In 2008 several videos appeared on YouTube featuring Los Chikitukus de Chuschi, a group of indigenous musicians from the Southern Andes of Peru. Shot in and around their hometown of Chuschi, the videos featured the group’s members performing the town’s chimaycha music and demonstrating its distinctive customs. Male musicians sported wool ponchos while lead singer Carmen Rosa Minas Quispe wore fancy festival attire, including colorful blouses and pollera skirts. All wore Chuschi’s distinctive embroidered hats, an emblem of indigeneity throughout the Department of Ayacucho, where Chuschi is located. The Quechua-language songs they sang were accompanied by nylon-stringed guitar and by chinlili, a small guitar played only in and near Chuschi. They dealt with thwarted love, erotic sentiment, and outmigration, perennial themes in Andean song. However, they also spoke of injustice, decrying centuries of colonial domination that have left Peru’s indigenous majority poor and marginalized. A few were more specific, denouncing the violence that engulfed Ayacucho between 1980 and the mid-1990s, when it became the central theater of conflict between Shining Path guerrillas and the Peruvian state. Despite such content, the videos looked like nothing so much as the spots that tourist boards in Peru, as elsewhere, devise to promote local attractions. Over several clips the musicians sang and danced their way through plunging valleys, grassy plains, cornfields, waterfalls, and finally the paved plazas and adobe walls of Chuschi’s small-town streetscape, presenting all the human and environmental diversity of their district.

Videos like these were the preferred medium for promoting and distributing Andean popular music in early twenty-first-century Peru and in neighboring Bolivia (Stobart 2010 and 2011). Some of them were indeed meant to lure outsiders via artful presentation of village attractions. However, Los
Chikitukus’ videos were not, and they presented some elements that may have confused viewers seeking vacation destinations. The youthful vigor of the singing voices, for instance, did not quite square with the images of lip-synching middle-aged performers. Several of the featured landscapes were not especially remarkable, and some of the scenes were frankly odd. A clip of the instrumentalists performing beneath a waterfall could surely not be faithful to any local tradition. And what to make of the tussle that almost erupts in the course of another video, wherein one man playfully seizes another as if to throw him to the ground?

These things are saturated with meaning for *chuschinos* (people from Chuschi) old enough to recognize their importance. For such viewers the filmic locations show mountains that are also tutelary deities, rivers that serve as weighty symbols in old songs, and waterfalls that house *sirenas*, beings with the power to make instruments sing. Several scenes take place in pastures where young people once practiced the *vida michiy*, a nocturnal courting custom that was also chimaycha’s major performing context. And the intended audience for these videos is not the potential tourist. Rather it is chuschinos, especially nostalgic elders who have moved away, and younger people who have never had a close relationship with the things they feature—but who might be persuaded to develop one. The videos are meant, ideally, to be consumed in a setting like the one I witnessed in October 2013, a birthday party where older guests murmured about the images as they waited for food. They named the places they saw, discussed the things they had done there, and lamented the changes that have taken place since. They commented on clothing, attributing different outfits to the neighborhoods they typified, and mourned the disappearance of the *vida michiy*, replaced by house parties where their children and grandchildren played mass-popular music on USB sticks and smartphones, rather than chimaycha songs on village chinlilis. Mostly they reminisced about a time when their lives were different: when they lived and farmed according to indigenous customs, amid forces of nature that they treated as fellow beings, and made music by recycling the words and melodies of their ancestors.

Such explicit commentary would have pleased the man behind the videos, for he meant them precisely as an injunction to remember and preserve past practices. Arturo Chiclla is a chuschino and the director of a Lima-based record label called Dolly JR. By the late 2000s he was distressed by recent changes in chimaycha performance, changes introduced by younger artists who had grown up in Lima or Ayacucho City, capital of Ayacucho Department. This younger generation had, predictably, blended Chuschi’s hometown style with the commercial popular music favored among Andean migrants.
From Peruvian *huayno* they had borrowed themes of alcohol use and abuse and urban anomie, while their melodies and electric instruments reflected the influence of the *cumbia* music that is popular across Latin America. The shrill music-box tinkling of the chinlili, chimaycha’s defining sound, was increasingly muted beneath the drum machines, electric bass, and requinto guitars that typified urban pop. Incensed, Chiclla had asked Los Chikitukus—long since retired—to help him arrest these ongoing musical developments. His label held the rights to their seminal 1992 recording *Vida Michiy*. Why not, then, simply relaunch those twenty-year-old sound recordings with videos in the style of more recent Andean productions, in an effort to remind audiences of the treasure that was being buried under the sonorous emblems of modern musical commerce?

Chiclla was not the only media worker pursuing a project of musical purification in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Radio Quispillaccta, a station run by indigenous activists from Chuschi’s neighboring town of Quispillaccta, had been broadcasting in Quechua since the year 2000. Based in Ayacucho rather than Quispillaccta, due to the city’s superior infrastructural advantages, its broadcasts often foregrounded a rhetoric of indigenous affirmation that had been brought to Ayacucho not long before by the station’s parent NGO. Such rhetoric remained suspect for many observers, in a region that has long been famous for its dearth of indigenous politics, but it identified the station with a mode of identity politics that was otherwise muted in the local mediasphere. Quispillacctinos (people from Quispillaccta) played chimaycha music too, and the style took a central place in Radio Quispillaccta’s broadcasts, where it became linked to the station’s emergent project of Andean cultural affirmation. Hoping, like Chiclla, to counteract the hybrid stylings of younger musicians, its directors favored old field recordings and new work by quispillacctino traditionalists like Óscar Conde, whose group was pointedly named Los Auténticos de Patario (The Authentics of Patario), and whose recordings the station actually commissioned to support their effort.

When I surveyed these efforts in the early 2010s, it seemed that people like Chiclla and Conde were fighting a rearguard action. The hybrid chimaycha of younger musicians was soaring in popularity among Ayacucho’s Quechua-speaking majority, and not only among migrants from Chuschi and Quispillaccta. Even members of Los Chikitukus conceded its legitimacy—above all Marco Tucno, the group’s musical director and the leading instrument maker to Ayacucho’s indigenous communities. As a scholar with some experience researching Ayacucho’s musical life, I found myself asking a number of questions about the evolving relationship between chimaycha music and indigeneity. Why were all of these actors invested in such different definitions of
indigenous musical legitimacy? Where had competing conceptions of indigeneity come from? What might be lost when one definition displaced another? What might be gained? What does it mean for a musical instrument to be understood as a bearer of indigeneity, and what happens when its sonority is transformed? How might the new experiences of urban indigenous peoples be transforming the very definition of indigeneity? And finally, how do the twin forces of global indigenous politics and mass popular culture inflect those experiences?