

‘Our Culture’s Not for Sale!’: Music and the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* in Mexico

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The *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO), a social movement that emerged in June 2006, was a response to severe government repression of a teachers’ strike in Oaxaca, Mexico. This article focuses on movement participants’ involvement with music, and the innovative ways in which songs associated with APPO were shared and circulated during the conflict. APPO’s engagement with musical activities created spaces in which the political significance of regional culture was re-interpreted and re-signified. APPO, despite failing in its primary political objectives, thus generated new ways of relating to the performance, representation, politics and consumption of musical traditions.

Key Words: popular music, politics, culture, social movements, Oaxaca, Mexico

The *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO, Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) emerged in June 2006 as a response to the severe local government repression of a teachers' strike. The principal motivating objective behind the movement was the immediate removal from office of the deeply unpopular state governor, Ulises Ruiz. Although APPO forced the temporary closure of municipal buildings and in effect controlled Oaxaca City until November 2006, when military intervention returned power to local government, it did not succeed in changing the political structure of the state. APPO thus failed in its efforts to force the governor to resign and Ulises Ruiz completed his term of office, remaining in power until 30 November 2010. However, the movement created new spaces of cultural resistance within which participants asserted and re-asserted control over the political significance and public representation, consumption and performance of regional musical styles.

The political circumstances that gave rise to the APPO movement, and the severe repression that followed, have been well documented (Blas López, 2007; EDUCA, 2009; Esteva, 2007; FIDH, 2006; Osorno, 2007). The importance of oral testimony for identity formation within the movement has been examined in two excellent volumes (Denham, 2008; Stephen, 2013), while other scholars have focused on the functions of radio and TV (Rogers, 2011; Rovira-Sancho, 2013; Stephen, 2007) and the visual arts (Arenas, 2011; Howell, 2012; Meneses Reyes, 2016) as disseminators of APPO demands and ideas. However, the roles that music and musicians played within APPO have received scant attention.

This article focuses on musical activity within APPO and how it opened spaces for the grassroots re-imagining and re-signifying of local cultural-political values. Primary data were collected in Oaxaca City in June 2007 via interviews with musicians, media activists and APPO sympathisers, through participant observation during meetings and gatherings held in Oaxaca City to commemorate the first anniversary of the uprising, and via email communications with musicians and activists between June 2007 and May 2009. The article is divided into four parts. In part one, a historical overview of the particular ways in which music and politics intertwined in post-revolutionary twentieth century Mexico will be offered, as folk traditions were institutionalised by the state to serve its political agenda. In part two, after briefly outlining the causes of the political conflict that produced the APPO movement, the songs that APPO generated in the year 2006-7 will be discussed. Part three focuses on the unprecedented ways in which, via a series of media takeovers and *megamarchas* (mass demonstrations), these songs were circulated during the conflict. Finally, the APPO movement's struggles to assert and defend 'ownership' of the performance, representation and consumption of regional musical traditions will be examined. The article concludes by arguing that APPO's musical engagement generated a cultural arena within which notions of self-government and autonomy could be imagined and enacted at a time of profound economic and social change.

Music and Politics in Mexico

In the early 1920s, the post-revolutionary Mexican state promoted folk music and dance as a basis on which to construct a strong national identity, incorporate diversity and secure the support of the masses (Martiniello and Lafleur, 2008: 1200). Music's properties rendered it particularly suitable for the cultural-nationalist project; local music was popular among regional and subaltern groups, it provided an effective 'teaching' tool without depending on literacy, and it was relatively cheap to produce and easily disseminated via radio (Turino, 2003: 202). State-sponsored folkloric groups and festivals served to represent the nation in a tangible, unified form. Popular music styles such as mariachi, which had been tied to specific regions, were redefined by the state as emblematic of *mexicanidad*, a construction of Mexico as 'a modern nation in the making, yet rich with tradition' (Mulholland, 2007: 252). These top-down processes, elaborated by urban intellectual elites, avoided dialogue with the nation's diverse Indigenous populations about the origins and development of their musical styles (Mariñelarena, 2014: 83).

As musical styles were co-opted by the state and assimilated into the new national format, they were contained, cleansed and controlled in the process. The corrido, a ballad form that emerged in mid- to late nineteenth century Mexico, often defied state authority, and acted as an archive of popular history by providing insights into the opinions, values, grievances and heroes of common people (Frazer, 2006: 131). With the growth of the Mexican film industry and the commercial recording industry after the 1930s, new corrido compositions disseminated via these media served to maintain the status quo. At the same time, many earlier corridos celebrating the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) were appropriated by the state and made to act as vehicles of hegemonic ideology, thereby encouraging the lower classes to accept elite domination (Frazer, 2006: 139). Indigenous and lower-class cultural identities were reinvented to fit the interests and conceptions of the dominant class (Mariñelarena, 2014: 114).

Government-funded radio stations and recording series launched in the mid-twentieth century extended and deepened paternalistic authority and control over the representation of Indigenous and traditional musical forms (Alonso Bolaños, 2008). State institutions promoted what government authorities defined, in top-down fashion, as the 'essence' of Mexican heritage, but these processes silenced and excluded Indigenous people's own voices (Smith, 2008b: 186). In the wake of the government's violent repression of the 1968 student movement and widespread political discontent, hegemonic representations of national cultural identity also erased contemporary state brutality and aggression. In the early 1970s, official support for national folk bands such as Los Folkloristas, and for Latin American folk-based *Nueva Canción* (New Song) groups such as Chile's Inti Illimani and

Quilapayún, served to focus the attention of protest away from the Mexican government and towards the more general concept of imperialism, as well as to reinforce a notion of cultural ‘authenticity’ and to reassert the boundaries of ‘respect and discipline’ between audience and performers (Zolov, 1999: 230). Mexican folk singers such as Judith Reyes, whose corridos directly denounced specific instances of government violence and brutality, suffered state persecution and exile (Marsh, 2010).

After Mexico’s default on its foreign debt repayment in 1981, the state-led cultural nationalist project shifted to ‘selling’ the country to tourists and attracting foreign investors (Green, 2018: 357). The Zapatista uprising of January 1994, which coalesced around opposition to this neoliberal economic and ideological turn, created hundreds of ‘communities in resistance’ in the southern state of Chiapas (Green, 2018: 357). Influenced by this uprising, Indigenous activism and demands for collective rights and recognition of cultural diversity in Oaxaca intensified (Mariñelarena, 2014: 102). For many of these ‘communities in resistance’, the freedom to preserve and record what they defined as their cultural ‘roots’ and regional music styles was closely related to notions of political autonomy (Green, 2018). The peace accord drawn up between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in 1996 made reference to handing over state-run radio stations to indigenous communities in order to allow opportunities for such cultural self-representation (Stephen 2012: 136). The establishment of *Ojo de Agua* radio, video and TV in Oaxaca in 1998, connected to the EZLN’s efforts to set up community radio as a collective right of Indigenous communities (Stephen 2012: 136), served as a tool for ‘unthinking’ the Eurocentric foundations of established cultural industries (Salazar and Córdova, 2008: 41). However, in 2001 the Mexican Congress passed an amended version of the original peace accords in which many proposals, including those concerning community media, were absent (Stephen 2012: 136). In 2006, the government passed a modification to Mexico’s Federal Radio and Television law that favoured corporate media while severely curtailing community radio and grassroots media initiatives (Stephen 2012: 136).

At the turn of the 21st century, Oaxaca’s ethnic diversity was approached by the government as a source of political control and financial profit; the region was viewed as a ‘testing ground for neoliberal multiculturalism in Mexico’ (Poole, 2007: 10). Government-sponsored festivals legitimised the values and aesthetic qualities of Indigenous culture only by identifying it as a product to serve the political and commercial interests of the state (Mariñelarena, 2014: 119).

Oaxaca resiste

The APPO movement was a response to major social and political conflict. In the first decade of the 21st century, Mexico had undergone considerable political change. The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the political party that for over 70 years controlled virtually every political office at federal and local levels, lost the presidential elections of 2000 and 2006. In Oaxaca, where social indicators for health, employment, education, housing and basic services are amongst the worst in Mexico (Espinosa Trujillo et al, 2014), the PRI continued to govern until 2010. However, it was not poor socio-economic conditions alone but rather the continuing problems of ‘electoral exclusion, political patronage, corruption, and old political rivalries’ that contributed most significantly to the development of major political conflict and mass anti-government protest in Oaxaca in 2006 (Correa-Gabrera, 2012: 74).

Conflict erupted when PRI governor Ulises Ruiz ordered the violent repression of a teachers’ strike and sit-in. For over twenty years the teachers and their union, *Sección 22*, had held a sit-in, known locally as a *plantón*, and occupied the main square of Oaxaca City as part of their tactics to demand better pay for teachers, increased funding for school infrastructure, and free school breakfasts, textbooks and uniforms for school pupils. The *plantones* were regularly tolerated by the state government while negotiations took place with the teachers’ union and a compromise was eventually reached. Therefore, on 22 May 2006, when 70,000 teachers and their union began a strike and *plantón*, many urban Oaxacans were indifferent to what appeared to be a ‘routine’ annual event (Esteva, 2007: 130). Before dawn on 14 June, however, some 700 state police agents, acting on the orders of Ulises Ruiz, entered the square with the aim of dismantling the *plantón* and dislodging the strikers. Firing tear gas from a helicopter and arbitrarily arresting union leaders, the police were widely and immediately condemned for excessive use of force in their attempt to end the strike.

Serious social and political conflict rapidly developed that same morning, with teachers and sympathetic citizens filling the streets to register their anger at Ulises Ruiz and what became known as the *desalojo* (violent eviction) he had ordered (Stephen, 2013: 80-81). Citizens threw stones and fireworks at police, who were forced to withdraw from the centre after some hours of confrontation, and more than 190 civilians injured in the confrontation required hospitalisation (Friedberg, 2006). Thousands of citizens immediately declared their support for the teachers and, following the retreat of the police, constructed hundreds of barricades throughout the city in order to block roads and make it impossible for the police to return by land (Estrada Saavedra, 2010).

The events of 14 June ‘changed the nature of the (teachers’) movement, unifying large numbers of Oaxacans with their own reasons for opposing Ruiz’s misrule’ (Esteva, 2007: 130). Ulises Ruiz became governor of the state of Oaxaca in 2004 after what many denounced as a rigged election, and his early actions in office led to widespread accusations of repression against political opponents, media outlets and indigenous peoples (Esteva, 2008: 23). He was also accused of diverting millions of dollars into the

2006 presidential election campaign of the PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo, which he managed, and of covering up this spending with a series of unsolicited public construction works which were widely criticised for damaging historical sites (Poole, 2008). These works, which involved the cutting down of 100-year-old trees, mobilised middle-class Oaxacans who had not hitherto been politically engaged (Poole, 2007: 11). The *desalojo* caused a ‘political opening’ which united the teachers’ union and diverse sectors of civil society around one immediate objective – to oust Ruiz from power (Affourtit, 2019: 2). As tens of thousands of Oaxacans became involved in efforts to support the teachers and demand the resignation of Ruiz, camping out at the barricades and joining rallies and demonstrations in the days following the *desalojo*, the teachers’ union sought to draw these forces together in support of their movement, convening what they originally called the *Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca* (The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca) on 17 June 2006. On 20 June, the word *pueblo* (people) was put into the plural form *pueblos* to better represent the diverse ethnic population of the state (Esteva, 2008: 23-4). More than 300 social and grassroots organisations expressed immediate support for the ‘movement of movements’, including neighbourhood associations, unions, Indigenous groups, NGOs, ecologists, artists, women, youth and media activists (Rénique and Poole, 2008: 25). Original songs arose in the new spaces created by the barricades, and by the numerous rallies and mass protests which took place in Oaxaca City in the weeks and months following the *desalojo*. Oaxacan teacher and musician ‘Che Luis’ (2008) describes how, after the *desalojo*, ‘[w]e ... created lyrics about the social (problems) that we live with and are witnesses to’. It was not the sonic properties of any music genre or style in itself which rendered it political at this time, but the context of its composition, circulation and consumption:

...[t]here was an explosion of musical creativity amongst those who had risen up [against the governor] ... Activists and sympathisers of APPO dedicated themselves to composing songs that told of the battles won by the rebels, that hurled insults at the government, and that described the insurrection in general. Reggaeton, *rancheras*, rap, *sones*, *boleros*, pop, ballads; the revolt was heterogeneous even in the music genres that intoned the cry of rebellion. (Osorno, 2007: 68)

One of the most popular songs from 2006, created by the ‘Tapacaminos’ collective, is ‘El son de las barricadas’. This title has a double meaning in Spanish, ‘son’ being both a category of music and dance and also the third person plural of the verb ‘ser’. Hence the title means both ‘They’re from the Barricades’ and ‘The *Son* of the Barricades’. The song narrates the events APPO sympathisers and participants ‘love to remember’, of ‘a people who managed to kick the police out of their city’ during the *desalojo* (‘Tapacaminos’, 2008). Oaxacans I spoke to in Oaxaca City in June 2007 asserted that this song ‘cheered

us up' and 'gave us more energy' while gathered at the barricades in order to protect the city centre from police attack:

On the 14th of June, in the year 2006,
the world turned upside down in the centre of Oaxaca,
early in the morning, just before dawn;
nobody could have imagined what was about to happen.

The striking teachers had taken over the square
while the bloody government was preparing its attack;

'Before dawn we'll break up this sit-in'
shouted the police, and the repression began.

...people came out, shouting, with sticks and stones
and sent the police to hell...

Let the cowards who have no dignity clear off

and let those who want to change this society stay,

because there is not a soul here who can stand any more of this rubbish;

the people demand justice, the people are rebelling.

(The *Son* of the Barricades. All translations from the Spanish are by the author).

Like 'El son de las barricadas', many of the songs that constituted the 'explosion of musical creativity' chronicled events that were significant for the development of APPO, and the dates on which these occurred. They acted as a means of circulating eye-witness accounts of actions and recording the opinions and grievances of APPO members and sympathisers. '21 de setiembre', for example, tells of the events of 21 September 2006 when, seeking a peaceful resolution to the impasse between APPO and the local government, approximately 5,000 Oaxacans set out on foot for Mexico City (a distance of some 300 miles) to present APPO's claims to the incoming Federal Senate (Esteva, 2007: 136). Reaching Mexico City on 8 October, the marchers established a *plantón* near the National Senate building, where several Oaxacans subsequently commenced a hunger strike. These acts did not lead to APPO's demands being met. In protest, a number of Oaxacans remained at the *plantón* in Mexico City, where photographs and texts chronicling the movement and state violations of human rights in Oaxaca were placed on display, and independently produced CDs and documentaries were available for purchase. The songs on these CDs served six broad functions at this time. Composed in a wide range of genres, the songs: a) celebrate the contributions of women ('Un angel/An Angel', 'Mujer/Woman'); b) praise the actions of Oaxacans killed during the conflict ('Corrido de José/The Corrido of José'); c) applaud teachers ('¿Dónde está el monumento?/Where is the Monument?', 'Maestro del pueblo/The People's Teacher'); d) satirise and

attack Ulises Ruiz and other government figures ('Parodia del buey Ulises/The Parody of the Ass, Ulises', 'El mono de alambre/The Wire Monkey'); e) celebrate resistance to state authority ('Madrugada de resistencia/Dawn of Resistance', 'Viva la resistencia/Long Live the Resistance'), and; f) assert an alternative notion of local cultural identity ('La resistencia oaxaqueña/Oaxacan Resistance').

Between 14 June and 25 November 2006, with hundreds of barricades erected in Oaxaca and APPO in effect governing the city, there was 'a great outpouring of creativity' (Romer, 2006). The barricades 'became ad hoc cultural centres ... people were crafting a shared public political culture' (Stephen, 2013: 87). The square was turned into a performance space where Oaxacans participated collectively in numerous musical activities (Romer, 2006). Music and song functioned as 'a way of communicating' within the movement, as 'a way of speaking and of valuing our voices, or of valuing our presence and our participation' ('Tapacaminos', 2008). At demonstrations and on the barricades, songs chronicling events and celebrating resistance to Ulises Ruiz 'were taken up by the people' and sung collectively ('Che Luis', 2008), creating spaces where opposition to the PRI government was shared and articulated *en masse* and giving voice to APPO demands. The lyrics of these songs are frequently direct and concise. The 'Cumbia del magisterio' ('Teachers' Cumbia'), for example, a cumbia composed by 'Che Luis', asserts:

The people are tired
of such vile corruption
from the swine
who rob our nation.
Presidents steal
and governors too.
Congressmen steal,
so do the senators.
(‘Teachers’ Cumbia’)

An anonymous corrido composed about the march to Mexico City on 21 September, 'Corrido a la marcha-caminata', links the APPO struggle with revolutionary principles which the government is accused of betraying:

I hold my flag up high,
the flag that Zapata fought with,
the one the government betrays

here in my beautiful Oaxaca.
And instead of bringing us justice,
the government represses and kills us.
(‘Corrido a la marcha-caminata’).

To my knowledge, during the conflict only one singer/songwriter recorded, and put his real name to, a complete album containing original material composed in the midst of the protests. Andrés Contreras, known as *El juglar de los caminos* (the travelling troubadour), was able to identify himself as the composer of these songs because he does not normally reside in Oaxaca and, since he originates from Baja California, he has no relatives in the state. Contreras is a popular protest singer who, for over four decades, has dedicated himself to travelling around Mexico composing songs that ‘narrate tragedies and struggles’ (Contreras, undated). Via sales of his existing CDs at *megamarchas* and rallies held during the conflict, where he also performed live, Contreras earned sufficient money to cover the cost of recording *A las barricadas (To the Barricades)* in a local studio (Contreras, personal communication, 6 January 2008). His compositions during the conflict, many of them satirical attacks on Ulises Ruiz, are composed in national folk music styles, such as the corrido ‘Ulises Ruiz’:

I’m going to tell you about a certain Ulises Ruiz,
an arrogant type of repressor.
In Oaxaca he’s a bad governor,
worse than Murat, his predecessor.
When he was a candidate he told the businessmen,
put me in power and I’ll support you,
I’ll give you wealth and investments
I won’t leave anything for the poor.
I’m going to tell you what this asshole said:
‘I won’t allow peasants, teachers or workers
to hold protests or *plantones*,
so the bosses can be comfortable’.
Ulises Ruiz, what a bad governor.
Of those I know, I think he’s the worst.
(‘Ulises Ruiz’).

With such songs, Contreras aimed to persuade people to ‘join the struggle’ (personal communication, 6 January 2008). Contreras was one of many who composed songs to harness support for the movement, to

express their anger with Ulises Ruiz, and to articulate the interests of APPO. However, most of these individuals only recorded their songs anonymously. In Contreras' words:

Many of those who composed songs in Oaxaca don't actually sing them and they're even less likely to sell CDs of their songs...they don't earn money through their music. They're teachers, peasants, or they have some other occupation, and they spring up like shooting stars which at a particular moment light up the universe of social struggles, and then they disappear again without trace. And they're right too; they have to live in the region that's in conflict, they have their families there, their work, their routine, and people like me can only move and operate while there are strong popular movements. Once things return to 'normality' we have to leave the place because, once we no longer have the cover of the popular movement, we could be detained or assassinated at any moment (Contreras, personal communication, 6 January 2008).

'A War of Creation and Imagination'

In the five months following the *desalojo*, APPO organised a series of meetings and *megamarchas* which drew up to 800,000 people (Hernández Navarro, 2008: 148). The primary, non-negotiable demand of APPO was the removal from office of Ulises Ruiz. Its resolutions included the recognition of Indigenous rights and autonomy, gender equality, political accountability, opposition to neo-liberalism and the Plan Puebla Panamá (a vast infrastructure construction project presented by President Vicente Fox in 2001 [Blas López, 2007: 78-9]), and the demand for alternative education and collectively-run media which, although promised by the government in 1996, was not delivered. Between the *desalojo* of 14 June and 25 November, when President Fox sent over 4,000 members of the Federal Preventative Police to Oaxaca to quell the upheaval, Oaxacans in effect governed themselves, establishing *plantones* outside government buildings which forced their temporary closure with local government having fled the region (Hernández Navarro, 2008: 148). During the months of the conflict, there were at least 23 civilian deaths in confrontations with police, hundreds were seriously injured, arrested, tortured and/or imprisoned, and over 1,200 complaints were filed with human rights commissions (Stephen, 2013: 6).

The collective singing of movement songs at demonstrations and rallies constructed a shared political identity of resistance and gave voice to APPO demands and grievances. But APPO was also highly innovative in its practices, making use of state media outlets and new media technologies in

unprecedented ways. The *desalojo* had mobilised tens of thousands of Oaxacan women whose actions became fundamental to the coordination of APPO and the dissemination of its objectives and values. The *Coordinadora de Mujeres de Oaxaca Primero de Agosto* (COMO) was formed on 1 August 2006 to promote and protect women's presence in the social protests. On this day, 3,000 women participated in what became known as *la marcha de las cacerolas* (the march of the pans) (Osorno, 2007: 70). Having reached the centre of Oaxaca City, the women decided to march on to the headquarters of the Oaxacan radio and TV Corporation, the *Corporación Oaxaqueña de Radio y Televisión* (COR-TV).

State radio and TV outlets were being used by the government to disseminate propaganda against APPO, which was officially characterised as a group of vandals, terrorists and criminals in an attempt to justify harsh government and police measures against the movement, including arbitrary detention and illegal incarceration, torture, and other violations of human rights. COR-TV and radio were widely seen as propaganda outlets for Ruiz, and the Indigenous presence on state stations was minimal (Stephen, 2012: 127). At COR-TV, the women, saying '[t]his media is ours. It is paid for by money from our taxes ... It is supposed to be public, to be ours' (Stephen, 2013: 149), requested half an hour of airtime in order to present their version of events and to demand the resignation of Ulises Ruiz. When this request was refused, a number of women entered the building and peacefully took over Canal 9, the state-run radio and TV network. The women had no technical training, but sympathetic technicians assisted and, with this help, they succeeded in using Canal 9 over the following three weeks to disseminate the 'ideas, proposals and initiatives of APPO', as well as opening the channel to the public to express their own opinions via live 'phone-ins' (Esteva, 2007: 131). These actions were celebrated in songs such as the anonymous ballad, 'Resistencia oaxaqueña':

Your bravery
doesn't come from weapons.
Women taught you
that pots and pans are your cannons,
courage and reason
are the story behind your protest.
(‘Resistencia oaxaqueña’).

On 21 August, the transmission tower of Canal 9 was destroyed by undercover police and mercenaries. In reaction, a few hours later, APPO occupied all private radio and TV stations in the city, some twelve outlets, in an attempt to 'give voice to the people' (Esteva, 2007: 131). The occupied radio and TV stations were in the following weeks voluntarily returned to their owners, with the exception of *Radio*

Universidad, the radio station of the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca. Although unidentified individuals used acid to temporarily destroy transmission consoles on 14 July and 8 August, *Radio Universidad* remained in the hands of APPO activists and sympathisers until the violent confrontation between federal police and protesters on 25 November forcibly returned the state to the control of the PRI government.

Oaxacan women took over media outlets out of anger and frustration, because they did not feel that those outlets represented them (Affourtit, 2019). During the conflict, these media takeovers opened up alternative cultural spaces in which Oaxacans were able to control their own representation through art, poetry, music, song and debate. While the private media characterises the period between 14 June and 25 November 2006 as one of chaos and disorder, musician and teacher ‘Che Luis’ (2008) describes the period as ‘a war of creation and imagination’ in which Oaxacans collaborated and participated in the construction of new cultural spaces. Dozens of songs were composed, to ‘fill air time on the ... radio stations that had been taken over’ and to ‘make those stations shine, to rouse, to recruit, to teach, to direct, and also to inform’ (Osorno, 2007: 68).

Oaxacans who had created songs about the conflict and the APPO movement performed their compositions live on the occupied stations. Once the stations were returned to their owners, many of these songs were subsequently circulated and re-circulated anonymously by means of pirated CDs. These CDs featured a variety of combinations of new compositions about the 2006 conflict, and also many older compositions written by or about popular heroes of the left, such as Chile’s socialist president Salvador Allende, Latin American *Nueva Canción* artists such as the Venezuelan Alí Primera and the Chilean Víctor Jara, and revolutionaries such as Che Guevara. This created what Scruggs (2004: 257) terms ‘aural bridges’ establishing a sense of continuity with previous social movements and leftist political struggles in the region. With titles such as *Resistencia Oaxaqueña (Oaxacan Resistance)*, *Oaxaca por la libertad (Oaxaca for Freedom)* and *Oaxaca vencerá (Oaxaca shall Overcome)*, these home-made CD compilations list the titles of the songs they contain, but not the real names of contemporary composers and performers, whose personal security would be at risk if they were identified as sympathisers of APPO. The very act of making and distributing such CDs, made possible by newly available media technologies, constituted a form of political activism. One student, who burned and sold CDs throughout the conflict, described the process in the following way:

The state represses, imprisons and tortures artists [who compose songs about the conflict]. I copy their music to spread the ideas it contains; I’ve dedicated myself to collecting music of the popular movement. Most of the artists are teachers, but many of them aren’t ... I make a selection of their songs, design a

cover, buy the blank CDs, and burn them. I sell these CDs at *megamarchas* ... I can't sell them anywhere else, like in the street, because the police would seize me and detain me. At the *megamarchas* it's safer because of the large numbers of people on the streets. In February I sold about fifty CDs, forty of them on one day. I sell them for twenty pesos, which covers the cost of the blank CDs, the covers, the cases, and [use of a computer in] the Internet café where I burn them. (Personal communication, 20 June 2007)

In addition to such CDs, the Internet also played a crucial role in disseminating resistance music. Andrés Contreras' *A las barricadas* was available for download for free from kaosenlared.net, and other sites such as Viento Rojo and Mal de Ojo offered free downloads of (mostly anonymous) 'revolutionary music' associated with APPO. Within a few months of the start of the conflict, APPO had created more than twenty webpages to bypass the official media and capture international attention (Gravante, 2012: 54). This, along with the media takeovers and the circulation of pirated CDs, opened spaces where activities such as singing, playing music and giving spoken or sung testimony acted to re-appropriate public spaces and unite people in nonviolent collective action. The occupied media and Internet technologies constituted what Clemencia Rodríguez refers to as 'citizens' media':

Citizens' media are communication spaces where citizens can learn to manipulate their own languages, codes, signs and symbols, empowering them to name the world in their own terms ... [and triggering] ... processes that allow citizens to recodify their contexts and selves. These processes ultimately give citizens the opportunity to restructure their identities into empowered subjectivities strongly connected to local cultures (Rodríguez, 2011: 24).

Sung and shared during mass demonstrations, at the barricades and via spaces created by 'citizens' media' activities, APPO songs functioned not only to oppose the government but to debate, think about and imagine new forms of autonomy, self-representation and self-governance. The movement's engagement with music, and the active dissemination of movement songs through spaces created by citizens' media throughout the summer of 2006, generated opportunities and resources for APPO participants to reflect on the meaning and value of their regional cultural traditions.

Ulises, comprende, la cultura no se vende

By 2007, the APPO struggle to remove Ulises Ruiz had also become a struggle to re-claim and re-define all aspects of regional cultural identity and expression, which were officially represented by the government in commercial ways that APPO rejected (Davies, 2006). The national and global shift towards neoliberal economic reforms:

... [e]xacerbated long-standing social and economic despair ... regional elites with holdings in the tourism and development-related industries have benefited ..., while the large percentage of Oaxacans who have long counted on some combination of subsistence farming and small-scale commercial agriculture are worse off now.

(Magaña, 2010: 76)

In the dominant Mexican imaginary, Oaxaca and the south more generally are represented ‘as part of the backwards *Indianness* of the uncivilised past’, and its people are blamed for their own poverty and marginalisation (Magaña, 2010: 75-6). The APPO movement revived twentieth-century struggles to demand collective rights and media autonomy, but it also gave rise to new struggles to assert control over the public representation of regional music and dance in state festivals. Participation in the newly created ‘communities in resistance’ generated spaces in which cultural autonomy and self-representation were discussed and enacted. Temporarily free of state censorship, these new spaces allowed APPO participants to represent and interpret themselves, on their own terms, and in their own voices and styles.

The Guelagueta is an officially organised cultural festival held in Oaxaca City every July. The Zapotec word ‘Guelagueta’ refers to Indigenous notions of ‘reciprocal exchange’ (Stephen, 2013: 66). In fact, though officially presented as a pre-Colombian tradition, the Guelagueta celebration actually dates back only as far as the 1940s, when Governor Vicente González Fernández organised a series of festivals in Oaxaca City, which he advertised as ‘example[s] of social justice and the economic and cultural development of the indigenous’ (Smith, 2008a: 224). These festivals also functioned as demonstrations of the governor’s political support bases and as a useful boost for the local tourism industry (Smith, 2008a: 224). The Guelagueta thus originates in a government initiative aimed at controlling the public representation and meaning of regional cultural traditions and connecting these to state interests. The modern Guelagueta, sponsored by corporations such as Coca-Cola, Inc., attracts large numbers of foreign and Mexican upper class tourists. However, most indigenous and lower class rural and urban Oaxacans are excluded due to the high cost of the entrance tickets. Ulises Ruiz, who framed culture ‘as an issue of importance primarily for tourism’, increased the frequency of such festivals (Poole, 2008: 207).

While Oaxaca became a ‘testing ground for neoliberal multiculturalism in Mexico’ (Poole, 2007: 10), Ruiz’s cultural policy was widely denounced for ‘contributing to the ‘privatisation’ of the Guelaguetza (Poole, 2008: 220). The anonymous ballad ‘Resistencia oaxaqueña’ accuses Ruiz of selling the region’s culture for his personal gain:

The repression started
with his ambition.
He sold off the Guelaguetza,
he destroyed our beauty.
My Oaxacan land began its resistance.
(‘Resistencia oaxaqueña’).

In the midst of the conflict in July 2006, Ruiz cancelled the official Guelaguetza citing concerns for the safety of tourists in what many viewed as his ‘first public concession that he did not have control of the growing uprising in the capital city’ (Affourtit, 2018: 87). However, Oaxacans sympathetic to APPO took over the Cerro del Fortín, where the event is usually held, in order to organise their own alternative free cultural festival. More than 25,000 people attended (Stephen, 2013: 67). The following year, keen to present a return to order and normality, Ulises Ruiz launched ‘Operation Guelaguetza 2007’, proclaiming ‘[w]e shall use the full weight of the law in defence of national and international tourism’ (Ross, 2007). APPO sympathisers and participants called for a boycott of the official Guelaguetza, arguing that ‘the official Guelaguetza is not us’ and ‘our Guelaguetza has to be shared; it’s like life itself’ (Lee, GW and Kautz, 2007). Although many opposed the boycott, many others ‘condemned the government’s cynical commercialisation’ of Oaxaca’s Indigenous musical traditions (Rénique and Poole, 2008: 27). Ulises Ruiz filled the auditorium with 8,000 government workers who, it was alleged, were obligated to attend the official Guelaguetza under penalty of losing their jobs (Ross, 2007), while many other Oaxacans showed a determination to recapture and ‘make authentic’ the festival by holding their own popular, non-commercial version of it (Davies, 2006).

The ‘Popular Guelaguetza’ of 2007 was part of a resurgence of the movement to overthrow Ulises Ruiz and to demand the self-determination of the people of Oaxaca (Lee, GW and Kautz, 2007). Two Indigenous students expressed the mood at the time, affirming that ‘the movement hasn’t gone away ... People have gained consciousness. We know that ... [t]he people can govern themselves’ (cited in Lee et al, 2007). As thousands of Oaxacans marched to the Cerro de Fortín auditorium, they chanted ‘*Ulises, comprende, la cultura no se vende*’ (Ulises, understand this; our culture’s not for sale) (Lee, GW and Kautz, 2007). The clash with military police and the ensuing confrontation appeared to symbolise what many movement participants now saw as ‘a battle for Oaxaca itself, for its culture and its people’ (Lee,

GW and Kautz, 2007). Participants stated that the demonstration was about ‘reclaiming the traditions, rescuing the culture of our ancestors’, and asserted that the government ‘can rob everything, but it can’t rob your dignity, your culture, your customs and traditions ... In Oaxaca, because there’s culture, there’s resistance’ (Lee, GW and Kautz, 2007). A teacher-activist explained on the day of the protest against the official Guelagueta:

We will no longer permit our traditions to be sold to the highest bidder. Today demonstrated that the Guelagueta has recuperated its origins, ... the peoples of Oaxaca can coexist without selling [their] culture. (cited in Lee, GW and Kautz, 2007)

In the aftermath of the APPO movement, the government and the private sector strove to ‘return to normality’ and minimise the perceived impact of the conflict, ‘step[ping] up commercial spectacles and imported artistic activity, to present an appearance of “renovation”’ (Esteva, personal communication, 8 May 2009). At an official state-financed music show I attended in Oaxaca City on 16 June 2007, *La noche de luces*, the Town Hall exhibited local arts and crafts alongside printed texts informing the public that:

The state government ... is mounting the exhibition ‘A New Face for Oaxaca’ ... With these works, our city has acquired a modern and avant-guard image, which will generate greater recognition at national and international levels, thus permitting the development of our economy, society and culture.

APPO rejected these state representations of regional culture. The movement created a rupture within which the demand for political autonomy, which has a long history in the region, was imagined and enacted via new ways of engaging with cultural activities and practices. APPO asserted the right to self-represent and to give voice to diversity, outside state commercial interests:

[C]ultural spaces were geared towards those who fitted in with these [state] ... visions of culture. With APPO, what happened was these institutions ceased to function as a monopoly and new spaces were opened for many other ways [of conceiving of cultural activity] ... new artistic forms of expression coexisted with more traditional forms. For me, this is one of the richest things to have emerged; the dialogue between tradition and youthful

experimentation. Another important point is that these spaces are open to all types of publics, but also all types of participants. These public spaces were constructed by the very same people who use them; they became genuinely collective spaces. (APPO supporter, personal communication, 22 May 2009)

Conclusion

Culture is a key site in the political struggle to maintain or transform existing power relations. Struggles to assert its meaning in the interests of particular groups, to keep that meaning fixed, to contest it, to redefine it and to change it, are important channels of political expression; these processes simultaneously define and locate others (Jordan and Weedon, 1995: 543). In Oaxaca, cultural resources have consistently been mobilised by post-revolutionary governments to serve elite political and commercial agendas, and to define and locate *mexicanidad* in the interests of dominant groups. APPO disrupted these processes, reviving historical struggles for Indigenous rights, education and self-governance, but also generating new modes of cultural resistance and spaces within which self-determination and self-representation were imagined and enacted. APPO's use of media technologies, and its re-interpretation and recuperation of musical traditions via state festivals functioned to assert the value of cultural diversity, independently of government structures, as a collective sphere of autonomy, communality and self-determination.

Within two years of its emergence, APPO was fractured and weakened by internal disagreements and divisions and no longer existed as a recognisable movement (Campbell, 2008). Although as a social movement APPO failed to achieve its political objectives, its creative innovations around media and music have left an enduring legacy. Since 2006, the Popular Guelaguetza has been organised annually by the teachers' union, in declared opposition to neoliberal economic policies and in support of popular education and collective Indigenous rights. These struggles have long histories in Oaxaca. But in 2006, APPO's co-optation and re-signification of the performance, representation and consumption of musical traditions gave rise to new modes of imagining and demanding the rights to self-representation, self-interpretation and self-determination. In 2019, the fourteenth consecutive Popular Guelaguetza was celebrated. On its Webpage, the *Sección 22* teachers' union asserted that the Popular Guelaguetza of 2019 would '... show Oaxaca, Mexico and the world the wealth of traditions and customs of people who resist the destruction [caused by] neoliberal projects and rapacious economic policies ... OUR CULTURE IS NOT FOR SALE!'. Fourteen years after the APPO movement that gave rise to it, the Popular Guelaguetza continues to act as a space within which the teachers' union mobilises musical traditions to resist elite political interests and defend notions of autonomy and self-governance.

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