NON SONO / UNA SEÑORA: GENDER REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH INTERLINGUAL COVER VERSIONS

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the song '*Non sono una signora*,' originally released by Loredana Bertè in 1982, and its three Spanish-language covers recorded by Latin American singers Lucía Méndez, Lissette, and Melisa in 1984. While several Italian pop songs from the 1980s became part of the Latin American soundscape through Spanish-language adaptations, this case stands out due to the shifting gender representations across versions. Framed within Translation Studies, this research engages with Susam-Sarajeva's (2019) concept of interlingual cover versions and Prato's (2007) theory of coverability to analyze how these versions negotiate gender, societal roles, and popular music discourses. Using a collective case study approach (Yin, 2018), the analysis contrasts thematic and narrative shifts across the adaptations, revealing how translation and performance interact to reframe gender and sexuality.
KEYWORDS: Gender; Popular Music; Sexuality; Embodiment; Affect

1. Introduction

This study is framed within the field of popular song translation—or non-canonized music genres, as categorized by Susam-Sarajeva (2020). It specifically focuses on the phenomenon of "interlingual cover versions" (Susam-Sarajeva, 2019), a term that captures not only linguistic transfer but also broader processes of adaptation and rewriting, as explored in contemporary critical theory and translation studies.

Cover versions raise compelling questions, as they exemplify what Plasketes (2010, p. 2) calls a postmodern manifestation of "rampant recontextualization"—where artists revisit, reinterpret, and reframe musical styles, eras, genres, recordings, and fellow performers.[1] This framework extends the postmodern characteristics attributed to covers—such as reinterpretation and cultural negotiation—to interlingual covers as well, allowing for a more expansive analysis within the context of song translation. For instance, Prato's (2007) theory of coverability underscores the structural reproducibility of popular songs—an idea that resonates with Benjamin's (2008) concept of aura, and its afterlife in translation studies via "The task of the translator" (Benjamin, 1996). Prato also adopts a cartographic approach, resisting unidirectional models of cultural flow. Drawing on García Canclini's (1989) notion of deterritorialization, he shows that interlingual covers circulate through complex and nonlinear cultural circuits, where identity, knowledge, entertainment, and pleasure are continually contested and redefined.

The case explored in this article is the song *'Non sono una signora'* (I Am Not a Lady), originally released by Loredana Bertè in 1982, and its three Spanish-language covers, all released in 1984 by Latin American singers Lucía Méndez, Lissette, and Melissa. The triple

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[1] For further conceptual exploration regarding the terms of 'cover' and 'cover version' based on empirical data and theoretical discussions, see Upton (2021), Magnus (2022), and Bradford (2023).

release in the same year may reflect contingent factors tied to technological and media developments, such as the central role of radio in disseminating music across Europe and the Atlantic; historical and political contexts (see Section 5 on Melissa's version); and the dynamics of the Mexican and broader Latin American music industries, which viewed Italian composers and record labels as key actors in innovating popular music globally. Indeed, the phenomenon of covering Italian songs gained momentum at the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, as Italy's music industry gained global recognition through events such as the Sanremo Festival. This festival played a pivotal role in shaping the development of Italian popular music and influenced how it was conceived, received, and circulated internationally (Prato, 2007; Agostini, 2013). A key study highlighting the Italian music industry's role in generating Spanish-language covers is García-Jiménez's (2013) doctoral thesis. She shows that Italy's influence on the Spanish musical context in the 1960s became clear as Italian songs renewed traditional musical models. This influence, expressed through the translation of Italian popular music, was part of a broader cultural phenomenon shaped by economic and historical factors. Rather than a one-way flow from Italy to Spain, this exchange reflected a global soundscape in flux, where different regions actively expanded their repertoires—an argument that echoes Prato's use of deterritorialization, as discussed earlier.

Taking García-Jiménez's study as a starting point, *'Non sono una signora'* might seem like a typical case of how several Italian pop songs from the 1980s became part of the Latin American soundscape through Spanish-language cover versions.[2] However, in contrast to these songs—whose Spanish lyrics have remained consistent across various artists—*'Non sono una signora'* presents a particularly compelling case of how the representations of societal roles shift depending on the performer and how their respective interlingual cover version contribute to reshaping gender narratives in Latin American popular culture. This observation leads to a second theoretical assumption guiding this study: the framing of translation as a form of repetition. However, repetition should not be understood as a simple derivative act of reproducing the same. Rather, it must be seen as a historical and cultural practice—one that opens up possibilities for subverting the original/copy binary in favor of radical rewritings or contingent readings that, although rooted in specific contexts, resist the fixation of meaning (Vidal Claramonte, 2023).

Framing translation as repetition helps to clarify how each cover version has established a critical distance from Bertè's original song. Repetition includes processes such as (re)translating a source text across different times and places within the same target language. It also aligns with poststructuralist conceptions of translation as an ongoing process of endless drafts (Waisman, 2005; Borges, 2012), the Derridean notion of continuous deferral of meaning and the impossibility of a definitive target text (Derrida, 1986; Molines-Galarza, 2025), and the idea that source and target texts coexist as parallel,

[2] Recognizable songs include '*Maledetta Primavera'*, originally released by Loretta Goggi in 1981 and covered by Yuri in Mexico in 1982, and *'Non voglio mica la luna'* by Fiordaliso, which was adapted as *'Yo no te pido la luna'* by Mexican singer Daniela Romo in 1984.

continuous, and proximate, yet always move toward vanishing points where fixed meanings remain elusive (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Understanding translation as repetition also introduces the possibility—and even the pleasure—of discovering innovations and noticing what changes with each iteration (Hutcheon, 2006). At the same time, it invites reflection on where things begin, whether an original or source can ever truly exist outside of its rewritings, and whether anything can be repeated in exactly the same way (Vidal Claramonte, 2023). These questions resonate with gender and queer critiques of originality, particularly in how 'original' forms of performing gender and sex are continually repeated, contested, and reconfigured. In this sense, critically thinking repetition also becomes a way of paraphrasing Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, where identity does not precede performance but emerges through reiterated acts that are open to disruption and resignification.

The following sections are structured according to the key components of an empirical article. Section 2 presents the methods and a general overview of the results based on the thematic coding stage. Section 3 offers an analysis of the source song, while Section 4 examines the cover versions by Lucía Méndez and Lissette, which are discussed together due to the melodramatic themes they share. Section 5 focuses on Melissa's song, expanding the analysis to include two later cover versions that helped transform her rendition into one more explicitly tied to representations of sexuality. These later versions illustrate how the song evolved from a rejection of traditional femininity into a piece that resonates with queer audiences, especially among gay male communities. Finally, Section 6, the concluding remarks, revisits the article's main argument and outlines potential directions for future research.

2. Research method and overall results

The general research method follows the steps and criteria of a collective case study (Yin, 2018). This approach involves the analysis of each song individually (methodologically considering each track a case), followed by a comparison of the results and interpretations across all cases. These stages align with the overall purpose of the study, which is operationalized in two stages: first, by identifying the themes conveyed in each song, and second, by examining how the thematic configuration of each song, when placed in contrast, reveals specific coordinates of gender construction. This approach also helps avoid a unidirectional comparison between the source song and its cover versions, which would reinforce a rigid original/copy dichotomy. Instead, it allows for an exploration of how translation and repetition have facilitated the song's transformation over time, particularly in its potential interpretations within LGBTQ+ imaginaries.

Table 1 summarizes the themes of Bertè's song and the three cover versions, providing a general overview of how the source themes were omitted, reinterpreted, or expanded through distinct lyrical and narrative perspectives on gender, agency, and emotional struggle. Bertè's source song, with its impressionist approach, presents themes of personal challenges, instability, and resilience, while rejecting traditional femininity

through fragmented and symbolic imagery. Regarding the cover versions in Spanish, one key difference is that Lucía Méndez and Lissette's versions take a narrative approach, emphasizing melodrama, romantic disillusionment, and emotional suffering.[3] Méndez's cover version focuses on marriage and domestic life, depicting a woman constrained by social expectations, passivity, and forms of abuse. Lissette's version centers on unfaithfulness and unhappiness, highlighting the pain of betrayal. Melissa's cover also takes a narrative approach but shifts toward a more assertive perspective and incorporates themes of self-determination and aspired liberation, where desire appears both as a source of shame and of self-affirmation.

Table 1. Summary of themes in the Spanish-language cover versions of "Non sono una señora"

		Loredana Bertè	**Lucía Méndez**	**Lissette**	**Melissa**
	Approach	Impressionist	Narrative	Narrative	Narrative
Theme	**Sub-themes**				
Personal challenges	*Instability*	+			+
	Resilience	+	+	+	+
Agency	*Aspired liberation*		+	+	
	Self-determination	+			+
Melodrama	*Love*		+	+	+
	Affair / unfaithfulness		+	+	+
	Pain / unhappiness		+	+	+
Desire	*Self-affirmation*				+
	Shame				+
	Revenge				+
Gender and society	*Social expectations and norms*	+	+	+	+
	Social condemn	+			
	Violence / abuse		+		
	Marriage / domestic life		+	+	
	Passivity		+	+	

[3] Bertè's own Spanish-language version of *'Non sono una signora'* appears in compilation albums from the early 2000s. However, its production seems to date back earlier, possibly around 1985, when singles by Italian artists were being produced in Mexico and Latin America. This *'Non sono una signora'* retains the impressionistic style of her source song but also introduces a narrative component. In this version, the lyrical subject directly addresses a second person, with whom she identifies, recounting shared experiences of hardship. Like the Italian version, it focuses more on personal struggles within the individual sphere but also includes the theme of love, which brings it closer to the other Spanish-language cover versions.

These themes will be further explored in detail in Sections 3, 4, and 5, where each version of the song will be analyzed in relation to the themes and representations conveyed through the lyrics. While the primary focus remains on lyrical content, each analysis will also include a brief presentation of the singer's persona. In the case of Lucía Méndez, the analysis will engage with her celebrity persona, particularly her prominence in Latin American popular culture. For Melissa and Lissette, who are comparatively less known on a continental scale, the discussion will focus on their repertoire and vocal style, which contribute to how their performances shape gendered and emotional narratives. Each section will also include descriptive comments on the composition and musical arrangement to provide a clearer sense of each version's sound and style. However, since these versions are widely available online and through music streaming platforms, readers are encouraged to listen to them while reading, as the sonic dimension offers important cues that go beyond textual analysis.

3. Fragmented imagery / impressionistic soundscape

'Non sono una signora' (Fossati, 1982) is one of Loredana Bertè's biggest hits. Written and composed by Ivano Fossati, a pop singer-songwriter, the song was released in 1982 and became widely recognized not only for its thematic complexity, which will be explored in the following paragraphs, but above all for Bertè's fragile yet melancholic interpretation and her unmistakable vocal quality. The song is built on a steady, mid-tempo rock groove, with prominent drumming. The electric guitar has rhythmic strumming and slightly distorted sound and is noticeable in the transitions between sections. The song also incorporates synthesizers and keyboards to provide atmospheric layers and texture to the verses and instrumental sections. Bertè's voice builds emotional intensity throughout the song, with its raspy texture shifting from vulnerability in the melancholic verses to a more defiant tone in the chorus. Her vocal delivery, combined with her stage persona and performance style, infuses the song with a rock edge, despite its formal pop structure.

Fossati and Bertè's song is rich in fragmented and impressionistic imagery, evoking emotions and moods rather than following a clear narrative. The song's impressionistic style—marked by evocative yet ambiguous symbolism—allows for multiple interpretations. For instance, the opening verses (see Table 2 below) leave conceptual gaps that invite different readings depending on Bertè's emotional delivery, the melody, and the musical arrangement.

Table 2. Excerpts from *'Non sono una signora'*

'Non sono una signora'	**Translation into English**
[Verse 1]	
La fretta del cuore è già una novità che dietro un giornale sta cambiando opinioni.	The rush of the heart is already something new behind a newspaper changing opinions.
[Verse 2]	
E il male del giorno è pochi chilometri a sud del mio ritorno, del mio buongiorno.	And the trouble of the day is a few kilometers south of my return, of my 'good morning'

The melancholic tone of the first lines suggests a sense of detachment or alienation, as if the popular discourse shaping people's lives overlooks the complexities of the inner world, which carries its own struggles. These themes of detachment and inner turmoil appear in the pre-chorus through references to constant hardship and precariousness, as in the line *"un volo a planare / dentro il peggiore motel"* (it's a gliding flight / into the worst motel) (pre-chorus 1). Additionally, the mention of a '*carretera'* (road) suggests a sense of rootlessness and emphasizes the instability and impermanence of a woman's journey. Meanwhile, the idea of a "dance-hall life" (*vita-balera*) creates a layer of irony by opposing the chaotic and difficult path to the notion of life as a performance or spectacle.

References to falling, being nailed to the wall, or crucified symbolize the constraints imposed by societal norms and personal challenges, contrasting with the metaphor of chasing the wind but being unable to reach it, which conveys a deep yearning for freedom and liberation. Additionally, lines such as *"sono una foglia d'argento / nata da un albero abbattuto qua"* (I am a silver leaf / born from a tree felled here) (verse 3) evoke a sense of pride and resilience despite unfavorable circumstances. As the song progresses, the lyrical subject shifts from expressing constant hardship and inner conflict to embracing imperfection and ultimately rejecting traditional expectations of femininity and societal roles, as emphasized in the refrain *"Non sono una signora"* (I'm not a lady). Since gender must always be understood as an intersectional critical category, the concept of femininity—and specifically, of having an 'appropriate' demeanor or being a '*signora'*—also carries class-based connotations. The ideal of proper behavior is not only gendered but also marked as belonging to a particular social class, reinforcing expectations tied to respectability, decorum, and status. In the cover versions that follow, these norms appear again, particularly through the lens of what is expected of women within marriage, often shaped by the class positions of the characters or personas involved.

4. Narrative feminine standpoints

4.1. Lucía Méndez's 'Ella es una señora'

Lucía Méndez is a Mexican celebrity whose career spans from the 1970s to the 2020s. She is widely recognized across Latin America, primarily for her acting roles in telenovelas over more than fifty years. Her musical career also began in the 1970s, particularly with ranchera music. Throughout the 1980s, she released eight studio albums and two compilation albums. Among these, her 1984 album, *Solo una mujer* (Just a Woman), featured a Spanish version of *'Non sono una signora'*, with writing credits to Ivano Fossati, the original composer, and Honorio Herrero, a Mexican songwriter and producer.

Compared to Bertè's original version, which runs for 3 minutes and 30 seconds, Méndez's cover slows the tempo, extending the song's duration to four minutes. Unlike the source version, where electric and bass guitars play a prominent role, Méndez's rendition replaces them with an electric organ that accompanies the drums throughout the track. The saxophone sections are retained in the bridge and final section of the song. A notable innovation in Méndez's version is the addition of string elements. The sound of a violin can

be heard at various points, giving the song a more pronounced ballad-like quality that aligns with its slower tempo.

This version, titled *'Ella es una señora'* (She is a lady) (Fossati and Herrero, 1984), introduces two key divergences from the Italian original. First, while the Italian lyrics present the lyrical subject as the protagonist, speaking in the first person, the Spanish version shifts to a third-person perspective, turning the narrator into an observer of a female character's experiences. This perspective is then used to directly address the woman's husband in the second person, drawing his attention to his wife's suffering (see Table 3 below). Second, and most strikingly, the title of the song as well as the refrain become an affirmative statement: whereas the Italian song rejected societal roles associated with being a '*signora'*, the lyrics in Spanish reaffirm the protagonist's gender and social position as a '*señora'* (She is a lady).

Table 3. Excerpts from 'Ella es una señora', written by Ivanno Fossati and Honorio Herrero

'Ella es una señora'	**Translation into English**
[Verse 3]	
Si no fuera porque vive asustada,	If only she weren't so afraid,
no pensaría en su libertad,	she would think about her freedom,
no pensaría en escapar de ti	she would think about escaping from you,
para poder volar.	so she could finally fly.
[Pre-chorus]	
De nada le vale	It's no use to her,
inventar disculpas para ti.	inventing excuses for you.
Y en su sitio espera.	And she waits in her place.
De qué puede valerle ahora.	What good can it do her now?

Méndez's song begins with imagery of domestic life and household chores ("the empty living room" in verse one, or "dinner is cold / and the children are in their room" in verse two), already marked by the absence and lack of consideration of the husband and father of the children. The pre-chorus introduces the idea that she is no longer in love and is exhausted from enduring his actions. Verse 3 references fear, which, within the context of the song, could suggest domestic violence (see Table 3 above). This interpretation is reinforced by the expressed desire to escape—first in a literal sense and later metaphorically, through the imagery of flying away. Additionally, verse 4 hints at an abusive relationship, as the lyrical subject conveys an inability to speak or reveal what is happening, possibly due to her husband's coercive control, *"ni poder hablar / por tus lazos atada / cada vez más fuerte"* (not be able to speak / bound by your ties / each time more tightly). As previously mentioned, her role as a '*señora'*—a devoted wife—is reaffirmed in the chorus, where it is made clear that her silence is an expectation imposed on her, even though it is destroying her.

The lyrics of Lucía Méndez's song gain additional layers of meaning when considered in relation to her celebrity persona, which has been deeply shaped by melodrama as a

genre, particularly through the *telenovelas* that defined much of her career. Her image as a telenovela star is even referenced in Sandra Cisneros's (1992) renown short story 'Woman Hollering Creek', where Cleófilas, the Mexican immigrant and protagonist, recalls Méndez's various roles as reinforcing the idea that one must endure hardships—such as separations and betrayals—in the name of love, always loving no matter what. In Cleófilas's memories, Méndez exists both as an actress and as a character, seamlessly blending fiction and reality. This dual identity is further emphasized by the fact that Méndez was also a singer, with her songs frequently featured in the opening and closing credits of the telenovelas she starred. In Méndez's case—as with other female stars in Mexico—*telenovelas*, melodrama, and music have intertwined to construct national and regional imaginaries around her, where gender and sexuality interact in ways that shape her career and influence her rise to stardom(Paxman, 2003; Cosentino, 2018). In this context, *'Ella es una señora'* aligns with the melodramatic tradition by reaffirming the proper and devoted conduct expected of both a melodrama heroine and her transmedia persona.[4]

4.2. Lissette's 'No soy una señora'

Also in 1984, Cuban-Puerto Rican singer Lissette Álvarez released her album *Caricatura*, which included her cover version of 'Non sono una signora'. Lissette's rendition, 'No soy una señora' (Fossati and Álvarez, 1984), was written in Spanish by Lissette herself and takes on a narrative approach. The lyrics center on a broken marriage caused by an affair and the husband's inconsiderate behavior toward the lyrical subject. A key theme, which can be compared to the Italian source song, is the wife's inability—within the socially defined feminine role—to act with agency. The arrangement of the song prominently features the electric organ, which stands out more than the drums and bass. A guitar can be heard at certain moments, as well as a synthesizer that produces a wavering, almost spectral sound that appears a couple of times throughout the track. The saxophone remains present, though not as a defining element of a soul-inspired arrangement—except in the song's final section—but rather as a melodic accompaniment to Lissette's voice. The song also has a slower tempo compared to *'Non sono una signora'*, extending its length to four minutes.

Some verse lines in Lissette's lyrics closely follow the structure of '*Non sono una signora'*. For example, in verse 2, *"lo llevaron mil kilómetros sur"* (They took him a thousand kilometers south) corresponds to *"è pochi chilometri a sud"* (it is a few kilometers south), while the pre-chorus retains the reference to the motel. Similarly, verse 4 includes *"más qué terrible fatiga"* (what a terrible burden) in place of *"ma che brutta fatica"* (what an exhausting effort), and just before the chorus, *"mas cómo recordarlo ahora"* (But how can I remember him now?) echoes *"ma come ricordarlo ora?"* (But how to remember him

[4] As a further comment on Lucía Méndez's music and the coherence sought with her celebrity persona, *'Ella es una señora'* is part of an album that includes both ballads and high-tempo songs focused in reinforcing conventional representations of femininity. The album's themes revolve around melodrama, love, and morality. One notable example is *'Padre nuestro'*, a musicalized version of the Lord's Prayer, which explicitly reflects the values Méndez's music conveys.

now?). These similarities suggest that while the Spanish version could have followed the more impressionistic style of the Italian lyrics, the cover version was carefully crafted to tell a structured narrative about a broken marriage. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of song translation as a form of constrained translation, as it highlights the various ways lyrics can be adapted beyond formal linguistic equivalence—an observation that also applies to Lucía Méndez's cover version. The inclusion of these specific parallels may have served as a deliberate nod to the original, creating a link between both versions while reshaping the song's meaning for a different audience.

The song begins by recalling a time in the marriage when the husband was devoted to his wife, *"la prisa […] por llegar […] y volar a mis brazos"* (the rush […] to get home […] and fly into my arms), but it quickly reveals how their relationship has deteriorated. She can no longer tolerate him, not only because of his arrogance (see verse 2 in Table 4 below) and his unconsidered attitudes (verse 3) but also due to his infidelity. This is emphasized in the pre-chorus, *"quiso escaparse / con cualquiera al peor motel"* (He wanted to run away / with just anyone to the worst motel,) and reinforced in verse 4, where she expresses exhaustion over his love affairs: *"terrible fatiga […] con sus aventuras"* (a terrible fatigue […] with his affairs). The husband's actions are framed as the cause of the lyrical subject's unhappiness and despair.

Table 4. Excerpts from 'No soy una señora', written by Ivanno Fossati and Lissette Álvarez

'No soy una señora'	**Translation into English**
[Verse 2]	
Cómo cambia el tiempo.	How time changes things.
Lo llevaron mil kilómetros sur	They took him a thousand kilometers south
de mi tolerancia,	of my tolerance,
con su arrogancia.	with his arrogance.
[Verse 3]	
Las mil y una noches	A thousand and one nights
de tertulia sin final	of endless conversations,
y recoger escombros	and picking up the wreckage
de sus amigos de insomnio.	of his insomniac friends.

The pre-chorus reveals that she has attempted to leave before but was unable to do so due to her fear of being alone. However, that fear no longer holds the same power over her, implying a growing determination to break free. The chorus then suggests that she will eventually find the strength to leave the marriage, as she acknowledges that she will no longer conform to the role of the dutiful wife or the *'señora'* at the expense of living life on her own terms. All these thematic components mobilize melodrama once again, reinforcing the portrayal of love relationships where the woman is largely characterized by essential passivity (see the previous section). This framework also suggests a possible connection with Lucía Méndez's version, given the thematic similarities. However, such a link remains speculative and becomes visible only from a temporal distance. Both covers were released

in the same year and coexisted within the Latin American soundscape of the 1980s, yet there is no evidence of direct influence or interaction between the versions or their production teams. Still, since speculation is part of any research endeavor, the relationship between the two versions may be imagined or conceptualized as a palimpsest.

Susam-Sarajeva (2019) proposes the notion of the palimpsest to account for the layered and non-linear relationships between source songs and cover versions. As she notes, "covers do not necessarily replace the 'original'" and "priority alone does not ensure absolute authority, and it certainly does not guarantee which version will be listened to first or most often" (p. 47). Without the need to account for which Spanish-language version was first, what remains is seeing them as part of a transformation process or, as said in the introduction, as repetitions carrying each its own meanings but also existing in cultural contexts with shared common beliefs about what it means being a woman, a lady, being married, all of them part of gender/sex system. Within this palimpsestic relationship, Lucía Méndez's and Lissette's versions appear to reference one another—not due to a shared creative origin, but through their engagement with a common cultural and gendered framework from which each draws elements that become intertextual echoes. This interrelation is most evident in their respective covers, whereas Melissa's version departs from this shared structure and marks a significant thematic and performative shift.

5. Melissa's 'No soy una señora': From gender to sexuality

Melissa Griffiths y Parra Del Riego, known artistically as Melissa, is a Peruvian Venezuelan singer who rose to fame in the 1980s. In 1983 and 1984, she released *Melissa* and *Melissa II*, respectively, both of which were primarily cover albums. Her debut album featured Spanish-language versions of songs originally performed by anglophone artists such as Pat Benatar ('Heartbreaker'), Petula Clark ('I Know a Place'), and Sheena Easton ('A Little Tenderness'), as well as a Spanish cover of the Italian song *'Canta'* by Drupi. Her second album, *Melissa II*, continued this trend, including Spanish versions of 'Time After Time' by Cyndi Lauper, 'Sweet Dreams' by Eurythmics, and 'Stand Back' by Stevie Nicks. It also featured cover versions of Italian songs, with the album's lead single, *'No soy una señora'*, becoming one of the defining and most representative songs of her career. The early years of Melissa's career must be understood within the context of Venezuela's 1×1 Decree, implemented in the 1980s during the government of Luis Herrera Campins. This policy required radio stations to play one song by a national artist—regardless of genre—for every song by a foreign artist that was broadcast. The decree significantly boosted the local music industry, facilitating the rise of artists like Melissa at a time when there was an insufficient volume of nationally produced music to balance the influx of foreign songs.

Melissa's version has a faster tempo than the previous two Spanish-language covers, with a length similar to Bertè's original (3 minutes and 28 seconds). In this version, the drums are consistently accompanied by the bass and the electronic organ. Additionally, an electric guitar plays a more prominent role than in the previous versions, most notably when it replaces the saxophone—shifting the song toward a more rock-oriented sound.

Melissa's voice also features a distinctive vibrato in the chorus, described as a "ronquito sabroso" (a slight but flavorful rasp) (Olavarrieta, 2024, 28:16), which became a signature element of her rock.

Melissa's cover version thematically centers on a love relationship as a key element of its narrative approach, introducing passion as both desire and pain. The song engages with societal expectations, as seen in *"La gente juzgar / cruzando opiniones"* (verse 1). These themes culminate in the chorus, where gender roles are explicitly challenged: *"No soy una señora / de una conducta intachable en la vida"* (I'm not a lady / one of impeccable conduct in life). The second line underscores external judgment and the pressure to conform, while also echoing the moral tone present in Lissette's cover version. The lyrics also depict total devotion to a lover—*"Yo creía en tus sentimientos / y vivía solo para ti"* (I believed in your feelings / I lived only for you) (verse 3)—followed by the realization of deception and betrayal—*"Preferiste seguir al viento / sin pensar en mí"* (You chose to follow the wind / without thinking of me) (verse 3) and *"Me usaste como un maniquí"* (You used me like a mannequin) (verse 4). From the start, pain is framed as an inevitable consequence of love—*"La herida de un hombre / no es una novedad"* (The wound of a man / is nothing new) (verse 1)—yet this suffering eventually gives way to resentment and disillusionment—*"Sacrificio absurdo"* (An absurd sacrifice) (pre-chorus 1) and *"una horrible aventura / una historia absurda"* (a terrible adventure [love affair] / an absurd story) (verse 4).

As previously outlined in Table 1, desire intertwines with these emotions, initially appearing as a source of downfall—leading to deception, shame, and disorientation, particularly in verse 2 and the first part of pre-chorus 1 (see Table 5 below). In these passages, desire appears to have placed the lyrical subject in a position of subjection to the other, as if surrendering to someone else's will. This dynamic echoes Bertè's original song, where the tone is similarly marked by lament. However, this tone quickly gives way to a stance of self-affirmation and defiance.

Table 5. Lyrics of *'No soy una señora'*, written by Ivanno Fossati and Peter Daniels

"No soy una señora"	**Translation into English**
[Verse 2]	
Empiezo otro día	I start another day,
un par de kilómetros más,	a few kilometers further,
sin horizonte,	without a horizon,
sin nadie a quien le importe.	without anyone who cares.
[Pre-chorus 1]	
Dejando mis sueños	Leaving my dreams
en el cuarto de cualquier motel,	in the room of any motel,
con la cara cubierta,	with my face covered,
con la vida revuelta.	with my life in turmoil.

The verse lines *"Dejé de ser tuya / fui de otro como fui de ti"* are particularly revealing in relation to the theme of desire—not because they state it explicitly, but because

they veil references to eroticism and sexuality. The first line translates literally as "I stopped being yours," but it is the second—*"fui de otro como fui de ti"*—that encapsulates multiple layers of meaning:

- I belonged to someone else just as I belonged to you.
- I gave myself to someone else, just like I gave myself to you.
- I was with someone else the same way I was with you.

This line strongly implies sexual and emotional agency. The phrasing evokes the language of possession, but the speaker subverts it by applying the same logic to both partners, suggesting equivalence—or even disposability—in how love and intimacy unfold. The tone carries a sense of liberation through repetition (*fui* and *fui*), with a hint of irony. It goes beyond marking the end of one relationship and the beginning of another; it suggests a deliberate, even defiant, reclaiming of the speaker's body and desire. In general, Melissa's cover version hints at a past lived through secrecy or marginality, but on the speaker's own terms—revealing that the lyrical subject was not merely acted upon, but was also a deciding and desiring figure, capable of loving furtively and intentionally.

Among the Spanish-language versions, Melissa's cover version is the only one that has stood the test of time. Much like Bertè's original, Melissa's version has become a reference point for subsequent covers by Spanish-speaking singers, a sign of its cultural resonance. This endurance can be attributed to its thematic innovation at the time. On the one hand, Melissa's cover is the only version that frames desire as a relational force beyond heteronormative institutions such as marriage and domestic life. On the other hand, desire and melodrama stand in contrast—whereas Méndez and Lissette's versions center on heteronormative romance characterized by deep suffering, Melissa's version overturns this by positioning desire as a pathway to self-definition and agency. Desire also expands the theme of love by introducing a more explicitly sexual dimension. In this version, the lyrical subject emerges as an active, desiring figure, which marks a distinct shift in the narrative focus of the song.

Two artists have most notably covered Melissa's '*No soy una señora'*: Mexican singer María José in 2009, and Spanish drag artist Chumina Power in her 2017 album entitled *No soy una señora*, where she reinterpreted various 1980s hits with a house music twist to appeal to gay club audiences.[5] María José, also known as La Josa, released *Amante de lo ajeno (*Lover of What is Not One's Own)*,* a cover album conceived as a tribute to various female artists ('divas') from the 1980s. Her version of *'No soy una señora'* was an electropop reinterpretation that prominently showcased her vocal talent. Much like Melissa's 1984 album, both María José's and Chumina's cover albums functioned as anthologies, curating

[5] There is a compelling audiovisual link between Melissa's cover version and queer transformation through its inclusion in the critically acclaimed Venezuelan Spanish film *Azul y no tan rosa* (My Straight Son) (2012). The film explores themes such as coming out to family, self-acceptance, homophobic violence, and trans identities. In a pivotal sequence, a gay character is brutally assaulted while, in parallel, scenes depict other characters at a gay club watching a drag queen lip-sync Melissa's *'No soy una señora'*. The intercutting of these scenes weaves together queer vulnerability and resilience, suggesting that the song—performed in drag—functions as both a site of collective identification and a sonic form of resistance.

collections of songs that were emblematic of a decade. While Melissa's album represented a promise of accessing modernity through the Spanish-language reinterpretation of international music, María José and Chumina's records functioned as a nostalgic return to a past era—for example refractions of sounds, a fantasy echo, as will be explored in the final section of this paper. As a song that has traveled extensively through time, covers, and translation, multiple voices have borrowed its ownership—not by contesting originality, but by leaving space for interpretation and asserting its meanings across new contexts and audiences.

'No soy una señora' provides a grammatical space for play, where Spanish-speaking queer men can easily subvert the feminine marker *-a* in '*señora'*. Through a rhetorical move of camp talk or linguistic *mariconeo*, they can feminize themselves or each other, reclaiming and resignifying the phrase within queer discourse. [6] However, the queer affordances of this cover version extend beyond its linguistic dimension. They also emerge through the embodied trajectory of María José as a singer and performer, whose nearly four-decade career has consistently appealed to queer audiences. As a performer, María José embodies the notion of a diva, whose voice serves as a semiotic anchor for resignifying songs and providing audiences with a space to explore their identities and desires (Jennex, 2013). Taking the body and performance of the diva as a sign in itself (Dyer, 2004), María José engages in her own translation work and reshapes the emotional core of Melissa and Loredana Bertè's songs through the power of her vocal expression (Smith, 2025, p. 83). María José's connection to queer performance also stems from her early career as a member of the Mexican pop group Kabah, which she was part of from its formation in 1992 until its disbandment in 2005. Kabah's queer appeal lies in its camp aesthetics, theatrical performances, and themes of self-discovery and belonging, all of which deeply resonate with LGBTQ+ audiences. The group's choreographed dance routines and gender-fluid styling further align with queer performative sensibilities, which contributed to solidify both Kabah and María José as enduring icons of self-expression and empowerment in LGBTQ+ spaces.

6. Concluding remarks: gender, fantasy, echo

This study has traced the multiple trajectories of '*Non sono una signora'* as it moved across time, languages, and cultural contexts, primarily through interlingual cover versions. Across all cover versions, societal roles remain central concerns, particularly in how social norms, condemnation, and expectations shape the lyrical subject's experience. In Bertè's song, themes of hardship in the lyrical subject's life appear more personal and confined to the private sphere. As a result, the song's affirmation of selfhood seems directed toward individuals, particularly individual women, rather than a collective. Lucía Méndez's and Lissette's covers function similarly in relation to melodrama, reinforcing the connection between personal struggles and the broader cultural frameworks that shape expectations of women's roles and lives. These themes, which reflect social structures, can be

[6] For an exploration of how the feminine grammatical marker in Spanish can be utilized by queer audiences of popular music, see Villanueva-Jordán and Martínez Pleguezuelos (2025).

interpreted as gender representations, as they embed critiques of systemic inequalities. The imagery of the household and institutions like marriage incorporate key elements of gender critique, particularly the sexual division of labor and the embodied experience of dependency among women who dedicate themselves to domestic life as housewives.

Rather than viewing these covers as mere offshoots of an original artifact, this analysis has shown how each iteration expands the possibilities of the Italian song. The transformation of *'No soy una señora'* from a defiant rejection of traditional femininity into a song mobilizing queer relationalities is not merely a shift in lyrics or performance style; it reflects a broader cultural process of resignification, where song translation creates multiple points of encounter between gender, language, and sexuality. A key theoretical insight from this study is that repetition and translation do not simply reproduce meaning but instead decenter and destabilize it. With each version, *'No soy una señora'* has moved further from the monist logic of an original source and has shown how popular music functions as a site of gendered negotiations, where voices, performances, and meanings remain in flux.

Framing the themes of early 1980s songs within the contexts of Italy and Latin America requires questioning the relevance of a feminist stance as a prerequisite for a gender critique. This means avoiding a binary classification of the Spanish-language covers based on whether they align with a feminist perspective. Even in the case of Bertè's song, applying a feminist framework to interpret the lyrics' context can be problematic. In Italy, feminist discourse only began to gain traction in public debate in the mid-1980s with more accessible proposals, such as *affidamento*—a practice of symbolic and political alliance between women that emphasized relational authority and the transmission of knowledge between generations (Cicioni, 1989). In Latin America, women's movements initially emerged to resist dictatorships and address specific political struggles, but their connection to activist and academic feminism developed more fully over the course of the 1980s (Lux and Pérez Pérez, 2020; Fernández Anderson, 2021). While an activist perspective remains ethically and politically valid, it can introduce research methodological biases that obscure micropolitical expressions within these songs—expressions that may not have influenced translation decisions before the formation of explicitly feminist identities and subjectivities with a defined political agenda.

This analytical and theoretical distinction between gender and feminism does not negate the epistemological relationship between the two concepts, nor the connection between social movements and their gender agendas. However, it is important to recognize that not all gender constructs are inherently pro- or anti-feminist. This distinction becomes particularly relevant when considering how contemporary cultural artifacts and industries incorporate gender themes as part of their commercial appeal. These integrations often align with emerging configurations of gender discourse, such as post-feminism or broader cultural labels like 'woke' or 'culture wars', which reflect shifts in how gender is framed and marketed in popular culture. Exploring texts inductively allows for the identification of

common themes across cover versions—such as melodrama, which is not necessarily linked to feminism—that help structure narratives about gender.

One final theoretical link can be established as this study concludes. This final consideration draws from Joan Scott's (2001) concept of 'fantasy echo', which examines the limits and possibilities of imagining the past in relation to identity politics and collective belonging. Cultural artifacts contribute to the construction of a shared past, as they shape both individual and collective subjectivities. This process holds the potential for creating, recovering, and affirming identities. However, Scott reminds us that this fantasy must always be understood as an echo—something that resonates but does not originate from a fixed reality. *'Non sono una signora'* was not conceived as a feminist or queer anthem; its past did not follow a predetermined path toward cultural or social transformation. Instead, its contemporary significance has emerged through layers of resonance, as different iterations, repetitions, and recontextualizations have shaped its meaning over time. The song does not recover a queer past that was already there; rather, it has acquired its meaning through successive stages of refraction, as translation and repetition have allowed it to evolve into what it represents today for certain audiences.

Future research could further explore how translation and repetition shape queer archives, particularly in relation to popular music and non-normative affective economies. Tracing the afterlives of songs in drag performances, club cultures, and digital remixing practices could provide deeper insights into how music translation not only bridges languages but also reconfigures desires, identities, and histories across time and space.

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