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## Producing An Other Nation: *Autogestión*, Zapatismo, and Tradition in Home Studio Music-Making in Mexico City

*Abstract: This article traces the discourses of “nation” and “tradition” that emerged in the home studio practices of pro-Zapatista activist musicians in the peripheries of the Mexico City metropolitan area. It examines the ways that these practices related to notions of “autogestión” and “autonomy” linked to the contemporary Zapatista movement which, in turn, were connected to musicians’ freedoms to “preserve” what they perceived as their cultural “roots”. Although these activities ostensibly harked back to ahistorical “tradition”, this article situates them within Mexico’s turn towards neoliberal economic policy since the 1980s, and the attempted reconfiguration of nationalism towards the private sphere that accompanied it.*

In April 2013 I went to Chalco, a zone to the south-east of the Mexico City metropolitan area, to spend a weekend with members of the rap group Re Crew. I had seen this band perform at a number of events in support of the autonomist, pro-indigenous rights Zapatista movement, which emerged in the wake of an indigenous uprising in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico, in 1994. Prior to this visit, I had been intrigued by Re Crew’s use of a conch shell as part of a ritual during these live concerts. During this weekend, band member Danybox explained the ritual as follows:

We want to transmit [...] to the young people [*chavos*] [a message] that they should maintain our culture, and that these traditions shouldn’t be lost. In fact, in some songs we put in phrases in Nahuatl [...] So we want to transmit [a message] that our roots should not be lost. (Interview, 11-12-12)

This weekend trip to visit Re Crew in Chalco was a disorienting mixture of old and new, diverse cultural tropes variously associated with the “traditional,” “modern” and “postmodern”.<sup>1</sup> On the evening of the day I arrived, we visited a *pulquería* (a bar serving *pulque*, a viscous alcoholic drink made of the maguey plant and consumed locally for millennia) where other clients were singing popular songs played on a

jukebox; at this venue, we discussed a rap that Kiper, a member of the band, was writing about illegal graffiti; after the drive home, another member of Re Crew, Higer, showed me a series of pictures on his phone of a woman upon whose naked body he had spray-painted a piece of body art; then, one member of the band told me of his intention to attend a trip to excavate pre-Hispanic archaeological relics on a nearby volcano. These incidents placed into relief Danybox's intriguing statement above, which resembles a hybrid mixture of references to ancient cultural heritage on the one hand, and on the other, a logic of communicative "transmission" which some scholars strongly identify with industrial modernization since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to compound the perplexity, Danybox had made this comment during an interview conducted in the band's digital home studio in Chalco, in which another band member, Higer, subsequently blamed "technology" for the loss of Mexico's cultural "roots" (*raíces*).<sup>3</sup>

Such ambivalent discourses concerning the relationship between technology and tradition were frequently invoked among the pro-Zapatista activist musicians in Mexico City with whom I conducted research between October 2012 and July 2013. Among many of these musicians, an objective of propagating political messages came to coexist with goals of "preserving," "transmitting," or "keeping alive" cultural "roots" through recording practices centered on the digital home studio. Further, these practices brought together occasionally conflicting discourses of authenticity and self-expression that intersected with a notion of *autogestión* – which can be defined as "grassroots control" or "self-management" – which my consultants linked to the Zapatista ideal of "autonomy". Finally, all of these discourses and practices existed within a broader frame of Mexican national identity – a value which was both accepted *prima facie* by my consultants, and a source of political contestation. Such apparent tensions drew attention to several crucial questions. How could one understand, in practice, the connection between the use of digital home studios and the maintenance or preservation of what were understood to be shared national musical "traditions"? What kinds of social dynamics marked the entry of national sentiment – very often considered to be a public value – into sources of musical creativity rooted in the domestic and private sphere? Finally, what did this say about the ways that ideas about

Mexican nationalism were being perpetuated and challenged in contexts deeply affected by processes of economic and social change?

In this article, I explore connections between discourses and practices of “preservation” and “maintenance” of what were understood to be musical “national roots” that emerged during my research with politically engaged musicians in Mexico City. I emphasize ways in which discourses around musical traditions, and the valorization of “rootedness” and “self-expression”, structured certain kinds of creative and recording practices. I structure my discussion of this topic as follows. First, I will ground this article in the existing literature on the digital home studio, and discuss potential confluences and conflicts between notions of tradition, authenticity, individuality and community that arise in the use of this technology of communication. Second, I will examine how these ideas became important to the creation of Mexican musical “tradition” in the twentieth century, outlining a brief history that begins in the post-revolutionary period and ends with the contemporary Zapatista movement in the 1990s. Finally, I will situate the musical practice of a number of pro-Zapatista bands in Mexico City digital home studios, pointing out ways that the perceived “authenticity” facilitated by this technological and social context supported these groups’ intersecting goals of dissemination of political messages through music and the “preservation” of music understood to represent “national tradition”. This “tradition”, I argue, ought to be located within a history of state-sponsored construction of the Mexican nation, and the Mexican government’s neoliberal turn at the end of the twentieth century.

### **Nation, tradition and technology in Mexico**

It has been recognized in several recent ethnographic studies that the digital home studio has become increasingly important for contemporary music-making practices across the world (Stobart; Crowdy). One of the earliest attempts to understand the significance of the digital home studio was made by Pierre Théberge, who viewed it as part of a broader set of emergent socio-cultural arrangements and values (or “social technology”) where “the privacy of domestic space becomes the ideal site of musical expression and inspiration” (217-8). Other scholars have highlighted ways that such “privacy” may

interact with and interrupt “non-private” social values, ideas, and activities. Stobart examines the home production of music videos by Gregorio Mamani, an indigenous migrant to Sucre, Bolivia. In this setting, digital home studio practice was used as a means of celebrating indigenous cultural heritage, but the use of this technology also started to accompany an increased emphasis of the “individual” over the “communal” source of creativity (214-16). Indeed, it is appropriate to ask how shared social concepts may change in contexts marked by the increasing dominance of such apparently private, intimate social technologies. In what ways are “imagined communities” perpetuated and created not by “print capitalism” (Anderson), but through the digital home studio?

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai suggests that “electronic capitalism” might be seen as the contemporary subjectivity-creating version of Anderson’s “print capitalism,” creating an environment in which a “postnational political order” might develop (8, 22). Appadurai’s position can be seen to have gained implicit support from commentators taking the position that nationalism and technology-driven globalization are antithetical, and that the rise of the latter will inevitably cause the demise of the former (Barber; Rothkopf; also cf. Pieterse). Recent scholarship on nationalism, meanwhile, emphasises the ways that (imagined) nations have become transnational brands in a fragmented, post-Westphalian world (Dinnie). There is merit, then, in approaches that seek to locate the nation, as imagined community, in spaces beyond the “public sphere” as typically defined (cf. Fraser; Milioni). Nonetheless, some scholars have also concluded that “nations can be constructed and strengthened through transnational flows and the technologies of globalization” (Bernal 3). Correspondingly, in recent years ethnomusicologists have paid increasing attention to the ways in which musical practice – often facilitated by new media technologies – can perpetuate imagined national communities, especially in contexts of diaspora (Zheng; Jung). Such a viewpoint may make ethnography an especially valuable research tool; Herzfeld, for example, argues that nationalism is as connected to intimate spaces (often sites for the reproduction of stereotypes that serve to foment “mutual recognition” among people adhering to the same social group) as much as to official discourse: “[i]n the intimacy of a nation’s secret spaces lie at least some of the original models of official practice” (4). It is for this reason, Herzfeld believes, that ethnographers are

well-positioned to examine how both “state ideologies and the rhetorics of everyday life” perpetuate nationalist sentiment (2).

These debates are highly relevant to the history of Mexican nationalism in the twentieth century, whose complex history straddles the “public” and “private” in complex ways. As Alonso Bolaños, Velázquez and Vaughan, and Hellier-Tinoco demonstrate, many of what are understood to be Mexican musical “national traditions” and “heritage” in the present bear the sonic imprints of projects of state construction, especially during the decades after the divisive and bloody Mexican Revolution (1910-20). After the Revolution, the state began to (re)construct an essentialist Mexican identity from practices of art, music, and dance (Velázquez and Vaughan 100-1). In this milieu, conflicting opinions emerged about how to “forge the nation” (Gamio): while some such as José Vasconcelos, Secretary of Education between 1921 and 1924, advocated the assimilation of indigenous musical practices into a homogenous national *mestizo* (mixed-heritage) culture, others ascribed “indigenous” and “popular” culture inherent value within a more plural Mexican nation. In the field of music, these attitudes linked to distinct courses of action: for instance, while some elite musicians in the postrevolutionary period believed that Mexican vernacular musical traditions ought to be “dignified” through orchestral arrangement according to the Western classical tradition, others advocated systematic fieldwork and recording, preserving “‘pure’ indigenous music” whose “essence,” it was hoped, could form a base from which a new national style could be gradually elaborated (Madrid 694).

Such divergent perspectives influenced state policies in different ways during the post-revolutionary period, in turn having varied effects on the ways that music was performed (Vaughan and Lewis). On the evening programs of state-funded radio stations such as XFX,<sup>4</sup> popular musics that had been “reorganized,” “cleaned up,” and assimilated into a “bourgeois musical format” were mixed together with European art music, placing Mexican popular culture on the same pedestal as the high-status European nationalist cultural model that many Mexican nation-builders sought to emulate (Hayes 50, 56). These radio projects

drew on the country’s regional musical genres – from huapangos to jarabes to danzas – to create a “panorama” of

regional musical traditions. This musical panorama positioned regional songs as inspiring examples of a larger body of Mexican national music. (Hayes 52-3)

Such regionalist cultural nationalism, incorporating traditions associated with both indigenous and *mestizo* culture, was given further support in 1952 when the government-funded National Institute for the Fine Arts (INBA) created the Ballet Folklórico. This was an institutional performance group devoted to staging the “essence” of the Mexican nation, whose repertoire “ranged from indigenous dance rituals to revolutionary corridos and *bailes típicos* from the nation’s diverse regions” (Zolov 241-2).

Other government institutions promoted “heritage” in different ways. In 1948, the government created the National Indigenist Institute (INI), an institution which would sponsor recording projects in rural communities across Mexico in order to “preserve” indigenous musical practices (Alonso Bolaños 63-7). These practices were defined according to restrictive, essentialized notions of indigeneity that failed to take indigenous people’s musical tastes into account. In 1986, a Taller de Programación Musical (Music Programming Workshop), which brought together a number of INI-sponsored radio stations involved in recording and disseminating “indigenous music,” produced a statement defining this music as “the living expression of the indigenous person through instruments of pre-Hispanic origin” and “a sonic expression developed through spiritual, cultural, and social processes”. This statement declared that indigenous music was “of a social, ritual, and ceremonial character” and could be identified by “the rhythm they use to play their music” (66). At the end of the twentieth century, the INI funded the creation of a number of phonographic series, such as a series of cassette tapes of “indigenous music” released under the name *Sondeos del México profundo* (“sounds from deep Mexico”), which continued to present a romanticized, pre-modern version of indigeneity (63, 67).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, the government-led cultural nationalist project was to significantly change in emphasis. In the wake of Mexico’s default on its foreign debt repayment in 1981, the ruling PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party) pursued neoliberal policies of so-called “structural adjustment” and the government “divested itself of social and cultural spending”; as a result, television “to a degree replaced state-sponsored production of national history and culture”

(Vaughan, 484). But the PRI of the 1980s and 1990s also sought to portray nationalism differently. Rather than the “educating, protecting, or constructing state” (ibid), President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94) aimed to weaken the historic ties between state and nation, discursively situating the latter in the private realm (O’Toole 277-8). Instead of a conscious project of state construction, Salinas de Gortari narrated the nation as a “set of core, immemorial principles that were ahistorical and permanent,” and state-sponsored nationalism became oriented around the goal of “selling” Mexico to prospective foreign investors and tourists (276-7). This orientation towards tourism reinforced the regionalist impulse of Mexican cultural nationalism; Hellier-Tinoco points out that “[f]or agendas of Mexican nationalism and tourism, essentialization involved [...] the reduction and neat classification of the country into regions each with its own typical food, dance, music, clothes, and other cultural practices that were regarded as representative” (45). At the time of writing, *ballet folklórico* is performed at educational institutions and tourist destinations across Mexico. Most states in the country are associated with at least one piece of music in this official imaginary: Chiapas by the marimba piece “Las Chiapanecas,” Veracruz by the *son* “La Bruja,” Jalisco by the mariachi piece *jarabe tapatío* and Sinaloa by the *banda* song “El Toro Mambo”.

Such distancing of “nation” and “state” was also reinforced by the Zapatista uprising in January 1994, during which the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) occupied several towns in the southern state of Chiapas before retreating into the countryside and agreeing to a ceasefire. Subsequently, in the wake of the uprising, the EZLN created hundreds of civil “communities in resistance” and began to cultivate a broad base of civil society support in Mexico and across the world (an endeavor which motivated the creation of the “Other Campaign” in 2005, a project that sought to foment local pro-Zapatista organization across Mexico and the world [Mora]). Made up of mostly indigenous members, the EZLN entered the fray as a staunchly nationalist organization which initially sought to bring down the government (Van Den Berghe and Maddens; Long). Represented by iconic, balaclava-clad spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos, this rebel army addressed their First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, issued on the eve of the uprising, “[t]o the people in Mexico”, asserting that



“[w]e are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation” (EZLN, “First Declaration”). In it, they declared that the country was in the grip of “a clique of traitors” that formed part of a “seventy-year dictatorship” which the EZLN linked to opponents of independence in the nineteenth century and the Europhile dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (“First Declaration”). Mirroring the reconfiguration of nationalist discourse that took place during the Salinas administration, the EZLN painted “the nation” as a result of the actions and beliefs of “the people”, which was being undermined by the state (Van Den Berghe and Maddens 132-7; Gallaher and Froehling). Furthermore, the EZLN’s later non-violent search for “autonomy” became linked to a multiple notion of Mexican nationhood, as Zapatista organizations sought to maintain the vitality of indigenous languages and perceived cultural traditions. With regard to education, this implied “rescuing” oral traditions remembered by Zapatista elders (Baronnet and Breña 117), but it also meant the reconstruction of lost cultural practices. In a recent interview, a Zapatista educator from eastern Chiapas expresses anxiety about the disappearance of their “regional music” performed on instruments such as the violin, marimba, drum (*tambor*) and reed flute (*carrizo*), which was being superseded at dances by keyboard music (EZLN, “Resistencia autónoma”, 15).

Concern for indigenous culture, as well as “tradition” more generally, also permeated the movement of solidarity that sprung up around the EZLN after 1994. But the “traditions” to which many pro-Zapatista musicians with whom I conducted research made continuous reference tended to have a more recent history than they often recognized. These musicians were operating at a historical juncture in which the pillars of postrevolutionary cultural nationalism had been undermined both economically and ideologically as neoliberal policies came into effect. The conscious separation of “nation” and “state” that both Salinas de Gortari and the EZLN promoted in the late twentieth century privileged a private, small-scale, intimate and non-official version of the Mexican nation. In addition, the Mexican government’s accession to international trade agreements such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) lowered the prices of the electronic equipment used to construct digital home studios (Cross 308). This was the same media technology associated in some scholarly literature with processes of “individualization” and the

privileging of the private realm (Théberge 216-20; Bennett and Segerberg 1). At this juncture, then, conflicting tendencies emerged concerning the relationships between “nation,” “state,” “technology” and “tradition”.

The activities of the musicians with whom I conducted research in Mexico City must be understood within this context. As I show in this article, their efforts to use music to transmit or disseminate information about the Zapatista movement and other related causes was often connected to another practice of transmission concerning nation, heritage and tradition. In turn, these practices were reliant upon the creation and use of digital home studios – something which represented, for many of these musicians, an example of the “autonomy” practised by the Zapatistas. In the following section, I will give a broad introduction to four pro-Zapatista bands whose discourses and musical practices exemplified these dynamics, before focusing in greater detail on the intersections between notions of technology, tradition and autonomy in two detailed case studies.

### **Tradition and *autogestión* in the city**

During my time in Mexico City between October 2012 and May 2013, I conducted research with four pro-Zapatista bands – Cienpies, Instituto del Habla, Re Crew and The Páramos – currently active in recording new music, some working in digital home studios and others utilizing more professional channels. I became acquainted with these bands as they participated in a series of live events in support of the Zapatista movement. Most lived in run-down *barrios* [“neighborhoods”] on the outskirts of the Mexico City metropolitan area in which crime and poverty were rife, such as Iztapalapa, Ecatepec and Chalco. I conducted in-depth ethnographic research with each of these bands, although since none was fully professional, this research often took place at weekends and on public holidays. These bands had enjoyed little economic success, and most could not afford to record through professional channels.

Of these four bands, six-member Ecatepec-based ska band Cienpies was the only one to record in a professional studio during my research, a goal for which the band’s members had saved up for years. Although they were comparatively well-established (having their own manager and frequent performing

opportunities outside activist circles), Cienpies defined themselves as outsiders within the contemporary ska scene which, they said, was dominated by bands singing apolitical songs about love and heartbreak to “apathetic” audiences that were “only interested in Facebook and video games”.<sup>5</sup> Cienpies claimed to be an “independent band” unwilling to enter into deals with commercial labels, suggesting that since protest songs were too “inconvenient for the system” to be promoted by a major label, such a move would inevitably compromise their political edge.<sup>6</sup> Like the majority of activist musicians I spoke to, Cienpies held a vision of social change that valued the communication of a political “message” as a means of transformation. In interviews, the band also linked their practice to the Zapatista project of autonomy which, in turn, they equated with the notion of *autogestión*, telling me that they were “[i]ndependent. We pay for everything. All *autogestivo*, like the Zapatistas”.<sup>7</sup> Although no direct translation for *autogestión* exists in English, as I have mentioned in the introduction to this article, the term may be rendered as “self-management” or “grassroots control” (see Brenner and Elden 14). Lefebvre defines *autogestión*<sup>8</sup> as a “practice that may be opposed to the omnipotence of the State,” which implies ongoing social struggle (2009: 134). He states that:

Each time a social group [...] forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestión* is occurring [...] it implies the strengthening of all associative ties, that is to say, of civil society. (Lefebvre, 2009: 135)

In broader perspective, however, this version of *autogestión* is more ambivalent than Lefebvre recognizes, since it bears notable affinities with pro-neoliberal discourses proclaiming the moral value of private initiative. Not only can Mexico’s elites be seen to have encouraged private organization beyond the state since the late 1980s, but *autogestión* may also be viewed as a response to the youth disenfranchisement engendered by neoliberal economic policies. For instance, García Canclini (2011: 14) and Woods et al. (2011: 110) argue that *autogestión* has become a means for Mexican youth to participate in a creative economy in a context of instability and high unemployment in which regular, stable work patterns have become far less frequent. Nonetheless, García Canclini and Urteaga conclude, in practice this approach has done little to remedy the “extensive exclusion of the majority and the condemnation of creatives to

intermittency and precarity” (2011: 139).

In Mexico City, pro-Zapatista musicians often made reference to the notion of *autogestión*, although the term could refer to a wide variety of musical practices and recording arrangements. Cienpies’ “independent” recording practice involved renting a professional studio, while other groups, like Re Crew and Iztapalapa-based band The Páramos, had created digital home studios which they, too, considered to be examples of *autogestión*. What connected these apparently disparate practices was the idea of independent music-making as a means of protecting freedom of expression, regarding both dangerous or controversial political messages and past musical practices. In turn, these musicians considered this expression to be under threat by both state and commercial censorship.<sup>9</sup>

These musicians exhibited deep ambivalence towards the category “technology”. Many suggested that new technologies were to blame for the disappearance of musical and cultural heritage while simultaneously utilizing these technologies in order to preserve perceived cultural heritage. Ajishar from Instituto del Habla, for instance, felt that the proliferation of information had detached music from context and identity:

today it’s very easy, thanks to globalization, thanks to this crisis of information that we have on the Internet [...] it’s easier that an adolescent falls into things that don’t belong to them [...] that sense of belonging is being completely lost. (Interview, 27-11-12)

Nevertheless, these groups also highly valued dissemination – of “tradition” and “message” – and saw home studios and the Internet as important means through which to achieve this objective. Laiko, a rapper from Instituto del Habla, told me that musical identity across Latin America was in danger of disappearing, and that musicians had a duty “to disseminate the identity that we are losing” as pan-continental “brothers and sisters”<sup>10</sup> which motivated the band’s studio practice and use of the Internet. The members of The Páramos, meanwhile, agreed that the Internet allowed their music to reach unexpected places, even outside Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

The cultural “loss” to which these bands objected was also blamed on local consumers of culture, with these musicians frequently complaining that musical “traditions” were not appreciated by

Mexicans themselves:

It's almost impossible to make a living out of Mexican traditional music here, almost impossible. Whilst people from outside come and appreciate the musical value, local people don't value their own music. (Interview, The Páramos, 21-07-13)

With statements such as this, these musicians constructed themselves as marginal subjects, distancing themselves from “local people” while simultaneously creating a position for themselves as ambivalent representatives of “local people’s music”. Nonetheless, many members of these bands (with the exception of Re Crew) were socially and economically distanced from most consumers of “popular music” in Mexico. All of these bands were funded by outside jobs: the members of Cienpies, for instance, earned money by variously performing in restaurants and bars for other ensembles and working in illustration, video editing and graphic design. Although these musicians lived in geographically marginal places, then, many were comparatively well-educated and worked in comfortably middle-class professions. In this context, the practice of *autogestión* may be better understood as a mode of spatial separation than one of creating autonomy from the state; these musicians could only create spaces of *autogestión* by channeling resources to them that had been earned through everyday employment.

In what remains of this article, I will focus in greater detail on the ways that two bands with which I conducted extensive research, The Páramos and Instituto del Habla, responded to these intersecting and conflicting discourses in their musical and studio practice. I will demonstrate that as *autogestión* in these digital home studios facilitated a mode of musical expression perceived to be “authentic,” the dissemination of messages in support of Zapatismo came to intersect with the dissemination of Mexican musical national traditions. Equally, this was a highly ambivalent setting marked by a neoliberalism that these bands strongly opposed. As such, I will show that in their attempts to “tell stories” and “carry messages” through music, these bands’ deployment of perceived musical “traditions” or “roots” invoked ambiguous sentiments such as nostalgia and anger which in turn, highlighted contradictions within the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Mexican national project.

*The Páramos*

During my time in Mexico City I conducted field research with The Páramos, a band based in Iztapalapa, a poor, densely-populated borough located in east Mexico City just beyond the reach of the city's metro system. The Páramos were made up of two core members, Eve and Toto, who could play a variety of instruments but tended to sing and play guitars and bass. At this time, the pair were in a relationship, lived together, and – both psychologists in their thirties – gave classes and workshops at universities in the city.

In interviews, The Páramos emphasized the material modesty and resourcefulness that had marked their emergence as a band. The pair had begun in 2008 rehearsing in a basement, borrowing equipment from friends or other bands, sometimes in exchange for favors. When Toto got work in a studio editing video and photography, he started to teach himself to record while the sound engineer was away, and became inspired to create a home recording studio. Toto and Eve bought a computer and basic multitrack recorder from friends, and began to record themselves while slowly accumulating studio equipment and instruments of various kinds.<sup>12</sup> By the time of my research, The Páramos had created a home studio equipped with a basic drum kit, bass guitar, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, and microphones. It had a separate booth for the sound desk and computer, and a window through which performer and producer could see each other; although the pair had gone some way to soundproofing the walls with egg-boxes, cables had to pass through the door during recording, meaning that it could not fully close. During my research I spent a number of afternoons at the band's studio, observing them record and occasionally participating in this process. In collaboration with Eve and Toto, I helped to produce, and performed in, two tracks, thus gaining an insight into the pair's creative process.

Eve and Toto had clear ideas about the type of music they wanted to produce, especially with regard to its themes and accompanying sounds. First, the pair told me that in their music they aimed “to tell a story,” especially “about topics that aren't easy to discuss,” like the 1997 Acteal massacre or the specter of feminicides in Ciudad Juarez.<sup>13</sup> Many of these themes were important issues within pro-Zapatista circles, and two of the albums that The Páramos had already recorded at the time of my

research, *Acteal: la otra historia vol. 1* and *Éxodo: la otra historia vol. 2*, as well as the album they were working on at the same time (provisionally entitled *Historias de maíz*), contained frequent allusions to indigenous culture, the Zapatista movement, and its numerous political allies. The band's own rhetoric highly privileged the textual over the bodily, and they told me that their insistence on the audience listening to their lyrics rather than dancing had led several venues to refuse to allow them to perform.<sup>14</sup> Further, the stories they sought to tell were often highly personal; for instance, Eve felt a connection to the theme of femicide through her personal experience as a woman in Mexico City ("as I came here, I saw a sign that said 'here it is prohibited to throw away rubbish, dogs, or women'. It's becoming so everyday that it's frustrating, humiliating").<sup>15</sup>

Second, the pair shared similar ideas about how the band ought to sound. On their website, The Páramos' style is described as "rock/punk/ska/garage/regional,"<sup>16</sup> a mixture that led to a perceived "clash of cultures".<sup>17</sup> On one hand, in an interview, Eve stated that the band "always takes as a base the melodies or rhythms of the people," which formed the band's "roots" (*nuestro raíz*). Indeed, since both of the band's core members were "from families of musicians who played in village bands," these "roots" were the result of a particular rural upbringing that the pair shared.<sup>18</sup> On the other, Toto told me that he had also grown up listening to Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, and Santana, and only began to listen to "traditional" music much later; therefore, rock music also reflected "immediate roots" that he wished to "recreate" in sound.<sup>19</sup> He stated that:

We weren't familiar with the sounds of the conch shell, nor of the flute, nor of other pre-Hispanic instruments, until a few years ago. We had already had some experiences with electric guitars, with electric bass [...] there's a clash of cultures and obviously, there's a need for self-expression. (Interview, 21-07-13)

Such musical "self-expression" – a personal means of both self-discovery and self-enactment which this pair of psychologists appeared to ascribe therapeutic value – was mentioned frequently during our interviews. Toto, for example, valued music as "our only means of expression," even if "for the rest of the world it might not matter if we make songs, or if we make music that's out-of-tune and badly-harmonized". Correspondingly, both repeatedly emphasized the fact that they had no musical training.<sup>20</sup>

The pair felt that the commercialization of music in Mexico had led to depoliticization and a lack of genuine “self-expression”. They told me that “if you want to set up a rock or cumbia band, or whatever, it has to be one with commercial tendencies [...] and not with reflexive social content,” satisfying an ignorant public who only wanted to “dance [and] forget about their everyday lives”.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in interviews they perpetuated a paradoxical discourse which characterized Mexican “popular music” as a marginal pursuit. For instance, Toto told me that: “it’s a great contrast between the music of the people [*música popular*] and all this commercialization appearing; while these genres of pop, for example, in English, are overvalued, traditional music is undervalued”<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, although the pair felt that communication technologies such as the Internet had been driving this lamentable development, The Páramos were also directly engaging with these technologies.<sup>23</sup> They ran a website, containing an introduction to the band, from which their music could be streamed online,<sup>24</sup> and stated that the Internet had allowed them the possibility of finding an audience at a national and international level; indeed, Eve told me that “without the Internet, everything we’d done would be void”.<sup>25</sup>

In a context in which mainstream music was dominated by commercial interests with no stake in the maintenance of tradition, *autogestión* – a concept the pair linked to the notion of Zapatista “autonomy” and understood to be physically manifested in their home studio – assumed special importance.<sup>26</sup> Many bands, Eve felt, tended to wait “for a great producer to produce [their] music, to record [them] and promote it [*difundirlo*]”.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, both members emphasized to me that their development of the capacity for domestic production of music was built upon a decision to reject such dependency and begin a process of self-education.<sup>28</sup> For Eve and Toto the *autogestión* represented by their studio allowed for the expression of not only political content, but also musical traditions. Indeed, in the band’s music political content and regional musics often came into tension with one another, producing an unsettling mixture of nostalgia, loss, and irony.

In their songs, the band frequently deployed references to “popular” or “traditional” music in support of more direct attacks on the Mexican state. Their song “Fue una masacre” refers to the paramilitary massacre, in Acteal, Chenalhó, Chiapas on December 22, 1997, of 45 indigenous people



who belonged to a Zapatista-supporting pacifist Catholic organization called Las Abejas. This song is arranged for two voices and two guitars (rhythm and solo), and structured into three sections distinguished by rhythm. The first section is organized around a descending harmonic and melodic line in a simple 4/4 rhythm, and the lyrics – sung in downbeat fashion in the lower registers of the voice – describe in graphic detail the horrors of the Acteal massacre (“the spilt blood of the peoples condemned to genocide and hopelessness”). The second section maintains this 4/4 time with increased tempo and a syncopated rhythm, and the vocals repeatedly shout: “It was a massacre in Acteal, Chenalhó!” The final section, however, eschews vocals, instead containing an instrumental *vals* in 3/4 time performed on the two guitars in the key of E minor. This, the band explained, was an allusion to the regional music of Chiapas, which included many *valses*, some in minor keys, typically performed on the marimba. However, it would be naïve to interpret The Páramos’ use of this *vals* as a straightforward exercise in maintenance or preservation of tradition. Instead, a musical style associated with Chiapanecan indigeneity is juxtaposed in jarring fashion with the conflictive realities of rural Chiapas, as illustrated by the band’s reference to the Acteal massacre, an atrocity the intellectual authorship of which they (along with most supporters of the Zapatista movement) attributed to the Mexican government.

Elsewhere, “¿De que país me hablas?” (“Which country are you talking about?”) opens with a triumphalist speech given by former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (“Today the *Patria* is stronger [...] Today we make the new Mexican greatness a reality”) on the occasion of the approval of NAFTA by the United States House of Representatives in November 1993, which is ironically accompanied by a recording of the *organillo*, a box-shaped instrument producing typically “nostalgic melodies,” often from the post-revolutionary period, using a score-reading mechanism similar to that found on a pianola (Reuter 99). Typically, people playing the *organillo* (called *organilleros*) in public spaces in Mexico City do so as a substitute for begging; thus, for many, the sound of the *organillo* evokes present-day poverty, as well as nostalgia for the past.<sup>29</sup> The juxtaposition of *organillo* music with Salinas’ speech created a disjunction exploited in the song’s angrily-delivered lyrics: “Which country are you talking about? The Mexico of above? Its millionaires’ bank accounts? The yes-men of America? [...] Which country are you talking

about? The Mexico of below? Hunger and desperation, collapse and desolation?”

These examples illustrate how, for The Páramos, the use of the digital home studio in tandem with the Internet facilitated a mode of intimate musical “self-expression” that would be impossible through other channels. In different ways, these songs use music constructed as (regionally) national in the post-revolutionary period to comment on Mexico’s revolutionary past and neoliberal present, and accompany stories which are both narrative and declamatory. In seeking to develop “self-expression”, The Páramos developed a creative alliance between regional musical “roots” and the radical political messages associated with Zapatismo. While it appeared no coincidence that this band created such personal, intimate expression as they used a means of musical production located in the pair’s house, among the musicians I studied the discourse of *autogestión* also used to refer to diverse recording arrangements with different relationships to domestic space. In the following section, I will explore the recording practice of rap outfit Instituto del Habla, a rap band whose music reflected, in a more explicit and in-depth fashion, on Mexican nationhood.

### *Instituto del Habla*

I was first introduced to the members of Instituto del Habla by a group of activists from Valle de Chalco during a short visit to Mexico City in July 2012. When I moved to the city for a longer period, beginning in October of the same year, the band invited me to a series of recording sessions, live performances and radio interviews. While the personnel of Instituto del Habla had varied throughout its history, at this time it had two members, Laiko el Nigromante and Ajishar, who worked with a producer, DJ Iceman, in whose house this studio was situated. Laiko was an intriguing figure who had studied at the Escuela Nacional de Danza Folklórica (National School of Folkloric Dance), and worked at a school in Ecatepec as a teacher of “artistic education specializing in Mexican folkloric dance”.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Ajishar worked as a manual labourer in the Chalco area, and had joined Instituto del Habla after Laiko came across his music on Myspace and contacted him. The pair subsequently began to perform shows incorporating Ajishar’s solo material as well as that of Instituto del Habla. Nonetheless, the pair

appeared to harbor significant differences. Laiko's political outlook was informed by Mexican cultural nationalism and reverence for what he saw as the country's indigenous musical "roots," while Ajishar took the racial struggles of black and Latino populations in the United States as a principal point of reference.

Both rappers perceived their musical practice to be intimately intertwined with questions of self and identity. Ajishar told me that as a teenager he was enthused by rock and punk, but came to feel he "lacked ability" with musical instruments; nevertheless, keen to be "a participant in some manner in the musical scene," he began to perform rap.<sup>31</sup> His early lyrics, the rapper told me, were borne out of the "desire to express myself," and release built-up anger from the experience of economic marginalization in the *barrio* of Chalco:

Someone from here can't study for example fine arts because of how expensive those courses are, photography, or whatever else. A kid from here, if they are fortunate enough to get to study, will study some technical course, to maybe become [...] the operator of some machine. (Interview, 27-11-12)

Meanwhile, the discourse of Laiko (who, notably, *did* have the kind of fine arts background which Ajishar envied) was focused on a goal of preserving and expressing cultural "identity"; he felt, he told me, a "commitment to seek first an identity for myself," and felt that "as Mexicans we do have an identity that we don't want to see, or which may seem to have disappeared or be unfamiliar".<sup>32</sup> This sense of lost identity drove Laiko's interest "in Mexican folkloric dance and [...] national cultural traditions," both outside and inside the recording studio.<sup>33</sup>

Despite their differences, then, both Laiko and Ajishar coincided in viewing musical practice as a means of expressing intimate experience, be it concerning economic marginalization or national cultural identity. Not only did this perspective inform the studio practice of both rappers, but it coincided with a perspective on the digital home studio as a facilitator of such "expression" that also underpinned the band's incorporation of political and pro-Zapatista lyrics into their songs. Instituto del Habla, like The Páramos, valued *autogestión* and perceived the arrangement they had with their studio to be *autogestivo*, belonging to and sponsored by those that carried out the creative work. This concept was also reflected

in Instituto del Habla's use of the word *underground* (loaned from English), which alluded to places in which the authentic self-expression of the people of Mexico could be made and heard; Laiko told me that rap artists that left the underground and entered the mainstream had to alter their content in order to do so, creating "decaffeinated" rap ("You'll find a different message in the underground than with a band that's got a big platform").<sup>34</sup> Digital home studios in this "underground" setting were thus seen to provide a platform for "expression" both of identity and of political messages. Furthermore, like The Páramos, Instituto del Habla saw the Internet as a potential threat to locally-rooted tradition, but also used it to disseminate their work.<sup>35</sup>

In October 2012, Laiko invited me to a recording session. We met at a metro station to take a bus to the studio, and on the way Laiko showed me a number of pre-Hispanic instruments he was carrying inside a small red backpack: three whistles in the shape of a tiger, an eagle, and a frog fashioned to make sounds corresponding to their respective animals, a conch shell, and *tenabaris* (ankle percussion used by Aztec dancers in Mexico). After a one-hour journey we arrived at the studio, which was located in Chicoloapan, in the east of Estado de México, in the house of Iceman, the band's amateur producer, and consisted of one microphone and a computer in the middle of a sea of clothes. From my past experience living and working in neighboring Valle de Chalco I knew that this was an area that had enjoyed rapid growth ever since, as part of the turn to neoliberal economic policy in the 1980s, the Mexican government had sharply reduced agricultural subsidies, negatively impacting the country's agrarian economies and forcing rural families to migrate to urban areas (Barry; Aguilar).<sup>36</sup> Correspondingly, the studio bore the traces of urban expansion alongside symbols of the area's rural past: chickens wandered about in the shared yard outside, which was full of dust and littered with planks of wood, as well as corrugated metal rods of the kind used for construction. Iceman's house was part of a floor-level complex surrounding this yard, which was used by the inhabitants of the complex to clean and dry clothes. The intimacy of this space – both interior and exterior – was further underscored by the fact that it was occasionally visited by the producer's partner and child. Although the relationship between artists and producer was an economic one, since Instituto del Habla paid Iceman a small sum as

remuneration for his work, Iceman was clearly good friends with Laiko and Ajishar, and they spent much studio time drinking beer and making jokes, especially at my expense.<sup>37</sup>

On this occasion, Laiko was recording a track together with a number of collaborating musicians: rapper Bankai and guitarist Jair Aguilar, brothers from northeast Mexico City; and guitarist Mario Caudillo, who was studying at UNAM's National School of Music (singer and music student Georgina Tritón also performed on the track during a later session which I did not attend).<sup>38</sup> These participants had vastly different cultural horizons, something which was made especially clear at particular moments during the session. For instance, while Laiko and Bankai were recording their rap tracks inside the studio, several of us waited in the yard and shared a conversation initiated by Caudillo about the music of J.S. Bach, whom he labelled a “genius”;<sup>39</sup> later, Laiko and Bankai discussed various musical uses for the instruments he had brought which, Laiko hoped, could help to create a “pre-Hispanic atmosphere”. Then, on the way home, while we were taking the same transport to a nearby metro station, Laiko, Bankai and Jair started to rap a song called “Tregua” whose political message they hoped to transmit to their fellow passengers. In fact, the coexistence of discourses about Mexican indigenous musical culture, “regional traditions” and the “genius of Bach” was less unusual than it might seem, since classical and indigenist traditions were both sponsored by the same state-funded cultural institutions, such as INBA. I was particularly keen, however, to discover how this group combined perceived Mexican “musical traditions” with a hip-hop practice that was, in turn, self-valorized by references to “message” and “lyrics”.

During this session, and a later editing session Laiko invited me to attend, this group recorded and produced an acoustic version of the well-known Mexican folk song “La Llorona” with two acoustic guitars and voice, with rap between each chorus performed by Laiko and Bankai. “La Llorona” (a tune arranged for piano by Carlos Chávez in 1943) is based on a folk tale with an indexical link to Mexico's pre-Hispanic history. It tells the story of a woman who, having drowned her own offspring and then herself, mournfully seeks her children as a ghost so that she may enter the spirit world (Kirtley). Importantly, in Ramón Peón's 1933 film *La Llorona*, the title character was equated with La Malinche,

Hernan Cortés' Nahuatl mistress who betrayed her native people for the Spanish invaders. Laiko's rap during the track's verse places this myth into a broader political and relational context: the figure of La Llorona suffers under the "colonial yoke," which persists in the collective memory: "so much time and we still carry the chains; our blood is spilt by the acts of strangers' hands". Here, the "malign time, which has marked that distance" between present and past is lamented, accompanying a recognition of a common experience joining these times together: "Your sentence, perpetuated by centuries upon centuries, in your sorrow; open veins are a vestige of the wound that left barren love and lost dreams".<sup>40</sup>

The haunting memory that the track's lyrics (both rapped and sung) evoke was also suggested by the samples Laiko and Iceman used in their arrangement. Thus, the song opens and closes with the sound of a conch shell, while the eagle-shaped whistle that Laiko had carried in his backpack accompanies the female voice each time the chorus appears and later marks the end of the song. It had taken time and effort to record and edit these samples, and the resulting samples were only sporadically deployed in the final version. Discussions between Laiko and Bankai suggested that they were intended to function as an aural signifier of pre-Hispanic Mexico, which was brought into a politico-emotional context of sorrow at colonial domination. Such a link to the pre-Hispanic was affirmed in the credits at the end of the song, when Laiko raps: "*Yeah*, Instituto del Habla, preserving the roots of Mexican culture".

This line seemed to encapsulate some of the productive tension that underpinned the band's creativity: *yeah*, an English loan word imported from (and pronounced like) American rap, followed by the assertion (in Spanish) of an essentialized Mexican identity that rap practice could "preserve". Indeed, the same line is repeated throughout Instituto del Habla's 2011 album *Rap con sabor a México* ("Rap with a Mexican flavor"), which contains a number of songs that are undergirded by samples drawn from Mexican regional music constructed as national during the postrevolutionary period. In this album, music is simultaneously valued as a textual medium for the transmission of anti-state, pro-Zapatista messages and a means for the preservation of musical "tradition". The track "Somos" figures hip-hop as a battle waged with "uncensurable song," in which "the voice of the people" may be kept alive while

“society covers itself in banal fashions”. Meanwhile, the eleventh track on the album, “Nostalgia,” contains the most direct criticism of the Mexican government of any track on the album: here, “the neoliberal dictates, and it’s a crime to be poor”; “they are selling my country, piece by piece”; neoliberals (and the “tyrant president”) have “their hatred kept in a briefcase that spoke of the war in Chiapas and the question of oil”. But this song also attempts to reflect the emotional life of the inhabitants of this Mexico, who are giving up “hope of living better times” and turning to a sorrowful “nostalgia”. At the end of the song, the band themselves enter into this nostalgic longing for the past, wishing for “eternity” in which “with our ideas we forge, in rap, immortality”. In each of these songs, critiques of Mexican society and institutions of governance leads into introspection concerning the role of rap itself in processes of change.

As the lyrics of *Rap con sabor a México* position a nostalgia for the past alongside a fierce critique of contemporary society, so this past is evoked with music. Most of the songs on the album use samples of Mexican regional music played at the beginning and/or end of the track, then manipulated into a new form in order to underpin the beat. Notably, during research Laiko told me that every sample the band used for the album had been downloaded online. While it might often be difficult to discern the regional musical sources upon which these songs are based from the beat alone, the samples at the beginning and end of these songs foreground these sources.<sup>41</sup> For instance, the album’s fourth track, “La Bruja,” is based on the Mexican *son jarocho* folk song of the same name from Veracruz. In their version, Instituto del Habla play a sample from an old recording of this song at the end of the track, after having reshaped this recording into the acoustic building blocks of the track’s beat. The same structure reoccurs on most of the songs of this album as they strive to assert aural continuity between hip-hop and “regional tradition” rooted in the postrevolutionary nationalist project.

These patterns and themes come to the fore in “Seguimos en la Lucha,” a song expressing solidarity with the Zapatista uprising. The track opens by directly referencing Zapatismo with a sample of EZLN spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos reading a statement representing the Tzotzil people who participated in the Zapatista rebellion. It is then followed by a sample of a piece of marimba music

in triple meter, which initially appears unredacted but is subsequently edited (specifically, “chopped” [Schloss 106]) to fit into a syncopated beat in 4/4 time. Although Laiko told me that this sample was from Las Chiapanecas, a piece often played at institutional performances of Chiapanecan folkloric dance, it appears that the sample is in fact taken from a marimba melody from Guatemala which is – ironically – deeply associated with the Guatemalan nation in that context. Nonetheless, here this tune is unconsciously resignified as Mexican, implying a deeply affective underlying understanding of aural “Mexicanness” closely linked to the timbre of the marimba. Indeed, the lyrics of “Seguimos en la Lucha” transport us to Chiapas, in which the marimba is commonly performed as a traditional instrument during *fiestas* (“continue then, Subcomandante, though they might think you crazy [...] the fight for Chiapas will make their lands tangible; the *indígenas* will harvest a free people”).

In Laiko’s rap in “Seguimos en la Lucha,” the government’s idea of “nation” is contested and contrasted with Mexico’s revolutionary past: “Say what independence, say what Revolution, if we continue to comply with a project of nation that, the further it advances, the more it takes away our freedoms?” Here, the rapper launches a fierce critique of the Mexican political classes, calling President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) an “imbecile” under whose rule “there are people that work and don’t eat”. Bereft of a real solution to Mexico’s problems, politicians fall back on empty patriotism: “they don’t approach the topic [of poverty] but they announce ‘*viva México!*’”. The alternative is made crystal clear: “long live Zapata and the San Andrés Accords”;<sup>42</sup> “long live [Subcomandante] Marcos”. Instituto del Habla’s use of samples of Mexican musical “traditions,” then, is far from celebratory; instead, it is bitter, critical and even ironic. On *Rap con sabor a México*, allusions to Zapatismo are brought to bear within this productive tension between the past romanticized in sound and the dystopic present constructed and criticized in rap. In “Seguimos en la Lucha,” the Zapatistas bridge this divide, representing peoples that “for centuries were ignored” but who “now cover their faces as revolutionaries [...] to defend their freedoms”.

Instituto del Habla, then, sought to use the digital home studio to preserve national musical traditions, motivated by a goal of maintaining and expressing an essentialist, intimate “identity”. In turn,



this enterprise privileged the home as private source of authentic creativity. But although they used this “social technology” (Theberge 217) to undergird “genuine” critique of the Mexican government, support for Zapatismo and nostalgia for the postrevolutionary past, it was also evident that the economic and ideological circumstances in which this band operated were emphatically tied to the neoliberal present. Not only were the costs of creating digital home studios reduced by neoliberal economic policy, but the national sentiment that Instituto del Habla expressed through this medium reflected the reconfiguration of the “nation” into the private sphere that accompanied Mexico’s neoliberal turn. Further, this technology facilitated a dynamic resignification of Mexican musical traditions that Instituto del Habla worked to control (by playing original samples at the beginning and end of songs) and which, in the case of “Seguimos en la Lucha,” effectively appropriated a Guatemalan nationalist tune for Mexico. Instituto del Habla, then, were producing a very contemporary form of nostalgia in their recording practice.

## Conclusion

In this article I have demonstrated how, among pro-Zapatista bands of various genres in Mexico City, the use of the digital home studio coincided with an ideal of *autogestión* that was linked to the Zapatista project of “autonomy”. This undergirded a perceived mode of intimate, authentic self-expression defined against an inauthentic cultural mainstream thought to be ridden with commercial censorship. For these artists *autogestión* emerged as a means of defending cultural “traditions” from neoliberal policy allowing large multinational companies to control cultural production in Mexico. The “self-expression” associated with the digital home studio facilitated messages critical of the government and supportive of the Zapatista movement, as well as the expression of perceived cultural “roots” – regional musical “traditions” created as national by the Mexican postrevolutionary state. In turn, bolstering perceived freedom of expression through the creation of *autogestión* – a project inspired by the Zapatista ideal of “autonomy” – led to the expression of support for Zapatismo, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Thus,

both the act of spreading pro-Zapatista messages, as well as that of representing Zapatismo sonically (for instance, by using samples of marimba music or sampling a speech by Subcomandante Marcos), became related to the creation of private means of musical production, involving the cultivation of complex economic relationships with actors from a variety of backgrounds as well as the channelling of economic resources from musicians' regular incomes towards musical practice.

Nonetheless, while this *autogestión* may be located in relation to Zapatismo, it may also be situated within neoliberal economic policies and their accompanying ideologies. These groups were working at a specific historical juncture, shaped by the cultural legacy of the Mexican postrevolutionary state's national project, as well as the divorce between "state" and "nation" that conflicting forces (the EZLN and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari [1988-94]) attempted to effect in the late twentieth century. Their studio practices, which constructed and experienced nationalism at an intimate, private level, must be understood within this context. This article, then, has examined the ways that the "imagined" nation can endure in spaces beyond the Westphalian public sphere. Further, it has highlighted the ambivalent relationships that emerged in these settings between technology and tradition, and the ways that these bands used technology to critique the present and express nostalgia for a past simultaneously free from and reified by such technology. Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, argues that "[n]ostalgia inevitably appears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals" since, "fundamentally, both technology and nostalgia are about mediation" (xiv, 346). In the settings I have studied in this article, vestiges of the past and marks of the changing present were a source of productive tension for musical creativity. Here, as well as being a political creed that musicians sought to propagate, Zapatismo became for many musicians a means of mediation between past and present.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Manuel and Walcott for arguments connecting hip-hop musical practice with postmodernism.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Carey, for instance, connects the popular acceptance of what he labels the “transmission view” of communication with the invention of the telegraph (“The telegraph [...] changed the fundamental ways in which communication was thought about. It provided a model for thinking about communication – a model I have called a transmission model” [157]). In particular, he emphasizes that this communication technology allowed for the conceptual separation of “communication” from “physical travel” – words that had previously been effectively used as synonyms.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Re Crew, 11-12-12.

<sup>4</sup> This is not an acronym.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 19-11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 02-05-13.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Cienpies, 19-11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre was originally writing in French, which is the reason that the *ø* carries no accent here.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Laiko from Instituto del Habla told me that “the artist who goes out to sell” ends up changing their message (20-07-13).

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Instituto del Habla, 27-11-12.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, The Páramos, 16-02-13.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>15</sup> Interview, 16-02-13.

<sup>16</sup> As already highlighted in this article, in this context the Spanish word *regional* is often linked to Mexican cultural nationalism.

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17 Interview, 21-07-13.

18 Interview, 21-07-13.

19 Interview, 21-07-13.

20 Interview, 16-02-13.

21 Interview, 21-07-13.

22 Interview, 21-07-13.

23 Interview, 21-07-13.

24 <http://theparamos.wix.com/oficial#!> (Accessed 30-09-14).

25 Interview, 16-02-13.

26 On the band's website, for instance, it was stated that "The Páramos is a totally autogestive project (*un proyecto totalmente autogestivo*) with one objective: to express ourselves through music?". <http://theparamos.wix.com/oficial#!historia> (Accessed 30-09-14).

27 Interview, 21-07-13.

28 Interview, 21-07-13.

29 See an interesting article on the *organilleros* written by Kate Newman at <http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/the-slow-demise-of-mexico-citys-organilleros/> (accessed 28-09-14).

30 Interview, 20-07-13.

31 Interview, 27-11-12.

32 Interview, 20-07-13.

33 Interview, 20-07-13.

34 Interview, 20-07-13.

35 Instituto del Habla has a page on music-streaming website SoundCloud: <https://soundcloud.com/laiko-el-nigromante> (Accessed 14-10-14). Their album *Rap con sabor a México* (2011) is available to download for free at <http://4puntozcrew.over-blog.com/article-instituto-del-habla-rap-con-sabor-a-mexico-2011-104204941.html> (accessed 14-10-14).

36 Also see [www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/sintesis.pps](http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/proyectos/conteos/conteo2005/sintesis.pps) (accessed 04-07-15).

37 *Albures* are a common form of pun in Mexico usually involving putting different words together to create a sentence with a sexual hidden meaning; a particularly common form of *albur* involves constructing a question that, if answered honestly, implicates the respondent in transgressive behaviour. Since I was not a native speaker of Spanish, I was an easy target for *albures*.

38 Interview, Mario Caudillo, 23-06-15.

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<sup>39</sup> In fact, Caudillo was no classical purist, but performed music in a wide variety of styles, including classical, rock, hip-hop, and Mexican popular genres such as the bolero.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase “open veins” (*venas abiertas*) recalls Eduardo Galeano’s dependency-theory classic *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*.

<sup>41</sup> Notably, the set of ethical norms around sampling in this context were very distinct to those described by Schloss among hip-hop producers in the United States, where revealing another producer’s sources is frowned upon, and samples ought to be manipulated in such a way that they are difficult to recognize (101-132). For Instituto del Habla, a large part of the value of sampling Mexican popular musics precisely lay in their being recognizable, on some level, to the listener.

<sup>42</sup> The San Andrés Accords were the result of talks between the EZLN and the Mexican government in 1996, and sought to protect indigenous rights and autonomy. Although agreed as a part of peace negotiations, they were never implemented by the government (Stahler-Sholk).