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ESPAÑÓLES, 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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# BRAZILIAN FANDANGO:

## TRADITIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND POLICIES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### **Resumen**

Esta ponencia presenta un esbozo del fandango brasileño tal y como se toca hoy. Relacionado tradicionalmente con comunidades ubicadas en las zonas litorales de dos estados brasileños (São Paulo y Paraná), el fandango, en tanto actividad compuesta de baile y música, tiene una gran importancia para estas comunidades como elemento de las prácticas culturales tradicionales. En ese sentido, el fandango brasileño constituye un elemento destacado en cualquier discusión sobre las relaciones entre el lugar geográfico y la identidad. Además, juega un papel central en las dinámicas sociales internas de estas comunidades, funcionando como una práctica del ocio y, a la vez, como mecanismo de control de las relaciones sociales. Este artículo también se centra en el papel del fandango en los debates políticos de los últimos diez años sobre la herencia cultural de Brasil. Políticas públicas que se han creado para regular sus cambios y su papel tradicional en las comunidades donde el fandango se sigue tocando.

### **Palabras clave:**

fandango, caíçara, gaúcho

### ***Fandango de Brasil: Tradicionalismo, la identidad y las Políticas de Patrimonio Cultural***

### **Abstract**

This talk will present a framework of the Brazilian fandango as it is played today. Traditionally related to communities that live in coastal areas of two Brazilian states (São Paulo and Paraná), the fandango, as a complex that integrates dance and music, has a great importance to these communities as an element of traditional cultural practices. In this way, it is an important element in any discussion of place and identity. Further, it has a central role in the internal social dynamics of these communities, operating as a leisure practice and, at the same time, regulating social relationships. This article will also examine the place of fandango in political debates about cultural heritage in Brazil for the last ten years. Public policies have been created in order to regulate its changes and its traditional role in the communities in which it is played.

**Keywords:**

fandango, caíçara, gaúcho

**Resumen curricular**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In Brazil, *fandango* denotes two different musical and dance practices. The word is used in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul to denote traditional balls, in a general sense. The other use is made in the coastal portions of the states of São Paulo and Paraná and, there, it denotes a specific kind of musical and dance practice. It is very difficult to establish links between these different fandangos and any effort to do so is hypothetical. What we can say is that *fandango* and its range of meaning gestures toward issues of history and contemporary conceptual frameworks in Brazilian music and society. In other words, we can say that *fandango* offers challenges to the study of history of Brazilian music and to the study of political and social questions (Oliveira 2014). In this article I present these practices described by the word *fandango* and the questions that they raise.

**THE GAUCHO FANDANGO**

Rio Grande do Sul is the southernmost state of Brazil. It is bordered by Uruguay and Argentina and had a great cultural contact with these countries. This is evident by the cultural element used as identity marker in the state: the *gaúcho*. The *gaúcho* is a very important transnational symbol used both in Argentina and Uruguay. The constitution of the *gaúcho* mythology, central to Argentinean and Uruguayan national discourses, occurred in the 19th century and it was a good example of which Eric Hobsbawm called "the invention of traditions." It was imposed as opposite to the urban culture that began its development in that century. The *gaúcho* was transformed in a symbol of rural and traditional style of life against the urban and modern one. So, the *gaúcho* culture is profoundly traditionalist and presents an idealist vision of the past and the traditions. This is important here because the music and dances called by the word *fandango* in Rio Grande do Sul are seen as old and traditional practices, related to that time when life in the state was marked by rural costumes and values (Lucas 2000).

*Fandango*, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, means any traditional *gaucho* ball in a general sense. It encompasses many couple dances, in binary and ternary rhythms, where couples do specific choreographies. The musical accompaniment is made up of ensembles of guitar, frame drums and *gaita*, a kind of accordion. There are songs that are sung, with lyrics about romantic love or natural life, and instrumental pieces. The dances of *gaucho* fandango are close to the ones that in Argentina are described as *folklore* and some of them are played in both countries. This is the case, for example, of *chamame*, that is one of *gaucho* fandango dances and, at the same time, a very popular genre of song in Argentina, Southern Brazil and Paraguay.

The history of *gaucho* fandango is related to influences of Hispanic culture in Brazilian practices. It happens because, until around 1850, Rio Grande do Sul was a land in contest: First, in colonial times, between Spain and Portugal; after the independence of Iberian colonies in America, between Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. So, the Hispanic elements in *gaucho* fandango are very important and this is evident chiefly in choreographies. Otherwise, the weight of the *gaita* in the musical accompaniment - against the importance of the guitar in Hispanic fandango - is a typical element of *gaucho* fandango in Brazil.

#### THE CAIÇARA FANDANGO

*Caiçara* is a Brazilian word, of indigenous origin, that denotes the inhabitant of coastal areas of states of São Paulo and Parana. There, practiced by poor people related to fishing activities, we have the *caiçara* fandango, very important to the production of a sense of place in these communities. Here, the fandango is a group of dances that is divided into two types: *batidos* and *bailados*. Both are danced in couples, but the *batidos* present specific choreographies where men do movements around women. Because of this, only few couples can dance. In this dance, men use wooden clogs and, dancing, they beat them. This produces a very impressive percussive effect. The *bailados* are fandangos where couples dance together, without specific choreographies. So, in this one, all couples can dance and the fandango becomes a general ball (Setti 1985).

The musical accompaniment of *caiçara* fandango is made by ensembles that gather *rabeca*, a kind of fiddle; *fandangueira viola*, a kind of guitar with five or six strings; and *adufe*, a circular two-headed frame drum (Gramani 2003; Marchi, Sanger and Correa 2002). The pieces are called *marcas* and some of them are sung, while others are instrumental pieces. If the *gaucho* fandangos alternate binary and ternary rhythms, the *caiçara* fandangos are played only in binary rhythm.

The *caiçara* fandango has its history profoundly related to contacts between Europeans and indigineous people of the Brazilian coast. The *caiçara* area was one of the first areas to be colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th century. It is very interesting to

observe that in *caçara* fandango we can see an European ball structure, typical of court dances of the 16th and 17th centuries. However, it is danced in a way that reminds us of the indigenous dances. This can be seen in the way that men flex their knees in the *batido* variety of fandango. This bending is visible in many indigenous dances.

#### THE LINKS BETWEEN THE BRAZILIAN FANDANGOS

It is an extremely difficult historical question to consider the links between the Brazilian fandangos. What shared features do they have? How was the word fandango maintained to indicate two such separate practices? Of course, there is a common historical background between these uses of the same word. It refers to the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, when many dances and musical practices were introduced during colonial times. The word *fandango* to denote general balls, where many couples dance or do specific choreographies, is a heritage of these times. This suggests two important questions: where are there references to fandango in important areas of colonial Brazil, like Bahia or Pernambuco? And why was the word maintained in only two areas? A great deal of historical research is needed to answer these questions.

There is another common element here. Both fandangos, the gaucho and the *caçara*, have a structure related to European court dances, typical of post-Renaissance times. The ring-shaped gathering, the intertwining line movement of dancers and the couple choreographies are indicative of this historical element. It is obvious that the meanings of these structures are contemporary, but their shape or form is related to older times.

However, the historical developments of fandangos are different. In Rio Grande do Sul fandango, its Iberian “flavor” is more evident. This is explained by the weight of Hispanic culture in the history of Rio Grande do Sul. As I said before, the dances gathered there within the title of fandango are closer to those that in Uruguay and, chiefly, Argentina, are known as *folklore*. Moreover, in Rio Grande do Sul, the development of fandango must be sought in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the cultural flux between that Brazilian state and Uruguay and Argentina were very intense.

If in Rio Grande do Sul the fandango invites us to observe the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – a time when this area was incorporated within Brazilian territory – the *caçara* fandango points to older times, in the beginnings of Brazil’s colonization. The areas related to *caçara* fandango – coastal areas of Paraná and São Paulo – were the first places to be occupied by the Portuguese. So, the *caçara* fandango sends us to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In these centuries, music and dance were used by Europeans to convert indigenous people, chiefly through the work of the Jesuits. In such way these dancing and music practices were called fandangos in these areas. However, it is important to observe that the sacred characteristic of these practices was, step by step, being left. There are



many dances in Brazil that originated through this process of the religious conversion of indigenous peoples.

This relationship between Europeans and indigenous people helps us understand some elements of *caičara* fandango: the prominence of a ring-shaped form to dance the *batidos*, for example. Concerning this point, there is a confluence of elements, because many indigenous dances used this form before the European arrival. As cited earlier, the knees' inflection in the *batidos* is also related to the indigenous influence.

Cultural flux and indigenous influences: these are some historical issues we can raise from the fandango practice in Brazil. Of course, these questions are also related to other practices, but fandango can be a good way to answer them. However, it would be a mistake to look only to historical questions in a fandango ball, wherever it happens. There are some political questions also, very actual and denotative of important processes in Brazilian society.

#### CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SOCIAL AGENCY

In the last twenty years, the fandango has been involved in discussions about cultural heritage and has become, in some places, a symbol of cultural identity and a means of social development. In this sense, the fandango is, to use a current expression in the discourse of the social sciences, a means to social agency for many communities—its political value today is undeniable.

Cultural heritage has been a very important concept in discussions about Brazilian culture since the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the fact that politically Brazil has been a nation since 1822, it was only in the 1920s and 1930s, arising from intellectual debates influenced by the Modernism, that an intense discussion arose about the idea of Brazilian culture. The political regime created by Getulio Vargas, between 1930 and 1945, was very important in this process, because it embraced the cultural debates of Modernism. The idea of cultural heritage idea was one of them. Since 1937, there have been public policies to preserve what is seen as cultural heritage. Such policies have always been matters of discussion because they use specific concepts of tradition and culture.

Until the 1990s, the idea of cultural heritage in Brazil was linked to material culture. In this sense, monuments and buildings were rated as objects of heritage. In the same way, handicraft and artisanal skills were valued. These elements were, and still are, involved in the idea of heritage, and they are protected such that their material and monumental characteristics are very important. This question is significant to us because this material idea of heritage was influential in further developments.

immaterial culture became dominant. Practices which until then were seen only as folklore – and not shielded by heritage policies – began to be protected as well. This is the case for musical and dance practices. Since then, the concept of immaterial heritage became the core of many debates and of great interest to the government (Gonçalves 2005; Pimentel, Pereira e Correia, 2009). Public funds have been allotted to promote cultural groups working with practices seen as immaterial heritage. For many communities these funds have become a matter of internal struggles and they have changed their life dynamics, because they are an important source of income. In addition, most of these policies link the fandango to tourist activities. This is very common in the *caiçara* fandango area (Diegues and Coelho 2013). As in this area, the fandango is played, chiefly, by poor people, we can imagine the importance of these policies to these communities (Martins 2006).

But, most important for us is the fact that these policies stress a specific vision about the idea of fandango tradition. In consequence, the changes - inherent to social life - are seen as a loss. Whenever the fandango changes, something is lost. Here, we have the matter of authenticity, which has been discussed by many researchers in relation to many cultural practices around the world (Moore 2002). As it is throughout the globe, in Brazil authenticity is a contentious matter. This fact invites us to see how the fandango holds not only a key to historical issues of the Brazilian society, but is today a political question as well.

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