

Hardcore as “Home”: An Etymology of CORE through Chicana Punk Sound

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Abstract

For the full intro to the forum by Michelle Habell-Pallan, click [here](#). For the first installment by Yessica Garcia Hernandez click [here](#). The forum’s inspiring research by scholars/practioners Wanda Alarcón, Yessica Garcia Hernandez, Marlen Rios-Hernandez, Susana Sepulveda, and Iris C. Viveros Avendaño, understands music in its local, translocal and transnational context;

Keywords

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The forum’s inspiring research by scholars/practioners Wanda Alarcón, Yessica Garcia Hernandez, Marlen Rios-Hernandez, Susana Sepulveda, and Iris C. Viveros Avendaño, understands music in its local, translocal and transnational context; and insists upon open new scholarly imaginaries. . .

Current times require us to bridge intersectional, decolonial, and gender analysis. Music, and our relationship to it, has much to reveal about how power operates within a context of inequality. And it will teach us how to get through this moment. **–MHP**

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Chicana punk is a Chicana feminist punk rock subculture within a subculture and a countercultural formation. Although ‘Chicana’ identity is typically thought of as a politicized Mexican-American woman shaped by Chicana/o politics, I recognize that there are varying participants that constitute this subculture, its scenes, and/or communities. Punk is in constant movement and formation, especially as its participants come in and out of the scene, contributing to and reshaping the subculture. The same can be said about Chicana punk.



ATRAKO live @ The Smell—by Susana Sepulveda

Chicana/o and Latina/o studies cultural theorist Michelle Habel-Pallán notes in [Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture](#) that punk is a “site of possibility” (150), a mode in which Chicanas and Latinas challenge the status quo and “disrupt fixed notions of Chicana identity framed by the dominant culture” (153). Thus, Chicana punk is constituted through different subjectivities, experiences, and imaginings (specifically Chicanisma, or Chicana feminist ideologies and consciousness formations rooted in the Chicana Feminist Movement) that continue to be pertinent for young women in punk today.

In this post, I explore an etymology of “core” and the relationship of this term to Chicanas and Latinas immersed in *hardcore* punk. I ask: How is “core” theorized as a conception of “home” within Chicana punk? Drawing from Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of “making face, making soul” and the sound and performance practice of Los Angeles based Latina/o hardcore punk band ATRAKO, I frame core as home, while considering how a Chicana punk listening practice of hardcore emerges.

[ATRAKO](#) is Samahara (Vocals), Irvin (Guitar/vocals), Suzy (Bass), and Cindee (Drums). Although ATRAKO was made up of both Chicanas and non-Chicana Latina/os in 2012, their participation in Chicana punk spaces, events, and adoption of Chicana feminist ideologies help to constitute Chicana punk subcultures more broadly. ATRAKO illustrates this through their performance on February 27, 2015 at [Xicana Punk Night](#). This was to be one of their last shows before their split on July 5, 2015 at the [Riot Grrrl Carnival](#) annual musical fundraiser event held at [The Smell](#), an all-ages-volunteers-run, do-it-yourself art and music space. Xicana punk night was a community fundraiser event for [Nalgona Positivity Pride](#), “a Xicana-Brown [and] Indigenous project that focuses on intersectional body positivity, eating disorders awareness and cultural affirmation.” ATRAKO’s lyrics also address issues of gender, racial, and environmental violence; and resonate with Chicana feminist critiques. Moreover, they exemplify how Chicana subjectivities are reconfigured and ‘sounded out’ through hardcore.



<https://youtu.be/x8T0Le8d4XQ>

Hardcore is a style of punk music and aesthetics that arose in the early 1980s in varying urban geographies including Southern and Northern California, Washington D.C. and New York City, with intensified musical characteristics that differ from the 1970s punk movement. Hardcore is characterized by its aggressive aesthetics typically depicted by its fast sonic tempos, short song lengths, and gritty confrontational vocals. Despite the queer Chicana/o influences on the sound of hardcore by punk artists such as Alice Bag and Kid Congo Powers, it has remained predominantly represented by white, heterosexual, masculine figures of middle class suburbia, epitomized by Keith Morris, Henry Rollins, and Ian MacKaye. But what happens when Chicanas and Latinas engage hardcore? By focusing on the relationships Chicanas and Latinas forge through hardcore, especially in relation to Chicana punk subcultural formations, I argue we can reconfigure hardcore narratives. It is also important to note that not all participants that engage Chicana punk necessarily identify as Chicanas. Yet non-Chicana/o identified Latina/os are entangled and implicated within Chicana punk subculture through their participation and co-production of Chicana punk spaces.

To theorize Chicanas’ and Latinas’ participation in hardcore, I consider an etymology of core—specifically its [articulation as ‘heart’ and as ‘coring’](#), that is, “the act of removing a core or of cutting from a central part.” These meanings help me to conceptualize core, and by extension, hardcore as home. As early hardcore punks began to distinguish themselves from 1970s punk, they formed new punk scenes, subjectivities, and sound. These new social formations offered new generations of punks another mode, or set of tools, to contest the status quo and articulate new social conditions, like for instance, Reaganism in the 1980s. But more than anything else, hardcore was the result of a new generation of punks creating a niche for themselves, that is, a “home,” within the broader punk movement. Thus, the formation of hardcore was an act of “coring” that produced a new site of belonging. I view these articulations of “core” further, alongside Anzaldúa’s framework and metaphor “making face, making soul” (i.e. making heart). This framework enables me to theorize hardcore as home in Chicana punk.



Xicana Punk Night Flyer– by Gloria Lucas, NPP

Making ‘core’

In *Making Face/Making Soul*, Anzaldúa writes, “‘making faces’ is my metaphor for constructing one’s identity” (xvi). In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, she extends this idea stating “The heart es un corazón con razón, with intelligence, passion, and purpose, a ‘mind-full’ heart with ears for listening, eyes for seeing, a mouth with tongue narrowing to a pen tip for speaking/writing” (153). Within Anzaldúa’s theorizations, “heart” is rendered a part of one’s conocimiento, a self-reflective awareness of how one is cultivating an identity and generating consciousness formations. But through this self-reflective process, one is also creating notions of home and belonging.

Through the notion of coring, self-reflective processes become about de-hearting, decentering and/or disrupting what is presumed to be foundational (i.e. what is central/core), in order to refashion. In other words, coring is a process of making anew. Hardcore demonstrates “coring” in its formation, as it emerged from the early punk movement yet reconfigured its notion of punk sound, style, and identity. In a way, punk ripped out its heart to start anew as hardcore. Similarly, Chicana punk has cored and reconfigured notions of punk and hardcore sound, style, and identity. For instance, ATRAKO offers a queer Chicana feminist representation that disavows dominant hardcore punk portrayals. They spit out lyrics in Spanish only, and use metaphorical language and visuals in their lyrics and album covers addressing gendered violence in relation to environmental abuse. Furthermore, while embodying hardcore’s “traditional” characteristics, ATRAKO dramatizes hardcore sound by performing a more melodic dissonance. The music compliments the lyrical narrations and arguably enacts a call-and-response to the sung lyrics posing its own sonic narration.



<https://youtu.be/c1t1Eq6xlrI>

The song “Madre” (2014), which translates as “mother,” exemplifies this as the guitarist begins with a lamenting introductory verse, followed by thumping drums and a grito reminiscent of a battle cry. In the first chorus Samahra blurts out:

ya es tiempo de entender

quien te dio la vida

es la muxer la encarnación

la esencia de la tierra

ya es tiempo de entender

quien te dio la vida

es la muxer quien tiene el poder. (Madre, 2014)

As Samahra is singing, the drums, guitar, and bass sound out a response to the chorus’s statements. This sonic accompaniment articulates a “coring” of hardcore music through the queer brown bodies animating this sonic experience, the exclusively Spanish lyrics and narrative, which centralize women and their relations to the natural world through the figure of mother, as well as a spiritual activism—what Anzaldúa called “a spirituality for social change” (323). In other words, the song presents all things that are not typically represented in American hardcore. ATRAKO tears up hardcore to make it anew and to speak to their experiences, politics, and identities, creating a “home” for themselves in hardcore.

In addition, Chicana punk reconfigures Chicana feminist politics, experiences, and subjectivities. Punk artists and bands such as ATRAKO articulate, or rather (re)articulate, Chicana feminist discourses through the platform of punk, and more specifically, hardcore. ATRAKO demonstrates a reconfiguration of Chicana feminisim through their sonic expression which shapes a listening

practice of Chicana feminist theory and praxis through a “coring” of hardcore. As ATRAKO presents Chicana feminist discourse through non-traditional avenues and hardcore style, they bring visibility to Chicana feminist experiences and subjectivities within punk subcultures. Moreover, given the ethnic heterogeneity of the band, ATRAKO demonstrates how Chicana feminist politics is engaged by non-Chicana Latinas, particularly punks, who help shape these politics just as much as they are impacted by them. ATRAKO’s hardcore sound reveals how Chicana and Latina punks engage and reconfigure Chicana feminist discourses, positing the political potentiality punk offers Chicana feminism. In considering the conceptual framework of making heart, or rather making ‘core,’ Chicana punk, as exemplified by ATRAKO, sounds out a process of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Additionally, these continuous processes of reconstruction in punk and more specifically Chicana punk, are made possible through the cultivation of practices and cultural productions of its active participants. For instance, ATRAKO’s sound stems from a variety of musical influences that might not necessarily be typically associated to or rendered Chicana or Chicana affiliated (such as metal, punk, and hardcore). Yet, their coring practices reconstruct hardcore as a Chicana genre. In addition, events such as Xicana Punk Night illustrate how Chicana punk subculture is constituted by varying participants who enact and identify with Chicana feminist politics in one way or another. ATRAKO’s participation at this show, as well as other non-Chicana Latina attendees, highlights how a Chicana punk space and genre is generated through a structure of feeling that extends across ethno-national identities. It might be suggested that the term “Latino punk” may best describe this structure of feeling; however, the fact that participants continue to specify the genre and spaces as “Chicana” or “Xicana” punk complicates such general descriptions.

Future Developments

The theoretical basis I have presented here is a stepping-stone for thinking about Chicana punk listening practices and what can be imagined through Chicana punk sound. Considering the etymology of “core” through the context of hardcore, I have argued that one way of imagining Chicana punk sound is through a reconfiguration and articulation of home. ATRAKO offers a new way to conceptualize how Chicana punk subculture and sound is constituted through varying Latina/o identities and non-Chicana subjectivities, and how it is also a site of home, belonging, and community for such participants, culminated through the act of listening. Listening is performative here, in the sense that it is a part of the “coring” process of hardcore, as Chicana feminist praxis is enacted through hardcore sound. The connection between “core” and listening practices in Chicana punk echoes a structure of feeling and political potentiality that emanates from the scene, music, and sound, exceeding their subcultural formations. Participants engage this structure of feeling, shaped by processes of making anew, that functions as a site of belonging that speaks to new Chicana subjectivities, politics, and experiences in hardcore.

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Featured Image: ATRAKO live—via <https://atrakopunx.bandcamp.com>

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Susana Sepulveda is a PhD Student in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona. Her developing dissertation project engages Chicana feminist studies, cultural studies, subcultural studies, and sound studies. She focuses on consciousness and subject formations in Chicana punk subcultures, emphasizing the importance of punk for understanding Chicana identities, subjectivities, consciousness, politics, and representations. Susana’s research has received support from the Barnard Library, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Arizona, the Women Studies Advisory Council (WOSAC), as well as numerous conference associations including the American Studies Association, the Cultural Studies Association, the National Women’s Studies Association, and Feminisms & Rhetorics. She earned her M.A. in Gender and Women’s Studies at UA, and her B.A. in Feminist Studies and Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In addition to her scholarship, Susana is the founder and organizer of the annual music fundraiser event Riot Grrrl Carnival, a punk musician in the Los Angeles based punk band Las Sangronas y El Cabron, zinester, and creator of the zine series “La Sangrona.”



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