



Revista Internacional

Nº 12 Año 2015

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

CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía

Actas del congreso internacional organizado por The Foundation for Iberian Music, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York el 17 y 18 de abril del 2015

Proceedings from the international conference organized and held at The Foundation for Iberian Music, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, on April 17 and 18, 2015

Depósito Legal: GR-487/95 **I.S.S.N.:** 1138-8579

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Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía

Carrera del Darro, 29 18010 Granada

informacion.cdma.ccul@juntadeandalucia.es

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THE SPACE OF AFFECT, OR THE POLITICAL ANATOMY OF CONTEMPORARY FANDANGO PERFORMANCE IN MEXICO

Alex E. Chávez

University of Notre Dame

Resumen

Este artículo examina la tradición musical del huapango arribeño con atención especial a la denominada topada en Xichú, Guanajuato. Allí, dos conjuntos participan en un duelo poético y musical en la plaza central del pueblo desde el atardecer hasta el amanecer mientras que miles de espectadores celebran el Año Nuevo. La poesía que surge en este espacio se argumenta, anima historias y deseos afectivos de conexión y reconocimiento que adquieren un sentido politizado y que se relacionan con el contexto político en el que público y músicos están ubicados en esos momentos. Bajo estas premisas, mi artículo relaciona directamente la anatomía poética y musical del espacio de la topada con el esfuerzo por atraer un público (o un contra-público) que recibe y absorbe la circulación del conocimiento, estableciéndose una poética de creación y recepción, que alienta el espacio del fandango.

Palabras Clave:

Mexico; Huapango arribeño; Affect; topada

El espacio del afecto, o la anatomía política de la ejecución del fandango contemporáneo en México.

Abstract

This paper discusses the little-known Mexican music of *huapango arribeño* with attention to its *topada* performance in Xichú, Guanajuato. There, two ensembles engage in both poetic dueling and musical flyting in the town central plaza from dusk until dawn while thousands of spectators ring in the New Year. The poetics that emerge in this space, it is argued, animate stories and affective desires of connection and recognition that grow sharply political in relation to the present fraught political context in which its audience and practitioners are positioned. In pursuit of this claim, this paper directly links the poetic and musical anatomy of the *topada* space of vernacular performance to the necessary invocation of (counter) publics that ultimately receive and absorb the circulation of situated knowledges—a reflexive poesis of enactment and reception that sustains the space of fandango performance.

Keywords:

Mexico; Huapango arribeño; Affect; topada

Author Bio

Alex E. Chávez is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Faculty Fellow of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Centered around Mexico, the US-Mexico Borderlands, and Latinas/os in the United States, more broadly, Chavez's research interests explore the innermost workings of transnational migration, embodiment, place-making, and everyday life as manifest in political economies of performance with particular emphasis on music and language. He holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin and is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist with experience in various Mexican folk music genres.

Alex E. Chávez. "The Space of Affect, Or the Political Anatomy of Contemporary Fandango Performance in Mexico". *Música Oral del Sur*, n. 12, pp. 545-562, 2015, ISSN 1138-8579

INTRODUCTION

In the post-NAFTA era of accelerated out-migration, the spread of narco-violence, and increased calls for indigenous autonomy across Mexico, the growing perception of a waning Mexican state has taken hold in both the local and global imagination. Here, the recent events of Iguala, Guerrero and the forty-three students of Ayotzinapa come to mind, as does the politically divisive issue of undocumented migration in the United States amidst the cultural and demographic realities linked to expanding transnational economic ties with Latin America—the often-cited majority-minority question playing itself out in places far from the border like New York, as Robert Smith's (2005) work has demonstrated.

Given the materiality of this political reality, this paper explores how particular social imaginaries are aesthetically voiced, to invoke Bakhtin. What stories are being told? How do they exist as sites of cultural struggle and connection? For the question of Mexico and its people—and necessarily their identity as so many of the Mexican literati have ruminated upon—has turned and returned to an iconicity of *Mexicanidad* whose master symbols are so surrounded by the palaverous scaffoldings of a circulation of discourses concerned with offering essentialist accounts of the Mexican character—either monolithic or *detailed labyrinths*—most often distant from people themselves. This self-referential loop—to draw on Kathleen Stewart (1996) and Brian Massumi (1992)—encircles and animates a mythologizing cultural discourse. The challenge, then, is to consider Mexican personhood in a way that does not source material from a distance or lean on assumptions about “culture” and “identity,” but rather, draws on people and their own technologies of

transmission, their own arts of living. Rendered neither disembodied data set, nor seen as once-removed subjects of cultural translation, the challenge is to consider the voices of ethnic-Mexican and how they speak of lived subjectivities and cultural geographies beyond the facile scriptings of nation, nationalism, and the nation-state, expressing alternative ways of belonging.¹⁾

This paper peers through this tensive social landscape and attends to a grassroots politics of culture (Briggs 2012) with specific focus on the New Years Eve ritual huapango arribeño performance in the town of Xichú, Guanajuato. There, two huapango arribeño ensembles face across from one another in the central plaza, engaging in a marathon musical and poetic duel that begins at midnight on December 31st and lasts for hours. One of the music's most salient features is the use of the Spanish *décima* as poet-practitioners use the form to assemble dialogic narratives. Audiences expect to witness a florescence of ritual poetics guided by the performative axiom referred to as *fundamento*, or the foundational ground upon which thematic elaborations arise and which allows poet-practitioners to stake claims and debate them. And as of late, the topics of contemporary Mexican politics, activism, and social unrest have emerged with greater frequency. And so, my comments today are undergirded by the concept of circulation, a concept implicit in much of what is being discussed at this gathering. Indeed, the originary sociocultural space of the fandango is syncretic; it was made possible by diverse groups of people coming together across places and times—often under extreme pressures and circumstances—assembling embodied communicative practices, an expressive complex of music, poetry, and dance traveling and transforming along routes through which the material and immaterial aspects of lived experience were negotiated, social relationships created, and subjectivities formed. And while we inherit the expressive form—the fandango as practice, its formal features, instruments, syntax—the space of performance is one of bundled relationships to be disarticulated. Tracing the entanglement of aesthetics, politics, memory, and sensate experience moving through space and time is paramount. I am particularly concerned with how this thicket of connections is emplaced within the context of a 21st century Mexico with particular focus on how huapango arribeño's own circuits of circulation contribute to the voicing of a post-national public.

POSTNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Recent music scholarship has tasked itself with tracing how flows of music take shape in the social reality of globalization. Drawing on Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theorizing in the wake of what he suggests is a crisis of modernity and a collapsing of hegemonic national identities, scholars contend that music shared across the boundaries of nation-states not only reveals how identities are forged and performed in a context of transnational

¹⁾ Renato Rosaldo (1994) and Adelaida Del Castillo (2007) provide frameworks for understanding such forms of belonging in the guise of cultural citizenship and social citizenship, respectively.

economies (or the complicated relationship between the local and the global), but also how borders themselves are ultimately “fluid, give-and-take areas where complexity, negotiation, and hybridity are everyday constants” (Madrid 2008: 3-4). In his work on Nortec electronic dance music, Alejandro Madrid (2008) makes a case for understanding localized music-making from Tijuana, Mexico as a postnational project of territorial resignification, writing:

As the experiences of many citizens at the border suggest, a postnational condition should not refer to the viability of the nation-state as a political entity but rather to its necessary restructuring according to the real needs of its citizens. Such re-signification entails recognition of the local diversity that is often homogenized by nationalist discourses. This type of reevaluation is necessary if the nation-state is to be reconsidered a feasible form of political organization within the globalized postnational constellation. (*ibid*: 197)

To imagine postnational identities amid the crisis of contemporary Mexican politics is to necessarily account for the types of subjectivities fashioned beyond the exclusionary practices of the nation-state, subjectivities that gesture toward its re-imagining so that it may be more inclusive. Embedded in this point is a critique of what is perhaps a common meaning postnationalism has taken on in Latina/o music scholarship, which at times operates as a gloss for transnationalism. Within the purview of contemporary processes of globalization, people and identities are constantly moving, crossing borders, as are practices of music-making. However, to account for the ways in which musics are geographically diffuse (some might argue increasingly) is not necessarily the same as providing an understanding of how these practices go beyond the politics of the nation-state. For instance, current flows of Mexican folk-derived popular musics across national boundaries are in reality cultural articulations of the transnational growth of their respective markets for production and consumption, given labor migration between both countries. But how do these musics speak to the politics of illegality as a racialized identity engendered by the nation-state and the expressive needs people have to fashion practices of self-valorization within this context? How do everyday practices of music-making *play* a part? Extending this to a Mexican national context, how do spaces of vernacular musical performance enable forums for the public expression of connections constitutive of alternative imagined communities? Therefore, a more politicized reading of postnationalism is a consideration beyond transnational sonic flows and toward the ways in which vulnerable and marginalized communities fashion identities beyond the nation-state through embodied aesthetic acts in contexts where their bodies are subject to dehumanizing forms of violence. The space of fandango performance, I argue, is one such space of performance, one capable of meeting everyday needs of intimacy and belonging, particularly within the huapango arribeño genre, which I introduce next.

CONTEMPORARY FANDANGO PERFORMANCE HUAPANGO ARRIBEÑO

The term huapango is typically invoked as a reference to its signature galloping 6/8 rhythm. Indeed, most appreciators of Mexican music know huapango when they hear it in all of its variations, whether it be the accordion-based stylings of Mexico's *música nortea* or rendered in dramatic *bel canto* flare by the immortal stars of the "Golden" era of Mexican cinema. This latter image often stands in the minds of many as a type of classic or authentic huapango. And while the popularity of this music outside of its region of origin—the overlapping northeastern Mexican states of Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Puebla, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz—owes much to the silver screen, this stylized representation is one that lays bare the complicated relationship between music and nationalism in the 20th century, and subsequently sheds light on huapango arribeño's relative absence from this cannon. The related huasteco variant of huapango—which is practiced in the *huasteca* cultural region home to the Téenek (or Huastec) Indians—is one of many regional string-musics popularized in the years following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) as new circuits of electronic media emerged as powerful commercial vehicles for embedding regional musical practices within a broader discourse of Mexican musical nationalism. While deemed an emblematic sound of assumed national tradition during this period, the historical origins of huapango, more broadly, as a regional music parallel that of adjacent styles such as the son jarocho from Veracruz. These musics are at their core *mestizo*, the product of centuries of culture building. The narrowly formulated popular style of huapango has engendered its share of stereotypes. Images of huapango-crooning seductive *charros* intent on winning over women's favors loom. Indeed, in the first "Golden" era pastoral drama, *Alla en el Rancho Grande* (Out There on the Big Ranch) (1936), the most emblematic performances are huapango duels that display a near cartoon-like *machismo*.

Nevertheless, a music relatively unknown outside its region of origin in the states of Guanajuato, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí, huapango arribeño takes its name from the *nahuatl* word *cuauhpanco*—signifying the expression "atop of the wood" which is a reference to the *tarima* atop which people dance *zapateado* to various styles of vernacular Mexican music. The term *arribeño* (highlander) is a reference to the mountainous region of the states of Guanajuato and Querétaro (known as *La Sierra Gorda*) and also to the mid-region of San Luis Potosí (*La Zona Media*), which sits higher in altitude than the *huasteca* portion of the state, home to the more *huasteco* style. Given its musicological features, huapango arribeño may be linked to an abstracted model of music, *son* in this instance. Doing so without critical reflection, however, is to passively accept the modernist distanciation embedded in the sonic iconography of *Mexicanidad*. In other words, the *son* paradigm is complicit in domesticating vernacular expressive practices, that is, in mapping them "*alla*"—both heralding them as the essence of the national character while necessarily reifying them as unmodern.

Think of huapango arribeño as an elaborate musical architecture. It has jagged edges in structure, timbre, and tone and there is gravity behind the sudden drops and shifts that lift you up and down in between verses and melodies. The prototypical huapango arribeño musical piece follows this format: (1) *poesía*; (2) *decimal-valona*; and (3) *jarabe* or *son*. Its tonal cadence is the familiar I–IV–V (root, subdominant, dominant) diatonic three-chord circle progression and is nearly always played in major keys, D, A, G. The term *poesía* refers to the lyrical content of the first portion, which follows the *pie forzado* format. In the decimal-valona section, the poet glosses a base quatrain with four corresponding *décimas*. Valona refers to the music that accompanies the gloss—specifically the violin interludes played in between each *décima*—the actual poetic glossing is the decimal.²⁾ The third and final section is the *jarabe* or *son*, which is always played in 6/8 and showcases the violinists. This portion most resembles the commonly recognized huapango rhythmic style.

Huapango arribeño is best expressed during topada performances, which are organized for celebratory occasions including birthdays, weddings, patron saint festivities, Mexican independence, the New Year, and so on. The name topada comes from the verb *topar*—to collide with—and signifies the heightened reciprocity and intensity of such encounters. When musicians dig into the topada performance, they become engaged in the focused act of listening: listening to the musicians sitting at one's side, to those situated across the way, lending an ear to the audience, observing the performance space as it blossoms. With each passing moment, a detailed code of etiquette guides this flow, which is referred to as *el reglamento* (the performative protocol), such that ensembles are responsible for bringing to bear an array of musical and poetic resources. In fact, one ensemble *lleva la mano*, literally “has the hand.” Far more than “an advantage,” *la mano* refers to an accountability of taking the initiative, for said ensemble is entrusted with a detailed set of responsibilities including: (1) commencing the engagement, that is making the first musical intervention of the evening; (2) deciding when and what types of *sones* and *jarabes* are to be played; (3) establishing the topic of poetic debate; (4) initiating different portions of the topada; and (5) shifting between musical keys, and setting the general musical pitch. Musicians

²⁾ Vicente Mendoza (1947) defines the valona as the act of glossing a base quatrain with four corresponding *décimas* such that the final verse of the first *décima* mirrors the first verse of the base quatrain, the final verse of the second *décima* mirrors the second verse of the base quatrain, and so on. Valonas also exist in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Veracruz. Both Gabriel Saldívar (1934) and Socorro Perea (1989) suggest the name valona comes from the Spanish word *valedor* (meaning worthy comrade) thus referencing its possible laudatory role in showcasing improvisatory skill. Vicente Mendoza (1947), on the other hand, claims the term is a referent for soldiers whom arrived in New Spain from the Valona region of Belgium where the glossing of *décimas* was commonplace. The evidence to support this is rather thin. Whatever its origins, the valona seems to have enjoyed great popularity in the first half of the 18th century throughout New Spain, however by the time Mendoza is researching in the first half of the 20th century, he only locates its practice in the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, and Veracruz. He makes no mention of its presence in the highlands of the states of Guanajuato and Querétaro or in the mid-region of San Luis Potosí.

strategize and demonstrate their competence according to these rules of musical engagement. The topada “winner,” so to speak, is never formally announced, although audience applause, cheers, and zapateados may offer an indication of who has come out ahead.

XICHÚ, GUANAJUATO

Every year in the mountains of northeastern Guanajuato, Mexico, the town of Xichú celebrates the coming of the New Year with a festival surrounding a climactic *topada* performance. There, two huapango arribeño ensembles face across from one another in the central plaza, engaging in a marathon musical and poetic duel that begins at midnight on December 31st and lasts through noon the following day. During the performance, both groups—made up of two violins (a lead and second fiddle, or *primera* and *segunda vara*), a *guitarra quinta huapanguera* (eight-string bass-guitar), and *vihuela* or *jarana* (both small five-stringed chordophones)—tower above the audience atop *tablados* (raised benches), one at each end of the plaza, physically facing each other while a sea of people dance rhythmically up and down below them. The intense back-and-forth that unfolds reaches a fever pitch, fueling the thousands who stomp their feet through the dawn to the point of exhaustion. With every patterned dance step, waves of energy prompt shouts of excitement despite the bitter cold as everyone is entranced by the music and improvised poetry. This is how minutes become hours, darkness transforms into morning, giving way to a sense of vertigo that feels eternal before it’s suddenly over.

The topada is the climax of the huapango arribeño festival that surrounds it, which has been going on for just over thirty years now. The very first festival, initially a one-day affair, took place on December 31st, 1983, the date upon which Xichú already hosted one of its two annual topadas. This is still the case, yet the festival now begins on the 29th and concludes on the 1st and close to six thousand people attend. Now, the yearly festival is part of life’s rhythms for its residents, something to look forward to. It rose in significance beginning in 1983, as Guillermo Velázquez—a prominent huapango arribeño practitioner and founding member of the group Los Leones de la Sierra de Xichú—and his brother Eliazar developed two projects aimed at revitalizing the spaces of huapango arribeño in Xichú. The idea wasn’t to “rescue” tradition, so much as to fortify the connection between veteran and younger practitioners. Through a chance meeting with Leonel Durán, director of the Dirección General de Culturas Populares, the brothers garnered financial support with which to organize huapango arribeño workshops throughout the Sierra Gorda of Guanajuato and a festival in Xichú to honor veteran practitioners, both as a way to

facilitate intergenerational dialogue.³⁾ The workshops were centered on both transmitting the rudimentary musical skills required to play the ensemble instruments and also familiarizing students with the poetic forms utilized. As of late, workshops have been incorporated into the programming and outreach activities of municipal *casas de cultura* in varying degrees throughout Guanajuato, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí. There is an aspect to these workshops that might be considered “invented tradition,” an idea famously introduced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger in reference to the innovation of symbolic and ritual practices “which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1983: 2). While this idea is usually in reference to types of historical forgery (typically in the service of nation-building), the situated re-enactment of practices and carving out of social spaces concerned with dignifying cultural resources by non-hegemonic groups, can also be a type of empowered innovation that likewise seeks to establish a sense of contiguity between present-day expressions and their antecedents.

For a number of years the festival was principally organized as an homage to veteran practitioners, known as the *Festival de Homenaje a los Viejos Maestros Huapangueros*. To this end, elder musicians were publicly recognized, given a modest token of appreciation, and were invited to participate in a public forum to speak about their experiences and their art. In 1983, Pancho Berrones, Tranquilino Méndez, Antonio García, Antonio Escalante, Agapito Briones, Tomás Aguilar, Ceferino Juárez, Román Gómez, Pedro Carreón, and Lorenzo López were the first to be honored. The festival is now known as the *Festival del Huapango Arribeño y de la Cultura de la Sierra Gorda* and each year attends to a thematic focus. And to this day, the apex of the festival remains the topada. Close to six thousand people ring in each New Year, dancing in Xichú’s central plaza to the oscillating performance of two huapango arribeño ensembles, an all-night encounter that begins at midnight and lasts roughly ten to eleven hours. In addition, the organizing committee has been and continues to be composed of Xichú natives (musicians, campesinos, migrants, local residents, etc.) and is funded primarily independently of official institutions and municipal monies. The committee relies on grassroots fundraisers and modest donations from Sierra Gorda natives. And while the festival is an event rooted in Xichú and its

³⁾ After completing the first recording in 1982, they were given the opportunity to formally present the material in the Museo de Culturas Populares in Mexico, City, where they subsequently met Leonel Durán and began to develop the workshop and festival projects. Furthermore, chance encounters also thrust Los Leones into the world of Latin American protest song in the 1980s, of which some of the more emblematic figures include Víctor Jara of Chile; Mercedes Sosa and Atahualpa Yupanqui of Argentina; Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés of Cuba; and Amparo Ochoa, Oscar Chávez and Los Folkloristas of Mexico. As a consequence, they have traveled to Europe, Japan, and throughout Latin America, introducing huapango arribeño as an expression of Xichú, Guanajuato to people and artists all over the world.

history of topadas at the start of each New Year, it is by no means isolated from other places. In fact, the vectors that attach Xichú to Chicago and other sites in the U.S. also exist when organizing and fundraising, for example. These connections play out through personal relationships and necessary transnational flows of resources, much like what happens through the sorts of binational civic efforts on the part hometown associations (Bada 2010).⁴⁾

PRECARITY, PUBLICS, AND RITUAL POETICS

Circulation seems an apt analytic in the present discussion. Linguistic anthropologist Benjamin Lee, in commenting on Greg Urban's work on the topic writes, "circulation is not simply the movement of people, things, and ideas within or among societies. Instead, it is a process with its own types of abstraction and constraints produced by the semiotic nature of the circulating forms" (Lee in Urban 2001: ix-x). Here at least is a starting point for my conceptual mapping of how "metacultural judgments form the normative core for the creation of community and the reproduction of culture" (*ibid*: xi). For a highly public and cooperatively enacted space of discourse emerges in Xichú. With each passing moment, with each alternating performative intervention, listening and reception increase in intensity, as décimas and melodies braid themselves to build a loud and felt inter-affective dialogue that, I argue, textualizes intersubjective desires for recognition.

At the most recent topada in Xichú, poet-practitioners Nicacio Lopez and Tobías Hernandez faced off and there emerged between them a circulating dialogue concerning Mexico's political present and the role they hope youth will play in the country's social and political transformation. Here is an excerpt from one of Nicacio's poesías:

Quieren desviar la atención
No nos **quieran** ver la cara
México ya se dispara
Contra tanta corrupción
Ya basta de impunidad
No podrán tapar el sol
Se les salió de control
Y la luz de la verdad
Alumbro la oscuridad
De toda **gobernación**
Si saben bien que ellos son
El crimen organizado
Que a México han lastimado:

⁴⁾ Bada's (2010) work is Chicago-based, though focused on the connections between that city and Michoacán, Mexico.

Contra tanta corrupción
Ayotzinapa ya no es
Aquella voz temerosa
Escondida silenciosa
Sometida en timidez
Se paró sobre sus pies
Puso el dedo en el renglón
La sangre del corazón
Tiene coraje enraizado
Que el **mal gobierno** ha sembrado:
Contra tanta corrupción

They want to divert attention
They don't want to look us in the face
México has risen up
Against so much corruption

Enough already with impunity
They cannot block out the sun
They have lost control
And the light of the truth
Illuminated the darkness
Of all form of **governance**
It is well known that they are
The organized crime
That has damaged Mexico:
Against so much corruption

Ayotzinapa is no longer
That fearful voice
Hidden, silenced
Crouched in timidity
It has stood up on its feet
It will not budge
The blood in the heart
It has a deep-rooted anger
That **bad government** has sown:
Against so much corruption

Consider Nicacio's language as he positions the people of Mexico—embodied in the figure of Ayotzinapa—as citizens the subject of state violence, but who stand up against such transgressions vis-à-vis the official and corrupt Mexican state. Similarly, a year earlier,

Vincent Velázquez—a young hip-hop MC, Guanajuato native, son of poet-practitioner Guillermo Velázquez, and active member of the Xichú festival organizing committee—burst into a décima-inspired flow in full-throated MC cadence as Los Leones de la Sierra de Xichú performed for the thousands in attendance. Vincent, who as of late has become part of the group as a dancer, proclaimed the following décimas in between vigorous fiddle remates as the musicians strummed out a valona on that cold December night, offering both a critique of power and a message of hope:

Lo que llaman democracia
tan solo nos causa asco
la política es un fiasco
es una burda falacia;
gobierna una aristocracia
torpe, voraz, corrosiva
que autoritaria y lesiva
no nos deja florecer
y al México del poder:
NO LE GRITARÉ: ¡QUE VIVA!
LIVE!

Pero nuestro país si resplandece
en cada son que se toca
en cada beso en la boca
y en el sol cuando amanece
en la lluvia que humedece
la tierra que se cultiva
en la música festiva
o en un alegre bailable
a ese México entrañable:
YO SÍ LE GRITO: ¡QUE VIVA!

Soy cantante y bailador
un sociólogo rapero
soy un MC huapanguero
saltimbanqui y trovador
en un indignado amor
mi canto a México estriba
y en esta hora decisiva
a pesar de los abrojos
con dulce llanto en los ojos:
YO SÍ LE GRITO: ¡QUE VIVA!

What they call democracy
only causes us nausea
the political system is a fiasco
it is a gross fallacy;
a clumsy, voracious, corrosive
aristocracy governs
authoritarian and harmful
it impedes us from flourishing
so to the Mexican powers that be:
I WILL NOT SHOUT: MAY IT LONG

But our country does shine
with each son in the offing
with each kiss on the lips
and with each sun of a new day
in the rain that dampens the earth
in the land that is cultivated
in our festive music
or in a joyful dance
to that endearing Mexico:
I DO SHOUT: MAY IT LONG LIVE!

I am a singer and a dancer
a sociologist rapper
I'm a huapanguero MC
an acrobatic troubador
my song to Mexico lies
in an indignant love
and in this decisive hour
despite all of the obstacles
with sweet tears in my eyes:
I DO SHOUT: MAY IT LONG LIVE!

These *décimas* consider the existential question of what the jingoistic chant “Qué Viva México!” actually means. Spurred by the fraught political atmosphere and everyday violences experienced by many throughout Mexico in the present moment, Vincent implored the audience to imagine what a “Mexican” identity could be in the face of history and structural violence, beyond cultural tropes, and inspired by movements for autonomy that give many hope of a brighter future. Indeed, he punctuated this hip-hop *décima* mash-up with a resounding, “Desde la Sierra Gorda, estas *décimas* van para el Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional por veinte años de lucha!” (From the Sierra Gorda, these *décimas* are dedicated to the Zapatista National Liberal Army for twenty years of struggle!), a shout out that resonates now more than ever as transnational Canadian mining interests have returned to Xichú and its surrounding areas. Although the area has been deemed a protected biosphere, this has not stopped lobbyists from influencing local municipal politicians to scale back certain environmental protections. In the post-NAFTA era, free trade trumps all. This conflict is just now beginning to play itself out, but it represents the type of neoliberal exploitation around the country that the Zapatista National Liberal Army (EZLN) has denounced.

Poetics are contingent on a dialogic exchange between public and individual lives. They are made legible and connective in this way, through the space of a shifting social imaginary. And caught within this dramatic dispersal are the people themselves, those that simultaneously produce and receive this “narrated world” (Stewart 1996: 181), their lives addressed and placed inside the story itself: a vertigo of narrative, encounter, and embodiment. And it is this very corporeality that authoritative discourses (of national culture, for instance) so disembody. I return to Benjamin Lee:

The ritual performativity of traditional societies has been replaced by the mass performativity of nationalism. The key transformation is that the ritual performativity that creates the image of social totality in traditional societies has been relocated from a unique, indexical experience to shared, mass-mediated individual performative epiphanies that are aggregated into a social totality created by the act of reading under a metaculture of newness. (Lee in Urban 2001: xv)

In other words, the liberal political model that posits the polity as an aggregate of individuals engenders a certain atomization integral to bracing facile and de-contextualized authenticities—from invented tradition to political discourse. However—and perhaps this is the crux of the major claim I am making here (and indeed perhaps an absurd claim because it might seem so obvious)—if there is one idea that we can all agree on in our varied discussions and exploration of the fandango at this conference is that it creates a public, dare I say it necessitates one. The fandango is a communicative space; it is legible because it generates a centripetal force that convenes. And the work of huapango *arribeño* poet-practitioners is that of voicing this polyphonic connectivity, generating a new shared

experience (through performance) where everyone present is bound up in the same interpretational space of living in that moment (of performance)—a reflexive dialogics of self-authorization that (within the context which I have described) emplaces lives in relation to others, indeed coaxing a counter-public against the grain of national scriptings. Once more, this attunement erupts in intense moments of composition and creative exchange.

THE SPACE OF AFFECT

Think of huapango arribeño as an act in-the-making, a vigorous assemblage of poesías, decimales, valonas, sonos and jarabes coaxed into harmony, communicating a sense of high drama. For performers, this means exercising a level of virtuosity in the moment for all to witness. One may succeed or fail creatively in the act of improvisation, for there is no safety valve to contain the commitment to the aesthetic belief that one will get from “here” to “there,” from embryonic thought to emotive poetic, all of which involves both technique and feeling. This is an aesthetic risk. Many dancers and musicians in this room have felt this: answering the call of a verse; improvising a patterned step; jumping wholly into what you’re doing musically—“do I know the chords?” Within the context that I have laid out, however, for Nicacio, in particular, to publicly voice a critical perspective regarding the events of Ayotzinapa also constitutes a very real social risk; people are being murdered for expressing dissent in Mexico. Now, I don’t mean to romanticize huapango arribeño poetics as some resistive thrust, but I do want to take seriously how its narrative circulations invoke inter-affective states of sociality. Guillermo Velázquez, poet-practitioner from Xichú, Guanajuato, explains:

El trovador es un condensador de la colectividad, es una antena que concentra en sí lo que en la comunidad es inquietud, es anhelo, es sueño, es memoria, es necesidad de expresión. En ese sentido, el trovador expresa los intereses de la comunidad y los suyos propios, que muchas veces pueden ir más adelante o más atrás de la comunidad. No por el hecho de que yo sepa hacer un verso quiere decir que ya soy capaz de expresar el interés de la comunidad—eso se logra a través de mucho tiempo, de mucha dedicación, de mucho deseo de llegar a traducir en los versos lo que la gente quiere decir. Eso tiene que ver con la responsabilidad que tiene el poeta, el trovador para estar permanente atento—“¿qué sucede aquí, qué sucede allá?”

[The poet is a conduit of the collectivity, he is an antenna that absorbs what in the community is uncertainty, is desire, is what is dreamt, is memory, is in need of expression. In that sense, the troubadour expresses the interests of the community as well as his own, which many times may be ahead of or lagging behind those of the community. Merely because I know how to craft a verse does not mean that expressing the interests of the community is a given—that is attained across a great span of time, of committing oneself, of desiring to translate through verse what the people want to say. That has much to do

with the poet's burden of responsibility, for the troubadour must be permanently attentive—"what is happening here, what is happening over there?"]

This highly developed vernacular theorizing is emergent from practice wherein the seemingly innocuous process of entextualizing situated knowledges, lived experiences, and social commentary both emerge and constitute a collectivity.

Charles Briggs (2008) asks us to consider, seriously, practices of vernacular theorizing—"metadiscourses that are excluded from the communities that are created . . . by academic theorizing" (101)—yet always careful of uncritically positioning them in opposition to (academic) "theory." Instead, how can we understand situated knowledges emergent from arts of living in ways that make apparent how the "immediate experience of community is in fact inevitably constituted by a wider set of social and spatial relations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 7). In other words, we ought not place the vernacular in opposition to the cosmopolitan, but rather trace the "intersections and exchanges that take place between them" and thus consider vernacular analysis as "practices for producing, circulating, and receiving knowledge" that bring to bear a critical politics of integral belonging rather than peripheral existence (Briggs 2008: 101). Such an understanding requires that we pay close attention to the embodied experience of "being there," which is admittedly difficult to measure, or quantify, yet undeniable, unavoidable even.

In her work on the cumulative aspects of affect, Megan Watkins (2010) moves beyond the notions of affect as preliminal or ephemeral, but rather insists on its lasting and building in capacity (269-270). She writes, "it is this capacity of affect to be retained, to accumulate, to form dispositions and thus shape subjectivities . . . whereby a sense of self is formed through engagement with the world and others and the affects this generates" (*ibid*). Her conceptualization of "accumulating affect" aligns well with the theory of Georges Bataille, particularly in her explanation of "interaffectivity," the changing sense of self in relation to that which is perceived as external. From a more directly and philosophically Bataillean perspective, Alphonso Lingis (1998) describes the same internal-external interaction as intimacy with the alien amidst coexistence. This speaks to how the intersubjective desire for recognition is realized through interpersonal relationships and transactions of all kinds.⁵⁾ These general states of interaffectivity, however, are always "articulated and contextualized" *in place*, or emplaced, as Gregory J. Seigworth (2010) suggests (21).⁶⁾ Seigworth turns to the cartographic thinking of Lawrence Grossberg (1992a), particularly his concept of the *mattering map*—"a socially determined structure of affect which defines

⁵⁾ Watkins focuses specifically on the pedagogic relation between teacher and student in building her argument around the ways in which acknowledgement plays into notions of self-worth.

⁶⁾ Lingis also writes, "the other's body is not first a material mass stationed before us and exposed to our inspection . . . From the first, we find ourselves accompanied, in our movements down to the levels of the field, by other sensibilities, other sentient bodies." (1998: 37).

the things that do and can matter to those living within the map”—in making this claim that place matters for interaffectivity (398).⁷⁾

Mattering maps, in this regard, come into being as contexts of sociality part of a larger politics and poetics of place. Interestingly, Grossberg braces his discussion of identity—as built around people’s mattering maps—by drawing on Stuart Hall’s conception of ethnicity as a “political agenda” congealed by “points of attachment which give the individual some sense of ‘place’ and position in the world”—thought of in terms of locality, culture, language, etc (1996: 236). This intellectual linkage provides a way for speaking of modes of attunement that come together in everyday life and erupt in extraordinary moments of intensity as transcendent of social differences—as spaces of desire where the political act binding personal experiences of violence and marginalization into larger public meanings of belonging that map out a future “not quite in view from the present, a future that scrambles any map in advance of its arrival, if indeed the moment (as a demand on the social) ever fully arrives” (Seigworth 2010: 21). These ideas of interaffectivity and mattering maps are significant to understanding the context of huapango arribeño space of fandango performance because they open up another way of imagining publics that do not rely on fixed or primordial notions of *lo Mexicano*. That is, taken on their own terms, the communities in question, while objectively considered “Mexican,” exercise agency in subjectively configuring who they are, much of which has to do with struggles in daily life, cultural memory, relationships and intimacies amidst a fraught political reality. Neither the Mexican nation-state and its jingoistic excess, nor the disparaging *ranchero* chronotopic figurations of Mexican nationalism that condemn Mexicans in rural areas like Xichú, Guanajuato to the “savage slot”—to invoke Trouillot (2003)—have a monopoly on who these communities are, for they actively engage in configuring their own Mexicanness, for lack of a better word, through the adverbial ways they go about living. The lives of the people in question are unavailable for metaphor: too much real, not enough symbolism. And this, I think, matters, for the authoritative voice of the state projects itself in a reified way—an object that naturalizes its own discourse, establishing a single ethical worldview—“the voice of the people”—which ultimately positions modes of sociality that mediate the absorption of its politics at the distal edges of those very politics. However, while the state attempts to claim its communicable cartography as authoritative, vernacular discursive social relations can reflexively enact another collectivity.

⁷⁾ While Grossberg focuses on the power of popular culture in his analysis—specifically the invested passion, energy, and emotional involvement so much a part of what characterizes fandom—he nevertheless makes a case for how these “affective alliances” exist as “sites of investment” within the structuring of everyday life atop which specific identities are constructed in the company of others, in the midst of shared moments and experiences (1992: 59-60).

CONCLUSION

Nationalism in the contemporary Mexican context is highly problematic, for attached to it is the tacit acceptance of state violence enacted with total impunity. In the fandango space of Xichú, Guanajuato, however, we find a ritual poetics that re-affirms a unique indexical experience of a certain Mexican political subjectivity beyond officialized scriptings, in turn invoking a counter-public against the floating signification of a certain tropic national folklore. In this way, huapango arribeño—as an indispensable meeting ground for the aesthetic and highly public elaboration of experience—takes hold as an element that contributes to the shared stories of Mexican lives, those stories then taking on a life of their own in the moment of their aesthetic voicing, touching those present. Stories—now a bundle of music and poetics—tremble beneath the skin as layers of tone and timbre build and fold in on themselves, pulling back tightly, spreading out, only to build and release again, like so many waves stirring senses of elation, an embodied, present-tense connection (however momentary) constituted by overlapping forms of sociality. And here we arrive at the resonance of music and poetics, this is to say, that which makes performance *moving*—the density of lived life. It is the shared and aesthetically voiced experience of daily struggles and the desire to belong. Our task, as cultural analysts, is to locate the fandango within the purview of such lived circumstances and political realities in order to more deeply understand the collectivities and intimacies enacted, or rather, the political anatomy of the fandango as a form of living exchange, beyond mere aesthetic emblem.

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