

Sounding Out Tarima Temporalities: Decolonial Feminista Dance Disruption

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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](#). For the second post by Susana Sepulveda [click here](#).

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Article, Chican@/Latin@ Studies, Chicana Soundscapes Forum, Dance/Movement, Diasporic Sound



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For the full intro to the forum by Michelle Habell-Pallan, click [here](#). For the first installment by Yessica Garcia Hernandez click [here](#). For the second post by Susana Sepulveda click [here](#). For last week's post by Wanda Alarcón 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; 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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The knowledge presented in this piece is reflective of countless conversations, and the many interactions I have had with teachers, practitioners, and extended *fandanguerx* communities in Mexico and the U.S. In my scholarly work, I draw from these conversations and my personal experiences as a *bailadora* in the fandango tradition to illustrate the power of community music as a practice to generate and articulate knowledge in relation to personal and social change. My work centers the study of rhythmic synchronicity in the fandango tradition from Veracruz, Mexico embodied in *Zapateado*; the percussive sound of women rhythmically stomping their feet on wood.

I am particularly interested in conversations that approach the study of rhythm from a feminist perspective as it allows us to claim visibility to the gendered and racialized voices of resistance that are often absent in academic discourse. My analysis builds on the contributions of Martha Gonzalez, who through her term *rhythmic intention* explains in "[Sonic \(Trans\)Migration of Son Jarocho Zapateado: Rhythmic Intention, Metamorphosis, and Manifestation in Fandango and Performance](#)": "[rhythms] processed by the body are not varying forms of making time in music practice, but they are indeed political acts rooted in a history of resistance" (60). To this, I theorize the *ca-fé con pan*—a polyrhythm cyclically played by women in the majority of *sones* in the fandango repertoire—to argue that rhythms embodied by the tarima speak of a learning practice that moves beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. The polyrhythmic zapateado that bailadoras sound out on the tarima is rooted in, and flourishes through interpersonal relationships among women as dancers, and through a more profound awareness and synchronized relationship with nature, all the plants, animals, and natural resources which comprise it as Shawn Wilson discusses on *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (4). The relational embodied knowledge of the bailaoras through zapateado, can thus be understood as a political act, one of decolonial resistance.

My approach to the study of this rhythm comes from the perspective of a *bailadora*. Although, I respect the work of scholars who capture the technicality of sound and rhythm, I do not offer an analysis of it from the perspective of a trained musician. I learned to dance and play music in informal settings, with my family and the people in the neighborhood. With a working class background, formal training in music or dance was a luxury enjoyed by the elites. Even though I lived in Veracruz for many years, I did not grow up within the tradition, but knew about the music through my dad who taught me some steps. My formation in community dances was primarily through family parties and the *sonidos* in Mexico City; block parties with huge speakers blasting a variety of tunes ranging from old *cumbias*, *salsas*, *banda*, *merengue*, and Mexican urban rock. *Sonidos* in the capital city are most popular in neighborhoods with high concentration of workers in informal economies, many of whom are migrants from states through the republic, who have been displaced due to neoliberal capital flows, various degrees of violence related to drug trafficking, and other socio economic devastation. I grew up going to *sonidos* in Iztapalapa, and “Neza”–Short for Netzahualcoyotl–a working class neighborhood outside Mexico City., where I lived before moving to Veracruz. From a young age, my ear became familiar to the sound of polyrhythms in family parties and *sonidos* dancing to *cumbias* and *salsas*.



Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, Festival de Son Jarocho, feb'13, image by Flickr User [boerries nehe](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Even though I attended a few *fandangos* before I emigrated to the U.S. in 2004, I started to regularly practice them in Seattle with my mentor and friend Chicana artista Gonzalez who co-founded the [Seattle Fandango Project](#), a collective of students of the fandango tradition based in Seattle, WA. Martha was the first person who I heard using the term polyrhythm to describe the texture and rhythmic basis of *fandango*. With Indigenous, African, and European influences, amongst many elements in the *fandango*, the *tarima* is a notably polyrhythmic instrument that in

its majority is played by women. It also carries the driven pulse of the *fandango*, where multiple *bailadoras* stomp with their feet fixed rhythms and syncopated improvisations. The basic fixed rhythm danced in the majority of *sones* is the *ca-fé con pan* composed of two independent rhythms of duple and triple meters playing simultaneously. This foundational understanding of polyrhythm as the simultaneous sound of two independent rhythms allows us to perceive the manner in which the cyclical repetition of the *café con pan*, embodied by *bailadoras* on the *tarima*, disrupts colonial logics of linear and individualized progress marked by the hegemony of the single bit of a clock. The dancer, processing and articulating rhythms through the body, engages in decolonial (learning) practices that generate a shift in consciousness from individual to relational knowledge.

This recording of “El Siquisiri” from a *huapango* (another name for *fandango*, most used in communities in the South of the state) in Michapan de Osorio, Veracruz with Colectivo Altepee, from Acayucan gives us two in a half minutes of community soundscapes.

<https://soundstudiesblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/mp3-siquisiricc81-fandango-en-michapan-de-osorio-veracruz-con-colectivo-altepee-27-06-2014.mp3>

“El Siquisiri,” Chacalpa, Veracruz

We can hear fireworks, the tuning of strings, “*aganse para aca*” (“come this way/come over here”) and “*No se pongan atras*” (“don’t stay behind”). Followed by the requinto’s call of the son, the *jaranas* join in, almost in unison, with the percussive footwork coming at last. In some cases *bailadoras* dance after the first verse is sung. With the sound of the footwork, in between taking turns to get on and off the *tarima*, you can hear dancers showing their skills in the *afinque de su zapateado*, their grounding of the step. By listening to the changes in style, rhythm, and force of sound of the *zapateado*, you can tell different *bailadoras* have taken their turn to get on the *tarima*. There are changes in the volume, intensity, and grounding sound in styles of stomping on the *tarima*. I say that these changes articulate through sound the inclusive nature of *fandango*, particularly the collective listening that makes space for each other’s rhythms.



Seattle Fandango Project. Photo credit: Scott Macklin.

Articulated by [Gloria Anzaldúa](#), I often think of *bailadoras* as *Nepantleras*: boundary crossers, thresholders who initiate others in rites of passage, *activistas* who from listening, receptive spiritual stance, rise to their own visions and shift into acting them out, *haciendo un mundo nuevo* (making a new world). They encourage others to ground themselves to their own bodies and connect to their own internal resources, thus empowering themselves. Empowerment is the bodily feeling of being able to connect with inner voices/ resources (images, symbols, beliefs, memories) during periods of stillness, silence, and deep listening or with kindred others in collective actions.

The *bailadora* in fandango is an example of someone who listens with a decolonial ear. *Bailadoras* recognize that the rhythmic vibrations they collectively create on the *tarima* are potential spaces to embody *Nepantla*. Anzaldúa explains in [Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro](#): “*Nepantlas* are places of constant tension, where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back, where transformation and healing might be possible, where wholeness is just out of reach but seems attainable” (2). *Nepantla* is the space where change happens, the kind of change that requires more than words on a page: it takes perseverance, and creative ingenuity. In learning the percussive footwork in fandango one practices listening in relation to others. A good dancer has to be aware of the space and improvisations of other dancers.

As a *bailadora* myself, I have often been reminded by teachers,—Ruby Oseguera, Laura Reboloso, Martha Gonzalez and Gemma Padua—to always stick to the *café con pan* and improvise when a good moment in the *son* comes up. *Zapateado fandanguero* cares about the *cadencia del son*, the feeling in the fixed rhythm: *the ca-fé con pan*. To maintain the groove of the *son*, bailadoras engage with one another in a decolonial listening practice that extends to the rest of the *fandango* soundscape changing the focus from a personal to a collective awareness. When we are referring to a decolonial listening practice we must understand that we are talking about an active sensorium that has personal and collective implications. Best articulated by Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, a decolonial praxis “depends on the practitioner’s ability to read the current situation of power, and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations. This is a survival skill well known to oppressed peoples” (50). The conditions that people within communities create in polyrhythmic music practices extend beyond the musical experience. *Fandango* and polyrhythm are the materialization of ways of being center on the awareness of our relationships and the relationship one shares with reality.



Son Jarocho Band, Image by Flickr User ilf_ (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Collective rhythmic practices are potential spaces where alternative consciousness to the hegemony of coloniality can originate. They activate an epistemology of differential consciousness that relies on the integration of the self as tuning into reality through sound. These acts of knowing connect to notions of relationality situated at the center of indigenous epistemologies. As Walter D. Mignolo claims in “*Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: on (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience*,” Relationality gives us the ability to think and do

decolonially dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs (277). Using music as a tool to organize collectively, fandanguerxs in Mexico, and the U.S. challenge global designs of social organization that continue to displace communities of color around the world. To exemplify this sentiment I share this video of *el son de la morena*, the Dark skin woman performed by Colectivo Altepepe's in one of their visits to the U.S. Before the beginning of the son, Sael Bernal shares:

There are many types of music. This music has to do with people's hearts, and everyone is different and this is the reason why this music sounds different depending on where you are, but in our hearts we all have this characteristic of humanity based on our capacities to relate to one another. This is the reason why we can share space and live together... ¡y qué viva la diversidad!



<https://youtu.be/13twUTjGcC8>

Chicago, 2012. Mario Gervacio, Sael Bernal, Gema Padua, Luis Sarmiento, Alberto Alor, & Simon Sanchez.

Featured Image: “encuentro de jaraneros y decimistas, tlacotalpan, veracruz, enero/febrero '14” by Flickr user [boerries nehe](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Iris C. Viveros Avendaño was born and raised in Mexico. She is a Ph.D. Candidate and a McNair Scholar in the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies department at the University of Washington. Her academic interests emphasize the integration of third world feminist approaches to the analysis of colonial legacies and projects in present-day systems of violence. To this effect, she focuses on the role of social structures and state-mediated technologies of power and domination in perpetuating violence against Afro Indigenous [descent] women. In addition, Iris's scholarly work focuses on study of decolonial cyclic temporalities embodied on the tarima, or platform drum center stage in fandangos as practices of resistance, recovery, and healing from trauma. A

central idea throughout her scholarly work is the exploration of the rhythmic body in fandango–In its collective and individual manifestation–particularly on the tarima, where knowledge is produced, reproduced, and transmitted.

A major source of Iris’s academic and personal inspiration comes from her involvement as a bailadora/percussive dancer and active co-organizer in the Seattle Fandango Project, a community dedicated to forging relationships and social activism through participatory music, poetry, and dance.

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