beyond the Platform—Experiencing Musicking on and through YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram," in *Remediating Sound: Repeatable Culture, YouTube and Music*, ed. Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas, and João Francisco Porfírio. *New Approaches to Sound, Music, and Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), 187–202.
10. "Welcome to the Internet—Bo Burnham (from "Inside"—ALBUM OUT NOW)," YouTube, 2021.
11. She/her pronouns will mainly be used throughout this article to refer to Samantha, as she tends to refer to herself that way on social media and TV appearances. However, they/them will occasionally be used, since they have stated that they feel identified with neutral pronouns as well.
12. Although the author is aware that queer and LGBTQIA+ are not absolute synonyms, both terms will be hereby used similarly for stylistic purposes. However, a nuance must be considered, as activist circles often use queer to refer to those identities that challenge social expectations of gender and sexuality.
13. This section is based on a conversation with Carlo Aguilar during a seminar centered around the ideas of Hispanicity, or Spanishness, and Samantha Hudson's production. For more information on Spanish culture and references to Catholicism and pain, see Carlota Aguilar, "La Voz Rota De Una España Rota: Los Discursos De La Escucha En El Presente Y Futuro Del Flamenco," in *Estamos Vivos De Milagro: 10 Años Después De Morente*, ed. Pedro Ordoñez Eslava (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2022), 277–296.
14. "Esto no es una canción, es un manifiesto. Que suerte tenemos de tener una mente así. Eres maravillosa(LL)."
15. "El concepto de Hispanidad tuvo una excepcional capacidad asimiladora, que le permitió aglutinar y articular valores dispares que constituían todos el fondo ideológico del régimen franquista: a lo largo de la dictadura, fue el mejor soporte de un culto nacionalista que celebraba justamente la Patria, la Nación, la Raza, el Imperio y el Catolicismo, ingredientes todos del nacionalcatolicismo." David Marcilhacy, "La Hispanidad Bajo El Franquismo: El Americanismo al Servicio de Un Proyecto Nacionalista," in *Imaginarios y Representaciones de España Durante El Franquismo*, ed. Stéphane Michonneau and Xosé M. Núñez Seixas (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2014), 73–102: 100.
16. "¿Y el Reino de España? Claramente solo se puede entender así (como blanco) a través de una narración que ha negado e ignorado la operación de homogeneización e "higiene racial"

ejecutada a partir de 1492 en la península.” Esther Mayoko Ortega, “Afrofeminismos En El Estado Español: Cartografiar La Blanquitud, Desplazar La Centralidad,” *Pikara Magazine*, February 18, 2020.

17. “Para la población negra o afrodescendiente se reservó el borrado sistemático de la presencia de nuestros cuerpos que, además, delataban la implicación del Reino de España en el comercio de personas africanas, en su secuestro y esclavización desde comienzos del siglo XVI.” Ibid.
18. “Tomó como eje las políticas de identidad, en concreto las estrategias políticas de identidad española llevadas a cabo por partidos de ultraderecha y neofascistas que apelan a un sentimiento patriótico, a un sentimiento de que todo el mundo pertenece a un mismo territorio, pero que al mismo tiempo fijan unos puntos que determinan quién no es un patriota o un español de verdad: las feministas, el colectivo LGTB, los de izquierdas... Por lo tanto, denuncia que estas identidades españolas son muy excluyentes, ya que dejan de lado muchos españoles al no cumplir con un canon normativo establecido.” Ion Goikoetxea, “Performance y Activismo a Través Del Videoclip de ‘Por España’ (2021) de Samantha Hudson,” (BA diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2022), 15.
19. For further context, see definition by the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), <https://dle.rae.es/astizo>.
20. “Ay, por España / Hazme sufrir por España / Dame dolor por España / Dame caña por España / Dame martirio / Con un dolor desmedido / A mí, a los de mi calaña / Danos caña por España.”
21. “Soy la bujarra con la que sueñas tú.”
22. “Cuatro esquinitas hay en mi cama / cuatro angelitos que me la guardan / cuatro barrotes en mi ventana / y yo te espero a cuatro patas.”
23. Goikoetxea, “Performance y Activismo,” 23.
24. Gianni Ginesi, “¡Baila Toda La Noche!: Fragments If Electronic Dance Music,” in *Made in Spain: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Sílvia Martínez and Héctor Fouce. Routledge Global Popular Music Series (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 135–43.
25. “Contra la pared, ven, fusíame / Por España, papi, déjame bien guapi / Déjame coqueta en una cuneta.”
26. Goikoetxea, “Performance y Activismo,” 24.
27. “Mira, Paco, qué calibre / Ay, una, grande y libre.”
28. For further information, watch “[GenPlayz’s episode on the Trans Law](#),” *YouTube* where young intellectuals debate and share their experiences on transition and the new proposition of law;
29. Extracted from a conversation with Teresa López Castilla during a private seminar. For more information on her work on queer identity, see Teresa López Castilla, “Por Ciento ‘Nido,’ Por Ciento ‘Ruido’: Disidencias de Género En La Música Electrónica de España y Latam,” in *REBEL GRRRLS!!! Desigualdad de Género, Discursos, Disidencias y Activismo Feminista En La Música Popular*, ed. Candelaria Sánchez Olmos (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2023), 259–82.

30. "Paco, Paquillo, sexy caudillo / Tú serás mi obispo y yo, tu monaguillo / Soy tu esclava, soy tu sumisa / Ponme correa, llévame contigo a misa / Yo no soy sosa, hazme una sogá / Con los collares, los collares de tu esposa / Me gusta mucho tu aguilucho / Como le gusta la trucha al trucho / Por España, Paco, me pones bellaco / Contra la pared, ven, fusíame / Por España, papi, déjame bien guapi / Déjame coqueta en una cuneta." A note on the translation: The lyrics quoted have many references to Spanish culture, from a critique to sexual harassment scandals in the Church to mentions of the dictatorship and its specific imagery, together with popular sayings that add a kitsch element to the song.
31. [@begaywithgirardi](#), *TikTok*. Sound cannot be linked, as user eliminated the sound and made their account private. As a result, other videos mentioned cannot be added, given that many videos containing that sound have also been eliminated.
32. Data collected in June 2023.
33. [@soctontu](#), "Echo de menos a esta cosa con mini piernas [@virgleo](#)," *TikTok*.
34. [@odcary2](#), "'por españa paco' (dc:  ) [@badbixsamantha](#) t'estimo reina , *TikTok*.
35. Laura Cervi, "Tik Tok and Generation Z," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 12, no. 2 (2021): 198-204.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. For visual reference, see "[TOP 10 TIKTOK DANCE MOVES | DO YOU KNOW THESE?](#)" *YouTube*.
39. [@hugoarcones](#), ".,," *TikTok*.
40. Cristina Ortiz, also known as La Veneno, was one of the most influential trans women in Spanish popular culture. She became known in the early 2000s, as she first appeared on the TV show *Esta noche cruzamos el Mississippi* in 1996. Soon after, she became recognized as one of the first trans women to appear on public television and has since been recognized as an idol and symbol of freedom by the LGBTQIA+ community. In October of 2020, directors Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo released a show called *Veneno* around her life and legacy for trans women around the country.
41. [@joanrafart](#), *TikTok*. This account is private and, consequently, video can neither be accessed nor linked.
42. [@bollokinki](#), *TikTok*. This account is private and, consequently, video can neither be accessed nor linked.
43. "Por España es pura provocación ante el avance de la ultraderecha española y en mitad de un ambiente social en el que proliferan los mensajes de odio y hay agresiones homófobas." Fernando Navarro, "[Samantha Hudson, La 'Bujarra' Que Da Caña al Fascismo Español](#)," *El País*, October 16, 2021.
44. "'Esta canción sin consecuencias no tendría sentido. Precisamente para lo que sirve la provocación es para poner en evidencia todo el camino que queda por recorrer,' cuenta

Samantha Hudson. "Sin lugar a dudas, el objetivo es provocar la reacción que ponga de manifiesto que el fascismo sigue vivo. O, más bien, sigue viVox,' añade." Ibid.

45. Rebeca Suárez-Álvarez and Antonio García-Jiménez, "Centennials En Tiktok: Tipología de Vídeos. Análisis y Comparativa España-Gran Bretaña Por Género, Edad y Nacionalidad," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, no. 79 (2021): 1–22.
46. Trevor Boffone, ed. *Tiktok Cultures in the United States*. Routledge Focus in Digital Media and Culture (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2022).
47. Chloe Partlow and Patricia Talarczyk, "Absurdism and Generation Z Humor: The Effects of Absurdist Content on Perceived Humor Levels in Generation Z Students," *Journal of Student Research* 10, no. 4 (2021): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v10i4.2011>
48. Anastasia Denisova, "Political Memes as Tools of Dissent and Alternative Digital Activism in the Russian-Language Twitter" (PhD diss., University of Westminster, 2016).
49. "Una performance consiste en canalizar un único sentimiento de la manera más intensa posible para hacer un *point*. Sin matices y sin *disclaimers*. Es llevar una idea hasta el final y estar comprometido con ella a la vez que sientes un cierto desapego por la idea"; Ter, "Un concepto que me ha cambiado la vida: la 'PERFORMANCE,'" *YouTube*, September 29, 2018.
50. "Para mí, y yo creo que para mucha gente de mi generación, [los símbolos del catolicismo] han adquirido un significado completamente nuevo, y no por ello menos profundo, porque realmente hemos convertido la iconografía católica en emojis, en el mejor de los sentidos." Ter, "Por qué se usan cruces en el TRAP," *YouTube*, July 7, 2019.
51. @pabsperetz and @lacuchillos, "@lacuchillos #samanthahudson #parati #pabsperetz", *TikTok*.
52. "Con esta mentalidad, la paciencia que tiene la Virgen María es completamente equivalente a la paciencia que tiene La Zowi porque su *crush* no la llama." Ter, "Por qué se usan cruces en el TRAP," *YouTube*, July 7, 2019.
53. Philip Auslander, *In Concert: Performing Musical Persona* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).
54. Surbhi Tandon, Namit Vikram Singh, and Durgesh Tripathi, "Like, Share and Comment: Gen-Z and Political Memes on Social Media," *Specialusis Ugdymas* 1, no. 43 (2022): 2973–98.