

## 2.4 Lesboqueer Culture in electronic dance music scene in Spain

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**A b s t r a c t**

From the beginning of the twenty-one century a lot of women's collective DJs are emerging around the world working on the idea to make visible women in EDM scene. In the case of Spain, I focus my attention on a collective women DJs in 2002 in Barcelona with the purpose of subverting the sexual stereotypes around of electronic dance music into the club culture. This work presents the pathway of *LesFatales's* collective in Barcelona in relation to its DIY way to work and its affinity with queer identities. The aims of this paper will be to explain this kind of project, pioneering in provide a particular electronic music scene related to queer identities, wit a feminist perspective and a guide for other collectives in Spain, that join a lot of people 15 years ago displaying different subjectivities and non-normative sexual identities around electric music scene.

**Keywords:** *Women's collective's dJs, electronic dance music, club culture, queer identities.*

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## 1. Overview

In this paper I would like to explain the meaning and the reason to be of the musical activity of lesboqueer women in the electronic dance music scene in Spain. First of all, I would like to clarify the term 'lesboqueer', which I use as a way to describe the protagonists of this story: 'women who like women' but who do not take part in the commodified mainstream culture for lesbian girls while they consume music in a lesbian club. Next, I would like to talk about 'scene' and 'subculture' (Bennett, 2004, 2015) in popular music from an interdisciplinary view. Cultural studies, sociology and ethnomusicology help us to understand the relations among music and space in the construction of identity. We consider this research within the current concept of 'scene', as a scholarship analysis's model which include the study of social meaning in the music as a contemporary source in daily life. Otherwise the term 'subculture' it used here necessarily to underscore the queer identities features related to this culture club which are working in contrast with dominant culture. After exposing these terms we will be prepared to introduce the study case, a DJs women collective located in Barcelona (Spain) whose name is *LesFatales*. Looking at their case, we can know more about how different but similar collectives are working around the world to make women DJs visible in a global queer identity scene.

## 2. Reason to be

The first point will be to contextualize our case study as it relates to the underground scene of electronic dance music in Barcelona (Spain), to queer identities and to club culture. The work of different writers like Andy Bennet, Ola Johansson, Sheyla Whiteley, McRobbie, Susan Driver, Jodie Taylor, et cetera helps me explain what I mean when I talk about 'scene' and in other lesboqueer subculture. The idea is to have a theoretical basis taken from subcultures studies in the last decade to understand minority groups (women, people of color, mid-lowerclass people) as active agents constructing their identities in interaction with electronic dance music in club culture environment.

We know that around popular music many subcultures have been expressed while they were constructing their resistant identities against dominant culture and politics. All subcultures created around popular music means in every historic moment a different way of expressing collective identity. In this process the music is a merging and constructing agent that works towards making the identity through interactions with people. One of the places where that happens it's the club and the aim of this research is to understand the sociocultural meanings in a queer and postfeminist scene.

In relation to this idea, Jack Halberstam (who has studied queer musical subcultures in the United States) emphasizes the importance of queer subcultures in opposition to mainstream gay and lesbian culture (2006, p.8). He informs about the power of media to present queer subcultures in a "voyeuristic and predatory" way which recognized and incorporated them at the same time. So this, one of the activist principles of queer culture is to oppose commodification to the mainstream culture that exists in gay and lesbian communities.

In the context of electronic music of our case study, this principle tries to create other socio-musical spaces outside of commercial leisure, a safe place to construct and reinforce plural sexual identities in interaction with music in

the space of club culture. With this idea we aim at the statement supported by musical sociologist and subcultural studies scholars who state that “popular music production and consumption is a vital resource in self-making and an integral node in the lifeworlds, collective identification and resistance practice of people” (Taylor, 2013, p.197)

### 3. Queer subculture in the electronic music scene

According to Jodie Taylor, “queer subcultures become generative spaces where queer feelings, identities, experiences and politics are frequently expressed and negotiated in aesthetic terms: that is, through style” (Taylor, 2013, p.194). This idea is valid to explain how *Lesfatales* collective was emerging at the beginning of this century to resist commodification of lesbian clubs, and above all, to propose another kind of musical taste associated to lesbian women in night clubs. At the same time *Lesfatales* was joining people (at the beginning only lesbian and queer women) around a different style made of:

- A particular electronic music genre (techno, minimal, electroclash) featured for the diversity between Karol Dj aka Elektroduenda (Electrovarieté) and DJ Rosario.
- An idea of freedom to express a plural visibility of different sexualities among women included their ways to dance, to dress, to be in the club. For example, in 2008 when I met this party/collective in Barcelona the first time I could see how women showed their breast while they were in front of the stage dancing crazy and uninhibited.
- A feminist activism to get more women playing electronic music in the clubs and supporting different social issues related to sexuality, inequality, and violence against women.
- An idea of DIY management to be able to do all these things freely.

Because of this, we can say that the *Lesfatales* collective have made a type of queer subculture around electronic music against patriarchal ideology, as an example that queer subcultures can produce alternative temporalities as J. Halberstam (2006, p.2) states: “by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death”. Another important question into this idea of temporalities is to find intergenerational people participating in this party, thus changing the conventional concept of youth and adulthood alongside race, class and maturity.

All these reasons conform a style into this queer subculture as Halberstam (2006, p.2) say paraphrasing Stuart Hall and Judith Butler around the term of ‘ritual’ as: “motion as a practice that can either reinforce or disrupt cultural norms”. But I dare to affirm that this queer subculture is part of a global scene: in the last decade many different collectives are emerging around the world with more or less the same principles and style (as I just say above with a feminist activism into electronic music). According to Bennet (2004) we can say

that this subculture take place in three ways: as a local, trans-local, and virtual scene. Because these options satisfy a socio-musical necessity that happen in every city, but at the same time there exists networking among collectives and women artist in electronic music scene with similar perspective who also connect virtually through different platforms like *female: pressure; pinknoises; shemakesnoise*.

Since the year 2000 there has been an increase of collectives of women DJs with a queer/feminist perspective constructing a network to provide more visibility to these artists, and simultaneously joining non-binary people (lesbian, queer, trans, and so on) in festivals, clubs, and parties. In this sense we can talk about a multi scene like a contracultural phenomenon “around stylistic and/or musicalized association as face-to-face contact in a venue, club or other urban setting” as Straw claims, where “memberships are not necessarily restricted according to class, gender or ethnicity, but may cut across all of these” (Bennett, 2004, p.225). Without a doubt we can consider the term “scene” here like a juxtaposition of electronic dance music, identity and place where these collectives are constructing other kind of cultural production and identities representations in local, translocal and virtual scenes. Some examples are *Room4Resistance* in Berlin, *Discwoman* in Brooklyn NY, *Girls Gone Vinyl* in Chicago, etc.

I would like to underline *The Mahoyo Project*, a creative collective from Sweden set up by three women (MyNa Do, Pia Do, Farah Yusuf) who work as filmmakers, photographers, DJs, club organizers and stylists. Their multicultural and racial diversity joined the arts and culture scene since 2008, establishing a wide network worldwide. Through transnational collaborations, they try to constantly challenge the status quo and push the limits where creativity becomes a weapon to challenge norms, structures and stereotypes. While they have Swedish nationality, they were born in China and Somalia, and recently traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa to collaborate with local artists who have counterparts in the creative scene in Stockholm where the collaboration continues. In both places we see a budding movement where norms and stereotypes are challenged. With this collective as proof I would like to support the idea of “aesthetics of heterogeneity” a term used by Jodie Taylor (2013, p.199) to describe how these queer women artists manipulate and reconstitute a variety of translocal popular music forms. This fluidity between musical genres are included into the sessions of *Mahoyo Project* as a mix of hip-hop, R&B, dancehall, Kuduro and House music. This is a feature existing in a queer music style according to a plural, openminded and sexually diverse perspective in all queer scene.

#### 4. *Knowing's work in Spain*

Certainly, we can say that *Lesfatales*, like the other collectives named above, have been making a particular musical scene based on electronic dance music (I will talk about what kind of music this is) and participating in a feminist/queer way to create the party and their sessions. According to Johansson, music works here as “a cultural form that actively produces geographic discourses and can be used to understand broader social relations and trends, including identity, ethnicity, attachment to place, cultural economies, social activism and politics” (2009: 2). In this sense above all, *LesFatales* has growned in a DIY project with a feminist/queer perspective.

I have to say that Barcelona, where this collective emerged in 2002, is the principal capital of electronic music in Spain, celebrating an important festival, SONAR every year for the last 25 years. This tells us that *LesFatales* was rising in a city with an electronic music scene but which lacked representation of women artists. In addition, the members of the collective wanted to create an alternative musical culture around the lesbian nightlife in Barcelona, apart from the commercial music normally consumed in lesbian clubs. Karol Villalon, aka Elektroduenda and Charo Salas, aka Dj Rosario founders of *LesFatales* with Gemma Delaguer aka Punto G -the VJ who does the visual performance- thought to generate this party to provide an alternative to nightlife's commodification and to make a DIY space where unknown women DJs could DJ. In a flyer for a party on 2 July 2008 we can read an autodescription of their objective:

*Lesfatales Faktory, a women's collective emerges from the necessity to create a representative platform in this area. Our aim is to facilitate interrelationships among artists and at the same time to help their external promotion by offering multidisciplinary sessions with quality and variety, which in other ways were more limited and restricted. So, here we are! Ready to fill your nights and to grow with every beat surrounded by vinyls and projections to make you dance until daylight with our DJs: Elektroduenda, Neopinchadiscos, Cosmic, Dj Rosario, Cliché. Dance and dance...Elektropop, House, Elektroclash, Minimal, Elektro... Go with the flow by visuals mix of Punto G.*

These parties were only for (lesbian) women at the beginning, and for non-binary people after. At that time, they were located in a workshop where Karol was working as a sculptor, but that on Sunday afternoons she transformed into a private club. There was not only a party with electronic dance music (not commercial) and Riot grrrl music, but they also organized exhibitions of photography, drag king workshop or even DJing classes (called 'Mamá quiero ser Dj') for women. Then they started to play in LGBTQ events in Barcelona and at the same time started writing fanzines with a feminist perspective. As more and more women were attending their events *LesFatales* moved to a bigger venue called *Pigalle* in a central street of the Gracia neighborhood. It is important to note that while this collective was growing, there were others emerging in Madrid and Bilbao (Clitpower and SoyTomboy respectively) in contact with them and doing some collaborations between 2006 and 2008.

At this point *LesFatales* was doing a monthly party frequently in other alternative and well-known venue in 'Gracia' neighborhood called KGB from 2008 to 2012 when they moved definitively to Nitsa Club in 'Sala Apolo', close to Rambla in the downtown area, an important venue for electronic music in Barcelona. Since 2012 they have been doing parties in the same DIY way but with less frequency. At the moment *LesFatales* have at least a party once a year, because their members are working in different projects. Karol, for example, is doing a workshop called Deepdance linked to mindfulness.

From the beginning *LesFatales* have collaborated with other collectives in

social justice causes all linked to feminism and alternative leisure in streets' parties in Barcelona in the 'Barrio de Gracia' o 'Poble Sec' neighborhoods. Lately they have been organizing other parties in the afternoon called 'vermut electrónico' in smaller venues linked to alternative and queer people. An example was the last year in a Social and anarchist Centre in Poble Sec named 'Mundis Jauja'. There they were a party collaborating in an altruistic way to take in money for refugees. With the provocative slogan "Queer Parties Made in BCN with Love and Lust" (invented since 2010) Lesfatales celebrated fifteen years last summer. As they tell us: we have spent fifteen years 'fatalenado'!"

In sum, you can see a DIY perspective in their work translated not only in the self-management of the party. The way that they show and make the logo and the pictures/flyers could be described as 'neopunk' (Bennett & Guerra, 2019). Another relevant feature of LesFatales is how they set out a dresscode for their audience in every party naming it from an ironic point of view and subverting mainstream pictures and events introducing camp elements. For instance: halloqueer parties, vuelta al cole, la virgen del vinilo 2.0...)

In addition, I would like to call attention to the visuals which Punto G shows are based on women's body deconstructing and subverting aesthetics representations and stereotypes allocates to female body but she gives it a new meaning something like rage, fury, desire, anxiety, and so on. Then, these bodies are not related to a normative erotic, but rather they change our vision in a post-pornography way (LesFatales have collaborated with post-pornography collectives like Post-Op in some parties). Punto G VJ deconstructing a binarism view of the body and sexuality juxtaposing concepts as: masculinity/femininity; crazy/subjectivity; fetishism/technology... mixing different pictures with strong contrast and saturated colors on black, white and red background. These female representations go against the idea of woman as a sexual object and more towards a power referent. An interesting detail that stands out is how every LesFatales's party finishes with a particular song which creates a sort of community and mutual understanding among the crew. Its about the musical French group Justice (electro house, electroclash music), the song 'We are your friends' (2006). In that video we can see this song ringing at the end of the last party in January creating a sort of involvement among people.

Finally, I would like to sum up what kind of music and different artists were working in LesFatales's parties. In addition, in the last party in January this year the famous DJ Cora Novoa a renowned Spanish artist, composer and producer was playing beside LesFalates.

## 5. Conclusion

LesFatales emerged out of the necessity to offer a space to give visibility to women DJs who like playing electronic dance music outside of mainstream music. At the same time, they were constructing a place for lesbian and queer people doing it in a DIY way using different underground, alternative and legendary locals in Barcelona. Above all, they have been producing a 'subcultural capital' (Thorthon, 1995) in the queer electronic scene in their city but in contact with other collectives and parties in other points of Spain (Guerra et al., 2018). As I claim in this paper, this collective is part of a global scene with the same principles and feminist/queer perspective within the underground electronic music scene, making events, parties, and even festivals with a DIY intention.

Last but not least, I conclude that this study case is within the four points underlined by J. Halberstam and Jodie Taylor (2013, p.199) “in order to claim queer territory and establish queer visibility in contemporary subcultural studies”. Queer subcultures blur traditional distinctions between those who study and archive culture and those who make and consume culture. I recall that this study is based on an autoethnographic way calibrated it with subcultures and queer studies. This research considered the analysis of the leisure pursuits of queer and lesbian girls, so this I call them lesboqueer culture, paying attention to women not proposed by the dominant subcultural narrative, but now recuperated by post-subcultural studies (Jack Halberstam, Maria Pini, Sara Thorthon, Jodie Taylor, Rosa Reitsamer ...). This research (a part of my dissertation on 2015) is like an archive to describe, to tell, to record this subcultural production which enable to know it and to continue in the future providing a queer discourse into queer electronic scene. Queer subcultures are not always youth-centric as subculturalists often remain active participants well into middle-age. Myself as a ‘insider’ researcher and middle-age ‘young’ have participated in the party meanwhile I check other ‘young’ people like me.

In the end, I could say that the particular style of lesboqueer culture in the electronic scene conform a ‘heterogeneous aesthetic’ which comprise in the same party different kind of music according to different works of women DJs in the same party. This musical scene is in conjunction with a plural sexualities, identities and subjectivities which are participating in that kind of parties “to mark distinction, affiliation and communal identification in radically different ways to many hetero, lesbian and gay subcultures” (Taylor, 2013, p.199).

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