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ESPAÑOLES, INDIOS, AFRICANOS Y GITANOS.  
EL ALCANCE GLOBAL DEL FANDANGO EN MÚSICA, CANTO Y DANZA

SPANIARDS, INDIANS, AFRICANS AND GYPSIES:  
THE GLOBAL REACH OF THE FANDANGO IN MUSIC, SONG, AND  
DANCE

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# PLAYING THE SOCIAL, DANCING THE SOCIAL, SINGING THE SOCIAL: FROM “SAY IT LOUD (I’M BLACK AND I’M PROUD)” TO FANDANGO SIN FRONTERAS

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## **Resumen**

El presente ensayo analiza el movimiento Fandango Sin Fronteras como representativo de las políticas populares transnacionales contemporáneas en un contexto más amplio de la música y los movimientos sociales. Se pretende resaltar una faceta particular de los flujos globales contemporáneos estrechamente relacionados con la construcción de comunidades translocales a través de la música participativa. Durante más de una década el movimiento Fandango Sin Fronteras ha producido redes móviles para apoyar la creación de comunidades de la diáspora a través de la difusión de sonido, ritmo y danza como una forma de convivencia entre las culturas caribeñas de Veracruz, México, y varias ciudades en los EE.UU. y Canadá, como Los Ángeles, Seattle, Chicago y Toronto, así como a lo largo de la conflictiva frontera México-Estados Unidos. Proyectos de música como el proyecto de diáspora transnacional Fandango Sin Fronteras son esfuerzos musicales que están en estrecha relación con las culturas participativas contemporáneas y sus ideales de una nueva sociedad cívica.

## **Palabras Clave:**

Movimiento social, Fandango Sin Frontera, Construcción de Comunidades, Música Étnica, Políticas Populares.

Reproduciendo lo Social, Bailando lo Social, Cantando la Social: De "Decir en voz alta (soy Negro y estoy orgulloso)" para Fandango Sin Fronteras

## **Abstract**

This essay looks at the Fandango Sin Fronteras movement as representative of contemporary transnational grassroots politics in a larger context of music and social movements. It intends to highlight a particular facet of contemporary global flows closely related to translocal community-building through participatory music. For more than a decade the Fandango Sin Fronteras movement has produced mobile networks to support diaspora community-building through the diffusion of sound, rhythm, and dance as a form of convivencia between the Caribbean cultures of Veracruz, Mexico, and various cities in the US and Canada such as Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, and Toronto as well as along the conflicted US-Mexican border. Music projects such as the transnational diaspora

project Fandango Sin Fronteras are musical endeavors that are closely connected with contemporary participatory cultures and their ideals of a new civic society.

### **Keywords**

social movements, Fandango sin Fronteras, community-building, ethnic music, grassroots politics

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Music, no doubt, is a global player, as it traverses national and continental boundaries faster than any other art form. It moves within transnational economic, cultural, and political circuits and forms an important asset of translocal and global community-building. But does globalization via music signify a smooth homogeneous and ideologically unified process? Perhaps music's utopian potential should not be overestimated, although governmental institutions and grassroots movements alike have recognized its political significance. In U.S. government-sponsored programs such as The Jazz Ambassadors and The Rhythm Road, music as political messenger is mobilized from above; political power structures with national interests in global politics guide the funding and distribution of "American" musical expression cross-culturally. Both projects emerged in moments of national crisis, The Jazz Ambassador program was launched as response to anti-Americanism(s) during the Cold War Period, whereas The Rhythm Road project represents a follow-up response to the global image loss of the U.S. during the Bush Administration after September 11.

But we have witnessed other forms of sonic cosmopolitics from below such as in the context of African American "sounds of freedom." Against the historical background of the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s, when the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements not only shook the foundations of white supremacy in the United States but advanced anticolonial black struggle throughout the Americas and other parts of the globe, musical expression turned into a major medium to spread political messages. Referring to the diffusion of black cultures and politics during that epoch, Thomas Fawcett writes about new identitarian links between African American and Afro groups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean that travel via music—funk and soul—in particular:

[...] the globality of soul and funk music [...] shows that music can create linkages between distinct groups of the African diaspora. [...] Soul and funk music linked distinct communities of the diaspora despite the potential barriers of linguistic and cultural differences. Fans and musicians alike adopted elements of the soul aesthetic – such as the afro hairstyle – in a show of solidarity and as an implicit protest against the status quo (24).

Commenting upon black musical expression in the Americas, Roger D. Abrahams reminds us that

Not that these black expressive forms are not associated with specific places: the Cuban Habanera, the Samba of Rio, Reggae and Kingston, the Mississippi blues. But these are also recognizably vernacular inventions that achieved a place in the transnational entertainment industry rather than providing the kind of cultural reflexiveness that leads to the formation of a patria (99).

What Abrahams suggests here is the diffusion of a larger black imaginary in market circles beyond the boundaries of nation-states. As he concludes, "These musics, and the peoples identifying themselves through them, knit together the entire region, even as they advertise local cultural invention to worldwide popular audiences (100). What emerges is a vision of black Americas far beyond the US South: "It is a region which not only includes the Caribbean and the U.S. South, but many coastal outposts in South America on both the north, east, and west coasts, and many areas of the latifundium of Central America, including Mexico, Belize, and Costa Rica" (100).

Describing the impact of funk and soul for black liberation throughout the Americas, William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon* (1992), states that

Transcending the medium of entertainment, soul music provided a ritual in song with which blacks could identify and through which they could convey important in-group symbols. Music was power and considered to be supremely relevant to the protracted

struggle of black people for liberation. To some it was the poetry of the black revolution (205).

Soul songs such as "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" by Nina Simone, "We Got More Soul" by Dyke and the Blazers and in particular "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" by James Brown turned into hymns for the struggle of black liberation throughout the Americas and other sections of the globe concerned with anti-colonial struggles.

With reference to contemporary times, Puneet Dhaliwal describes how "Social movements across the world are currently expressing this selfsame insubordination, or resistance, to neo-liberal capitalism through mass public demonstrations and the articulation of their own cry of 'no, no more' to the existing social, political, and economic order" (Dhaliwal 251). While movements like the Arab Spring are intense but often short-lived there is a growing presence of movements that are less noisy but steady and that bring music to the streets, public places, conflicted territories and cultural centers to support their efforts in new community-building processes. While participatory cultures are frequently associated with cyberspace networks today, their antecedents in communal rituals and spectacles continue in music projects that emphasize participation, tear down walls between stage and public space, and dissolve boundaries between performer and spectator.

By looking at the *Fandango Sin Fronteras* movement as representative of contemporary transnational grassroots politics, this essay intends to highlight a particular facet of contemporary global flows closely related to translocal community-building through participatory music. For more than a decade the *Fandango Sin Fronteras* movement has produced mobile networks to support diaspora community-building through the diffusion of sound, rhythm, and dance as a form of *convivencia* between the Caribbean cultures of Veracruz, Mexico, and various cities in the US and Canada such as Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, and Toronto as well as along the conflicted US-Mexican border. The movement *Fandango Sin Fronteras*, a fusion of participatory music and community-building between locations in Mexico and urban centers in the US started approximately around 2003 with first collaborations between music groups such as Quetzal from Los Angeles and Mono Blanco from Veracruz.

The movement's decolonial outlook attempts to free fandango music from such stifling labels as state, regional, and national cultural heritage and to revive a participatory and horizontal spirit that takes away the boundaries between performer and audience, between professional musicians and amateurs. *Fandango Sin Fronteras* also revises the traditions of music along gender lines. While women have always taken part as dancers, for instance on the *tarima*, today they are increasingly contributing as composers, lyricists, and



instrumentalists.<sup>1)</sup> Finally, making participatory culture a central strategy of musical performance and social network building, the grassroots movement promotes ideals of a transnational civic society linking Mexican communities to diverse Latina/o communities in the US and more recently also Canada (and German cities like Munich and Frankfurt, too). Put briefly, *Fandango Sin Fronteras* is a musical grassroots movement that has traversed local, regional, and national borders in the new millenium. As primarily a larger informal transnational coalition of artists and musicians from California and Mexico, they engage in music as a community-building project and as mobile cultural heritage; furthermore, they address issues of social justice and urban planning and reflect relations between music and social engagement in workshop and event settings such as the Seattle Fandango Project. Locating the political in everyday life and culture, the actors involved travel back and forth between communities in Mexico, the US, and Canada, in this way creating communitarian and cultural networks based on the idea that fandango music represents an inherently participatory culture.

Fandango as a musical form traces its origins to Spanish-Arab culture and arrived in the Americas with the *conquistadores*. It is a participatory form of music and has played a central role in communal dancing throughout its history.<sup>2)</sup> García de León defines it as:

The musical ensemble that accompanies fandango, starting from a basic orchestration, varies according to the circumstances, as a group of musicians - whose number can increase or decrease in the course of the evening - come together around a set of two or three instruments around the stage. The most common melodic instruments are the diverse types of "son guitar," "jabalina guitar," or "requinto jarocho," which is the instrument that sets the plucking melody with a plectrum [pick] and that is made up of four strings (2009: 37-38, *my translation*).<sup>3)</sup>

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<sup>1)</sup> A tarima is a small dance platform a foot high, approximately the size of a piece of plywood and usually made of cedar planks. Here the dancers pound out a diversity of rhythms, interacting with the other musicians of the group sometimes following and sometimes dictating the direction the music takes.

<sup>2)</sup> 'Huapango' (word that comes from Náhuatl) is the original word people use in the places where the tradition is preserved. There is an on-going discussion about who changed it and why, since 'fandango' comes from Spanish tradition. It might be due to the resurgence of popular music in Sotavento, but local people consider it is important to bring back the actual word they use in an attempt to repair the broken bond of people with their culture.

<sup>3)</sup> "El conjunto musical que acompaña al fandango, partiendo de una orquestación básica, varía de acuerdo a las circunstancias, pues a partir de un "pie" de dos o tres instrumentos alrededor de la tarima, se aglutinan un grupo de músicos que puede crecer o disminuir a lo largo de la noche. Los instrumentos melódicos más comunes son los diversos tipos de "guitarra de son", "guitarra jabalina" o "requinto jarocho", que es el instrumento que marca la melodía punteada con un plectro y que consta de cuatro cuerdas." (de León 2009: 37-38)

The third of the instruments named gives the popular music of Sotavento from the Veracruz region its unique sound and distinguishes it from other Mexican regional traditions. In Mexico, fandango (*huapango*) traditions have flourished in the Caribbean cultural setting of the Veracruz region ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Further processes of transculturation took place as indigenous and African musical traditions impacted on the Spanish-Arab fusion from the Hispanic peninsula and led to a variety of regional styles.<sup>4)</sup> Later further processes took place when already fused musical styles traveled through different regions in México, mixing the internal flows. But more than simply a musical form, it is a ritual or a celebration that involves dance, word, crafts, and even food. It is a complete folk party.

In a series of cultural heritage acts of the Mexican government after the Mexican Revolution fandango was declared Veracruzano state music — an act of cultural policy consolidating state identities in the public sphere that consciously negated indigenous and African elements of Veracruzano fandango, frequently referred to as the *Son Jarocho* tradition (“*Fandango Jarocho*,” see García de León 2009: 11).<sup>5)</sup> According to Gonzalez, “the *son jarocho* from Veracruz, the fandango and its communal participatory aspects (trans-generational, virtuoso-to-beginner skill level, spontaneous music making process where there is no audience only participants) of this social phenomenon, disappeared in this consolidating effort” (2011: 61-62).

The *Fandango Sin Fronteras* movement draws upon a restoration policy developed by *El Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero* in the mid-1970s to decolonize the state identity politics of the Mexican government by re-emphasizing the multicultural ingredients of the musical tradition and by reviving the participatory and improvisational elements in the fandango praxis of rural communities (cf. *ibid.*: 63). To link this newly regained praxis to Chicano/a communities in the United States music groups such as Quetzal from Los Angeles, Mono Blanco from the port of Veracruz, and Son de Madera from Xalapa initiated transnational collaborations at the beginning of the New Millennium. In the meantime fandango has traveled to various urban centers and Latina/o communities in the United States and Canada and has created new networks of *convivencia* (the Latina/o notion of community and coexistence) by means of a participatory music culture. The musicians and community activists involved in *Fandango Sin Fronteras* frequently travel back and forth between

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<sup>4)</sup> As Guevara points out in an interview, *son jarocho* in particular in the US context serves as an umbrella term but does not do justice to the regional differences in style in the Veracruz region. As examples of a more differentiated terminology she mentions a few such as “*música de jarana*,” “*música popular del Sotavento*,” “*música popular abajeña*” in Veracruz, “*música de huapango*,” and “*música popular del Sur de Veracruz*,” which are more objective terms and point to the whole tradition and not just to the developments of the last 30 years (Guevara 2014).

<sup>5)</sup> *Son Jarocho* refers to the music, and points specifically to the commercial aspect. Fandango as a concept is huapango, which has always included everything, not just the music, and can only be done communally.

various locations, have roots and contacts at different sites and build networks on translocal as well as transnational scales. Communal and cultural centers in Xalapa, Santa Ana, and Seattle are representative sites of network-building and nodal points of transit for musicians and activists alike. Hence mobility not only leads to plurilocal activism in community-building but also to a shifting positionality of actors in different networks. As a result, multiple translocal and transnational flows of actors, concepts, and traditions challenge various norms, be they aesthetic, political, or social. Frequently there is also a divide between traditionalist purists and progressive fusion-oriented musicians in Mexican as well as diaspora communities in the US. What emerges from transversal flows of actors and their music is a transnational social and cultural network, and the network structure is constituted by connected sites of cultural production, preservation, and diffusion in Mexico and the United States. Workshops run by the group Los Cojolites from the south of Veracruz take place in Jáltipan, Mexico in an annual weeklong series.

These workshops are linked to the Center for the Documentation of *Son Jarocho*, the latter being dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and promotion of this Veracruz fandango tradition as a cultural heritage. Within these workshops both musical expertise as well as a participatory spirit are at the center of attention. Musicians from Los Cojolites and Ricardo Perry Guillén, the founder of the group and of the Center, a historian and cultural worker, travel back and forth between their center in Jáltipan and regional sites such as Xalapa as well as centers in Santa Ana, California, Seattle, and Chicago. They travel as musicians, social activists, and educators to spread the communal gospel of *Son Jarocho* in the context of *Fandango Sin Fronteras*. Their mission includes the preservation and expansion of this musical heritage but also dialogue and innovation through exchange and most of all the creation of a sense of communal belonging at home and in the diaspora. In the area around Veracruz with an Afro-Latina cultural spectrum, *huapango* events frequently function as communal gathering to bring the people from the farms and ranches to the "pueblo." In urban centers the intention is to create identitarian spaces for communal bonding in the metropolis as well as the diaspora.

The birth of the Seattle Fandango Project in 2009 also resulted from frequent transversal journeys of Mexican and Chicana/o musicians and activists between Veracruz, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Martha Gonzalez and Quetzal Flores had united with other fandango musicians in Seattle earlier in the New Millennium to launch a series of workshops. Meanwhile, various cultural centers and educational institutions in Seattle such as El Centro de la Raza, Raíces Culturales, the Ethnic Cultural Center, the University of Washington, and various primary and secondary schools have supported the Seattle Fandango Project. Cultural heritage politics, community activism, and amateur as well as professional music production coincide, as Martha Gonzalez and Flores Quetzal are also the head of the professional folk-rock-jazz fusion band Quetzal, whose fifth album *Imaginaries* was rewarded the Grammy Award in 2013 for the Best Latin Rock, Urban, or

Alternative Album. Their creation of syncretistic music and community activism is one of the propelling forces behind the grassroots politics of *Fandango Sin Fronteras*.

The fact that grassroots movements as one of the contemporary manifestations of Appadurai's global flows have finally achieved global presence has become visible in the worldwide media coverage of the Occupy Wall Street / Occupy Oakland / Occupy Frankfurt protests against laissez-faire capitalism in metropolises around the globe (Appadurai 1996). While this protest movement responds to the global crisis of money and market systems that seem to have lost all aspects of transparency and control, other grassroots movements with diverse social concerns but less media attention have increasingly crossed national boundaries in recent decades. As Batliwala points out in "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors: Implications for Global Civil Society":

The past two decades witnessed the emergence of a new range of transnational social movements, networks, and organizations seeking to promote a more just and equitable global order. With this broadening and deepening of cross-border citizen action, however, troubling questions have arisen about their rights of representation and accountability — the internal hierarchies of voice and access within transnational civil society are being highlighted. The rise of transnational grassroots movements, with strong constituency base and sophisticated advocacy capability at both local and global levels, is an important phenomenon in this context. These movements are formed and led by poor and marginalized groups, and defy the stereotype of grassroots movements being narrowly focused on local issues. They embody both a challenge and an opportunity for democratizing, legitimizing, and strengthening the role of transnational civil society in global policy. (2002: 393)

Fandango Sin Fronteras represents an expanding recent grassroots movement in the New Millenium that is contributing to the making of a transnational civil society that transports the idea of border crossings rhythmically as well as geopolitically. The movement links musical actors and performances in cities such as Veracruz, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Vancouver and demonstrates a continuous presence at the US-Mexican border literally overcoming the fence through music and dance. What we can see and hear are people joining in a musical interaction on both sides of the fence celebrating a trans-border communal spirit and at the same time protesting against and mocking the attempts by US border control agencies to prevent illegal immigration. As Pacheco points out in "Sixth Fandango Fronterizo Tijuana-San Diego" in May 2013,

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, many people gathered together at the Tijuana-San Diego border to play and dance son jarocho, celebrating the Sixth Annual Fandango Fronterizo. The meeting point converged on two locations: the Friendship Park on the US side and the Faro in Playas de Tijuana on the Mexican side. For three hours the jaraneros gathered to sing poetry, dance on the tarima, play jaranas, guitarras de son, leaonas, violins, donkey jaws,

and other percussive instruments. [...] The *jaranero* communities arrived at the border from Tijuana, Mexicali, Veracruz, Zacatecas, Seattle, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Santa Ana, San Diego, and Texas, to name a few of the places. Well-established musicians of *son jarocho* and other genres from southern California also joined the fandango. Among them were Martha Gonzalez and Quetzal Flores of the group Quetzal, and Cesar Castro, Xochitl Flores, and Jesus Sandoval of the group Cambalache. Andres Flores, invited by the *jaraneros* from San Diego, also joined the fandango. (2013)

Frequently at the Tijuana-San Diego border so-called *Fandango Fronterizo* events take place. Announced on the internet, in local radio, and newspapers as well as in community centers south and north of the border, these get-togethers draw hundreds and thousands of people to celebrate '*convivencia*' a communal spirit of belonging together. On both sides of the fence musicians from different regions join to practice, share and teach fandango as a way of 'jamming together' without the politics of exclusion.

Those who travel to the border are musicians who embrace different regional styles at times coming all the way from Veracruz and Seattle to transport the communal spirit they hold in their respective communities to the dividing line separating not only nations but individuals and families south and north of the border. Numerous photographs and video clips with shots taken directly at the border have captured the spirit of these events showing people playing music, singing, dancing, and communicating through the fence. While this is a grassroots politically organized happening with a focus on temporary, translocal community-building, it at the same time represents a mockery of US-American border politics. The dynamics of the musical and communal performances involved include physical touch through openings in the fence, the musical joining the sounds and rhythms on the two sides, and conversing with one another about this experience and its translocal significance. Most recently these events have also functioned as a matrix for exchange of information about missing family and community members at one of the most militarized borders in the world today.

What happens at the border is a local event with reverberations related to various diasporic links connecting cities and villages in Mexico with Latina/o communities in urban centers north of the border. The underlying political project is one of community-building throughout the US-American diaspora. Frequently activities revolve around urban planning and the creation of place within this diaspora. As Gonzalez explains:

Manifesting through many artistic, cultural, and political events, *Fandango Sin Fronteras* activities resolve around the commitment to share, and participate in fandango practice all over the U.S. and Mexico. There are many collaborative grassroots efforts throughout the U.S. that engage in dialogue with different communities in Veracruz. (2011: 65).

Put simply, the grassroots movements share a common impulse to overcome the national container and its politics of exclusion. On the one hand, they reveal the transcultural roots of musical tradition that have falsely been claimed to be a strictly national tradition; on the other hand, they enrich and expand the tradition by adding new instruments such as the cajón, a box-shaped percussion instrument originally from Peru, and by expanding the tradition in terms of gender. What still is an almost all-male domain in the Mexican pueblos (villages) has now, in the transnational diaspora movement, been invaded by women musicians and composers, who add new expressions to the traditions in lyrics and style. While musicians from the LA group Quetzal travel south, musicians of the Cojolites from the Veracruz region travel north to share, teach, learn, and practice fandango as a new communal force for building new diasporic communities. Ideas for new instrumentation and orchestration travel back and forth between various cultural centers in the Veracruz region, Santa Ana, Washington, Seattle, and Chicago, to name but a few. Hence local, regional, and transnational trends meet, clash, and exist side-by-side mirroring different approaches toward heritage, culture, and tradition but sharing the ritualistic power of fandango performance as a community-building force, as Guevara, a PhD candidate in sociology and a fandango musician from the Los Tuxtlas region pointed out in an interview at the CIAS in Bielefeld on November 14, 2013. And Munro points out:

Rhythm [...] plays a fundamental role in bonding societies and groups and in structuring the collective experience of time [...]. A society's notion of time becomes 'second nature' to its people through collective, rhythmic interactions. People learn how to keep together in time through various forms of movement socialization, and these movements are mediated by rhythm (2010: 5).

*Fandango Sin Fronteras* builds on participatory cultures and, as I would like to emphasize, goes beyond what is considered classical resistance in colonial and postcolonial discourse. In the 1960s and 70s the African American sound of freedom associated with soul music in particular became a symbol of liberation as well as of resistance and reached from black communities within the US to Afro-Latina/o groups in countries like Brazil and Columbia. *Fandango Sin Fronteras* shares the transnational outreach, but is less concerned with politics of difference. Rather *Fandango Sin Fronteras* chooses a distinct transnational, diasporic paradigm of communitarian politics, which is oriented toward dialogue and integration. While songs by groups like Quetzal contain messages of cultural criticism, I want to stress that their choice of location for performances like community centers and bus terminals follow a pragmatist understanding of politics and aesthetics (Dewey 1934) that locate the idea of community-building through music in the realm of the culture of everyday life. Accordingly, the agenda of *Fandango Sin Fronteras* fuses cultural politics with direct local activism, such as the redistribution of urban and public space. Kun rightly warns us that we should not "romanticize popular music as a safe-house for revolution and resistance" (2005: 17). But he is also right when he states:



Popular music is one of our most valuable tools for understanding the impact of nationalism and citizenship on the formation of our individual identities. And second, it is also one of our most valuable sites for witnessing the performance of racial and ethnic difference against the grain of national citizenships that work to silence and erase those differences (ibid.: 11).

As the reception and condemnation of jazz by totalitarian regimes and the recent move of the Chinese government to officially support music festivals show, national politics are quite aware of the potential of popular music to create highly individualized and unpredictable "*audiotopias*," to borrow the title from Kun's book. In his *The New York Times* article "Rock Music Festivals in China Obtain the Government's Blessing" of November 8 2010, Jacobs reports the following:

A curious thing happened in October at the Midi Music Festival, China's oldest and boldest agglomeration of rock, funk, punk and electronic. Performers musically criticized the country's leaders, tattooed college students sold anti-government T-shirts and an unruly crowd of heavy metal fans giddily torched a Japanese flag that had been emblazoned with expletives (2010: 14).

He expresses surprise, as he continues, "Curious, because the event, a four-day-free-for-all of Budweiser, crowd surfing and camping, was sponsored by the local Communist Party, which spent \$2.1 million to turn cornfields into festival grounds, pay the growling punk bands and clean up the detritus left by 80,000 attendees" (ibid.). Jacobs' report demonstrates how complex the net between music and politics has become in our age of globalization. One way to read it is to conclude that the Chinese government is attempting to co-opt youth culture, especially if we take into consideration that China has witnessed an explosion of music festivals in recent years. Another way to evaluate the government action is expressed by one of the festival attendees: "The government used to see us as dangerous. Now they see us as a market" (ibid.)

Different from Chinese rock festivals *Fandango Sin Fronteras* does not need festival grounds to perform. On the contrary, performances often take place within local communities and also in public spaces such as plazas and squares directly south and north of the border. Precisely in these nationally demarcated spaces, marked by fences, walls, and border control, the performance of *Fandango fronterizo* temporarily occupies public areas for the performances of trans-border communities. Professional music groups engage in these performances, in which market interests in spreading the music seem to be only of secondary nature whereas community-building is of primary importance. While the link between music, market, and politics in contemporary society is undeniable, I see this grassroots musical movement as an attempt to open up new venues that can spread music and ideas of community along horizontal lines. *Fandango Sin Fronteras* contains an

element that connects the individual and the local with the transnational. Both aesthetically as well as spatially *Fandango Sin Fronteras* seems to locate itself in the border zone between ethnic, racial, and national identities. As Fluck reminds us in his reflection on resistance:

If systematic power is all-pervasive, the hope for resistance can only be placed in the margins of that system, and even if the margins can no longer possess a quasi inbuilt oppositional, then only a flexible identity can function as a resort of last hope. This new utopia is often space- or territory-based, for example in the emphasis on border zones, diasporas, or intermediate spaces, because, as the argument goes, such spaces force their inhabitants to adopt several identities and thus seem ideally suited to create models of resistance (2007b: 70).

Fluck expresses certain doubts about the border zone as a creative zone of resistance since for him the national power structures also absorb the margins. *Fandango Sin Fronteras*, however, does not confine its activism and outlook to the borderlands. Working toward providing a sense of relocation in community for migrants from a variety of Latin American backgrounds, the movement's communal and artistic work perpetuates newly emerging communities within the national space. As a migratory and intermediary grassroots movement *Fandango Sin Fronteras* challenges national music histories and national myths of identity. Beyond resistance, though, it embodies the agency and channeling that lies behind the community-building concept of this grassroots movement.

*Fandango sin Fronteras* represents a dialogue between professional musicians and bands from various local community centers in Mexico and the US. The *Fandango Project* riffs on music's pivotal role in processes of nation-building but also music's potential for the performance of difference and the expression of cultural criticism. And it takes us beyond ethnic and national communities to a transnational vision. With a nod to the recent shift to post-national and post-nationalistic studies of the Americas I consider the study of popular music as paradigmatic for the shift from purely national to transnational American Studies. After all, sounds travel fast, cross national and cultural boundaries constantly, and feed on cultural exchange both in processes of production and reception. "The study of music offers a unique lens with which to focus [on] various debates in cultural studies, media studies, literary studies, history, sociology and anthropology that try to come to terms with issues of shifting identities, new ethnicities, shifting agency, ..." (Rausser 2011: 1).

While the *Fandango Project* and the musical activities of groups such as Quetzal rebuild collective memory, it bears mentioning that their understanding of *latinidad* fuses Spanish, indigenous, Arab and African elements and opens a venue for new transnational identities thus challenging a monolithic *latinidad* north and south of the Rio Grande. Critics such as Caminero-Santangelo have repeatedly emphasized the intellectual debates between Latin



American thinkers about *latinidad* since the nineteenth century.<sup>6)</sup> She refers to Latin America's post-independence period as well as to Simón Bolívar's vision of a unified region when she mentions "the possibility of transnational *latinidad*," (2007: 19) which is circulating among Latin American intellectuals of diverse national backgrounds. She also points out that empire-building manifestos such as the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary "effectively constructed all of Latin America, from the point of view of the United States at least, as a single entity" (18). For the fandango grassroots movement the *Son Jarocho* becomes an aesthetic means to expand *mexicanidad* as well *latinidad* and reveal its native, Arab, African as well as Spanish elements of rhythm and performance. As Dudley and Gonzalez point out in "The Seattle Fandango Project" (2010):

To avoid creating a new orthodoxy of their own, professional groups in the grassroots movement, including Mono Blanco, Son de Madera, Chuchumbé, Los Utrera, Los Cojolites, Estansuela, Relicario, and Los Negritos continued to organize and participate in community fandangos, where they took part in a collective dialogue about the future of the tradition. This practice continues today, and many musicians in the movement contribute part of their earnings to the community centers that host free workshops and fandangos. This vibrant scene caught the attention of a new generation of community-oriented Chicano artists in Los Angeles who began making trips to Veracruz in the early 2000s. Chicanos shared their own experiences and techniques of community building through art. Back in Los Angeles they shared what they had learned about the fandango and brought up musicians from Veracruz.

The Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero took shape through a process of research and reclamation. This created a new interest in the living tradition of Son Jarocho, which most Chicanos had previously known through commercial recordings (or through Ritchie Valens' 1957 rock-and-roll remake of a traditional Son Jarocho piece called "La Bamba"). As Dudley and Gonzalez tell us:

In 2002 Fandango Sin Fronteras was established as an informal musical dialogue between Chicanos and Jarochos. In 2004 members of Quetzal traveled to Mexico to help record and produce Son de Madera's CD, "Las Orquestas del Día". In 2005, Son de Madera, one of the premier son jarocho ensembles from Veracruz, came to Los Angeles to perform with Quetzal at a fundraiser for the South Central Farm, an inner-city farm that the community had reclaimed from industrial wasteland, and from which the authorities were then trying to remove them. Through these and many other exchanges, Fandango Sin Fronteras has

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<sup>6)</sup> For a detailed discussion of *latinidad* see Kirschner (2012). Put simply, *latinidad* has historically functioned as a politically charged signifier to create patterns of transnational Latin American identities. Frequently Afro-Latinas/os but also Jews and Muslims still feel excluded from this broader and transnational understanding of Latina/o belonging.

taken shape as a transnational musical dialogue rooted in the spirit of *convivencia*. (2010: n.p.)

This music, *Son Jarocho*, is a fandango style specific to the Sotavento region in the state of Veracruz, emerging from the indigenous, Spanish, and African cultural influences on that society. The Mexican government canonized the music in the 1940s, moving it to the stage while taking out the culture and improvisation at the music's heart. It was reclaimed in the 1970s, representing a return to community values. Martha Gonzalez, lead singer of Quetzal, explains it in the following way:

As a participatory music and dance practice *fandango* conceptualizes community as a central aesthetic principle. Veracruzano communities utilize *convivencia* as a collective production of auditory identity; a culmination of memory through sound. Spanish, African, Arab and Indigenous legacies are present in the multiple dialogues and musical inflections. This musical dialogue is achieved through the expressions of *son jarocho*'s multiple instruments, notably the heartbeat or pulse, of la *tarima*. *Bailadoras* (percussive dancers) are the drummers that produce the central pulse of the *fandango fiesta* through their footwork. In this sense they are percussionists. As percussionists these women dialogue with other instruments and singers in the *son jarocho* ensemble (2011: 65-66).

Despite the overwhelming historical evidence of an African presence in colonial Mexico, its presence was not recorded in the nation-state's official history of Veracruzano cultural tradition. Caught in an urgent obsession with modernizing the nation in the early 1900s, the Mexican nation-state created a Veracruzano cultural identity that emphasized the Spanish influence and reduced the Indigenous and especially the African elements within dance and music. In the United States today, *Son Jarocho* and Fandango is performed in Chicano communities as a way for members to connect with one another and, as we have seen in the beginning Fandango has once again gone transnational building new diasporic links across the boundaries of nation-states.

Tracing shifting and dialogical identity politics between south and north, one cannot help but notice that the intercultural dynamics and tensions behind the emergence and development Chicano/Latino popular music struggling for recognition and integration in the realm of US American popular music in earlier decades have shifted direction. Music now frequently claims its community-building power in transnational diaspora Chicana/o/Latina/o communities. Looking at musical grassroots movements like decolonial *Fandango Sin Fronteras* and the music of groups such as Quetzal, it becomes evident that these new musical expressions and their communal contextualization pose a challenge to classical concepts of 'America', '*latinidad*' and '*mexicanidad*' in both national and transnational contexts. In a truly inter-American dialogical perspective the transversal migration of musicians and sounds in the context of this movement illustrates

that the process of transnationalizing Chicana/o Latina/o identity politics has also gained new momentum south of the border. Trans-border music performances by the Mexican actor Tin Tan and the Mexican-American El Vez among others have served as a model of inspiration for a young generation of musicians in Mexico — think of Maldita Vecindad y Los Hijos del Quinto Patio and Café Tacuba — to define their music as rhythmic projects transcending essentialist concepts of ethnicity and nationality. Groups such as Mono Blanco, Son de Madera, Chuchumbé, Los Utrera, Los Cojolites, Estansuela, Relicario, Los Negritos, along with Quetzal have joined the grassroots agenda of Fandango Sin Fronteras, and use music as a transversal flow to overcome boundaries and create new communities. The new trans-border aesthetics developed by such sonic grassroots movements embrace the idea of thinking and acting transnationally both north and south of the border and challenging diverse forms of closure, be they aesthetic, communal, or political. Clearly *transfronterizo* aesthetics fuel these communal projects of fandango, and while Quetzal's songs such as "Die Cowboy Die" keep reminding us of national mythography, conflicted borders, border violence, and attempts at national closure, the transnational spirit of fandango expands *latinidad* in an audiotopian fashion in which sounds and rhythms build bridges between Chicana/o, Latina/o, and other communities in and between the US and Mexico.

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