

**On Photography and Sound:
Sonic Landscapes and
Multidimensional Narratives**

A conversation between Edna Martinez
and Dzekashu MacViban

In the following exchange, Dzekashu MacViban engages with Edna Martinez, DJ, and curator for music and sonic practices at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Raised in Colombia and rooted in Colombian-Caribbean sound traditions »where music permeates everyday life,« Martinez's love of sound as a medium, narrative, and methodology stems from her deep connection to music, the everyday, and people.

Here, Martinez talks about what her practice as a photographer has in common with sound journaling, about El Volcán, a series of events unique in Germany around the Colombian-Caribbean picó sound system culture, and about the Sonic Pluriverse festival, which premiered at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt last summer.



El Volcán, Berlin, first and only picó sound system culture night in Germany.
Photo: Dalis Pacheco

Edna Martinet playing at Báhidora.
Photo: Jazmin H.

Dzekashu MacViban: The relationship between sound and photography is a good entry point into this conversation because your work lies at the intersection of sonic investigations and photographic inquiry. How would you describe your journey to the aforementioned practices?

Edna Martinez: I graduated from the photography program at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig (HGB) and completed a curating certificate course at UDK. My interest in this medium evolved from traditional elements of documentary photography and conceptual art to encompass interdisciplinary approaches such as research, installation, video, and essays. Through my research, I discovered the importance of sound as a medium, but also as a document and its potential to enhance storytelling, sometimes serving as a bridge to music, which has always been a significant part of my life. Growing up in the Colombian Caribbean, where music permeates daily life – from taxis to households and streets – I was surrounded by the picó sound system culture, which is strongly influenced by the advent of technology and vinyl records. Photography and sound intersect in captivating ways, transcending fixed historical or social contexts, the dynamic of interaction allows audiences to engage with the aesthetic experiences interpreting the work in multiple ways. My goal is to underscore the potential for art to open spaces, thereby transcending the limitations of its perceived context.

DMV: You mentioned how music was everywhere around you when you were growing up. Did you always know that music would be part of your practice, and how did your research into archival sound develop into the current curatorial positions and methodologies you practice today?

EM: Growing up surrounded by the sonic landscape of the Colombian Caribbean, I couldn't have predicted the profound impact it would have on my artistic journey. Nevertheless, its omnipresence deeply influenced my sensibilities and memories, ultimately shaping my interdisciplinary exploration. Photography serves as my starting point, allowing me to seamlessly integrate interviews, archival sound research, and sonic journaling into my practice. This immersion in sound has enabled me to engage deeply with communities in which oral traditions and sonic practices have evolved alongside technological advancements. I view sound

as a potent tool for enriching storytelling and enhancing audience experiences. Drawing from my DJ practice, I've learned to navigate music contexts, sound production, research, and performance, while also understanding the role of the music industry. These experiences propelled me toward adopting a curatorial position and methodologies that prioritize interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches. As a mediator between artists, audiences, venues, or institutions, I strive to expand understanding of the role of sound in both arts and life, fueling my commitment to crafting multidimensional narratives that resonate with audiences on various levels and contexts.

DMV: Can you talk about the work you have done with different communities, and how this cuts across different narrative aesthetics, from activating communities to carnival?

EM: My work with various communities has been deeply enriching and diverse, spanning different narrative aesthetics and cultural contexts. One aspect involves activating communities through participatory projects like workshops, gatherings, events series that empower individuals to share their stories and perspectives through music, dance, sound, film screenings, and other artistic mediums. These projects often aim to amplify voices and dialogues that are marginalized or underrepresented, fostering understanding and sensibility within the community. Additionally, I've been involved in several cultural constellations such as drum encounters from Palenque in Colombia, the Carnival of Cultures in Berlin, *Alba* magazine, which publishes Latin American literature in German, YAAM: Young African Market, and in Berlin I've founded projects such as LatinArab, working with the Arab diaspora in the Americas via Berlin, or El Volcán, the first and only picó sound system culture night in Germany. I collaborate closely with community members to capture the vibrant energy and traditions of these gatherings. Through these experiences, I've witnessed how art can serve as a catalyst for social cohesion and collective expression, transcending linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries to create meaningful connections and shared experiences among diverse communities.

DMV: An important part of your work explores sound as a facilitator of cultures of resistance. Could you talk about the different musical traditions, such as Champeta, that have influenced your work in this regard?

EM: Sound is a vital aspect of cultures of resistance, and my work explores how various traditions, such as Champeta, which in its beginnings was called *terapia*, have shaped and influenced this narrative. The musical genre Champeta, originating from Afro-Colombian communities on the Caribbean coast, emerged as a form of resistance against cultural marginalization and oppression. Its first lyrics often convey messages of social justice, resilience, and solidarity, serving as a means of empowerment and cultural preservation. It also played a very important role for the Afro-Colombian identity to be acknowledged in a country with a pregnant history of violence and colonialism.

By incorporating elements of Champeta into my artistic practice, I aim to amplify the voices and stories of these communities, shedding light on their resilience and creativity in the face of adversity. It's also about bringing these sounds into different contexts and opening spaces of exchange and experimenting. Through photography, sound recordings, and collaborative projects, I seek to honor and celebrate these traditions while also fostering dialogue and solidarity among diverse audiences. Ultimately, my exploration of sound as a facilitator of cultures of resistance is rooted in a deep respect for the transformative power of music and its ability to inspire healing, social change, and collective action.

DMV: One aspect of your curation in sonic practices explores and maps the relation between countries that

are separated by geography, yet share incomparable sonic, cultural, and historical similarities. One of such projects is the Sonic Pluriverse Festival at Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Could you shed more light on this?

EM: The Sonic Pluriverse Festival debuted at Haus der Kulturen der Welt's 2023 summer celebration, *Acts of Opening Again*, succeeding the renowned Wassermusikfestival. With a loyal following and a captivating history, the latter left a lasting impression on the city. I recall the joyous moments spent immersing myself in wonderful concerts on the HKW terrace, nestled in the heart of the city, which now under the new director, Prof. Dr. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, has been renamed as the Paulette Nardal Terrace.

My curatorial endeavors center around immersive soundscapes that explore the intricate connections and interactions between diverse geographies and cultures. It's a dialogue with resonance between tradition and contemporary expressions, rooted in a spirit of restitution. Within the framework of the annual thematic of Music & Sonic Practices program, the Sonic Pluriverse Festival plays its role. Last year, under the theme »Congorama,« we embarked on a transatlantic journey exploring three distinct locales: the Congo Basin, Congo Mirador, and Congo Square. This year's overarching theme, »Terapia,« sets the stage for the Sonic Pluriverse Festival. Guided by the healing practices of the Afro diaspora, the festival promises to be a transformative experience, resonating with the rhythms of cultural conversations and resilience.

Edna Martinez is a DJ and curator for music and sonic practices at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. She was born and raised in Colombia. Martinez studied photography at the Academy of Arts Leipzig (HGB) and completed curatorial training at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). She is also one of the driving forces behind projects such as El Volcán, a series of events that is unique in Germany around the Colombian-Caribbean picó sound system culture, and LatinArab, a format that traces Arab migration in the Americas and its diaspora. Once a month, Martinez hosts a show on NTS Radio and Radio Alhara.

Dzekashu MacViban is a publisher of African literature and curator of literature and orature practices at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. He is the founder of Bakwa Books, a Cameroon-based publishing house. He was previously editorial manager at *This is Africa* and has been guest editor at Schlosspost and *Solitude Journal*.