

# The local dimension of the cultural industry of music. An ‘anthroponomic’ perspective

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Jorge A. González\*

## Abstract

This paper is about the reconstruction of some of the production’s global processes in the cultural industry of music in its local dimensions, through a report of a family story of musicians and their band from a small village in Central-West Mexico. To understand the characteristics and properties of our goal, we use the *anthroponomic* perspective proposed by Bertaux as a conceptual alternative focusing the “other” *production*, that is not only confined to matters of economics, and it documents a different process, sometimes a complementary one, in which are produced *minds and bodies* that are apt for certain types of activity in a time and a given social space. As a result, we point out that, at the same time in which the macro social structures produced three generations of “apt” musicians, was being born and progressively growing stronger a complex cultural industry in Mexico that testified the relative fine tuning of a local and an industrial-cultural temporalities.

**Keywords:** Cultural Industry. Music. Culture. *Comala Band*.

## Introduction

This text is about the history of a family in a rural area of West Mexico that has three generations of musicians. Over the time, it shows how a family structure adapts and

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\* LabCOMplex, Cybercultura@ and Emergent Knowledge Communities, Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Humanities, UNAM. Mexico City. Email: [jorge@labcomplex.net](mailto:jorge@labcomplex.net)

organizes to *produce* musicians, in a place where there were only poor peasants living in socially adverse conditions. This case can be interpreted as a successful strategy of organization to prevent the de-energization which farmers and rural people have been subjected by the dominant economic structure in Mexico. The example can probably be extended to many other bands and musical groups that have emerged in the country since the 90s, curiously followed by the strengthening of the neoliberalism since the 80s in Latin America.

The story of a family of musicians allows us to reconstruct some of the global production process of music's cultural industry in their local dimensions. The biographical time of the social agents, interspersed with family time of growth cycles and stages of family and local production, is intertwining with the national and global time in the field of music production. These temporal and spatial scales combine themselves to explain the *anthropo-nomic* perspective by Daniel Bertaux (1977), about the way that society produces, distributes and consumes social energy in a human scale. This perspective allows us to understand, on the one hand, how family time in harmony with the local time is put into a double relationship with the material and mental historical time of the macro social structures in which the great cultural industry of record producers requires the formation of a critical mass of band's musicians perfectly adapted to a *taste* that is increasingly profitable for record companies.

On the other hand, this research depicts the struggles and efforts that these peasant families made to escape of the destiny that awaits for them in the *anthroponomic* distribution structure of Mexico in the mid-20th century and shows how a family network manages to "extract" of this destiny their younger son to turn him into a *musical director* of a musical collectiveness present in the local, regional and national music industry, local concerts and celebrations thanks to the phenomenon of migration to the United States, with dual national characteristics.

The aim of this research is to understand the peculiarities of Mexican society's formation process in the 20th century through

different strategies that a family's social network, which has had this job for at least three generations, become active to avoid being *de-energized* by outside forces derived from the organizational process of the world-system. Through the continuity and discontinuity of functions transmitted, inherited or acquired it is clear the dynamics of the *anthroponomic* production of one century of history in Mexico.

Using the technique of family stories, through insightful interviews, we built a genogram of affinity and blood relationships that makes the whole family network operating as domestic unit of production and consumption. Once this empirical information system is constructed as a genogram, many types of analysis are concluded in order to synthesize them into a family story, which follows the fortunes of the continuity or discontinuity of laboring strategies, in these cases, of the lower classes, to adapt creatively wasting as little energy as possible, to the macro structures of *anthroponomic* production and distribution in different scales. The *ethno-sociological analysis* makes it possible to convert an anecdotal story to a systemic one. Thus, in a narration with different voices, emerge different hypotheses that allow us to depict a scientific and comprehensive explanation of the "anecdotal dimensions" obtained from multiple interviews realized.

### **The origins: from extreme poverty to villager poverty**

Mr. Venustiano Beltran, "Tiano", is a sturdy and dark man born in 1934, with a friendly personality and an honest smile. I met him years ago when I came to live in Comala, a small farming village in West Central Mexico. The first time I saw him was at five in the morning, he was leading a band playing a trumpet, while at the same time fireworks whistled and exploded in the sky, out of tempo. Behind the musicians, several dozen women and children marched on all the village's rocky streets singing "Las mañanitas" and other praises to Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of the town. The band seemed a symbolic ram, fluid and multi sound that echoed in space and in time of silence in

this typical villager dawn: as a liquid that slowly fills up the channels, all Comala was waking up to the sound of music and others noises. It was dark, and from far away, the church bells rang as the sounds of that band – the drums, the tuba, the trumpets, the explosions, the songs, the musicians all in uniform (black trousers and white shirt) – when the smell of candles and flowers and the whole procession was slowly losing its intensity around the corner and heading to the main square.

So, Tiano was the contact to hire the – already famous –Band of Comala. For him, like many others musician in this region, music was in his blood. His father, a farmer born in 1898, loved music and also apparently the tuzca<sup>1</sup>, just as any Mariachi<sup>2</sup> of his time. Don Juan Beltran was not famous for playing the harp, violin or guitar, but he played at celebrations in some farms and villages in the area. It was he who taught his son Tiano to play the “*vihuela*” and passed on to him – unintentionally – the “virus” of music. His wife Irene had gave birth to six children and died when her last daughter was born. The baby, called Irma, died too, few months later.

The public health conditions in rural Mexico in 1940s were bad<sup>3</sup>. The death of the mother culminated in a household catastrophe, in 1941, when the family was dismantled in order to survive. Without basic support from their own *anthroponomic* production, the four young Beltran children started to leave, one by one, the little place where they were all born.

So Tiano, the oldest boy, just before turning eight went to live in the village of Comala, with his uncle Paul. As his father wished, he left the ranch forever and thanks to his uncle, learned two new skills: to cut hair and to make pants, but he never lost his love for music.

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<sup>1</sup> The tuzca (its name comes from the village of Tuxcacuexco) it is a type of high grade distilled drink produced from agave in the area of southern Jalisco and Colima.

<sup>2</sup> N.T.: Mariachi is a musical accompaniment recognized as a symbol of Mexico and played in the most important moments of life cycle.

<sup>3</sup> In 1930, child mortality rate in Colima was 174.5 per 1000 inhabitants (INEGI, Mexico Historical Statistics, 2009).

Fifty-six years later, when we started this study, the family of Tiano Beltran and Ines Fuentes, his wife, had two single daughters and two married sons, both homeowners. Those same boys, well groomed, just ironed uniforms – sometimes out of proportion – that marched to the band beat, hitting the drums, tense, totally focused on any signaling from their father during the religious parade, are now the legal owners of the *Comala Band*, where they play and manage it. Leonel and Carlos Beltran were the successors of the band after the retirement of his father, and recorded a professional cassette tape with funds financed by their own band, and they know they sold it very well in 1993, in Los Angeles, California. Two years later, in 1995, with their group they recorded a CD with MCM<sup>4</sup> record company and they began to alternate gigs with several important groups in Mexico.

While expecting the call from Monterrey to go and record their next album, and when they do not have contracts to play in local or regional clubs, Carlos (the band manager and drummer) drives a taxi in the city of Colima.

Leonel (the musical director), together with his wife, helps his mother with the food business that they have had for years, at home. Every day, since then, in the street where they live, appetizing smells arise together with musical notes and verses that are repeated again and again in practices that marked the routine of the *Comala Band*.

The case of this family that has produced three generations of musicians, in a region where these musical lineages are plenty, helps us to understand how in an increasingly consolidated and flourishing industry around the world<sup>5</sup>, generated in Mexico a intense movement of cultural revitalization.

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<sup>4</sup> MCM is the record company that came from *Discos Peerles*, the first record company in Mexico starting in 1933. In this company where recorded a lot of Mexican musicians that were distributed throughout Latin America since the 1930s. Later there will be other global settings.

<sup>5</sup> Of all the entertainment industries, the industrially produced music not only has its own global structures of legitimation and status bestowal since 1958 (Grammy's), but also a satellite channel (MTV: Music Television) and a growing presence in the global network information (WWW) via the Internet. For discussion of the presence of MTV in the 1990s see the text: FIRTH, S. *Music for Pleasure*. London: Polity press, pp. 205-225, 1988.

This *movement* involves the retrieval of places for dancing, a despicable national, regional and local Mexican music industry in Spanish (at least with visible signs identifying and relating with Mexico), a veritable flood of popular compositions, although they may seem variations on a same theme, sung with untrained, acute and nasal voices, imply also of an almost oncologic growth of groups and bands in the country.

Clearly, it should be included in the meaning of “national” every neighborhood, town and village populated mostly by Mexican and “Hispanics” in the United States of America, the so called “*other Mexico*”.

The phenomenon of bands and “group wave” is a movement that like many other vectors of the cultural industry, also comes from the north, but *speaks Spanish*. And it speaks and sings in Spanish as seen on national television, has its own magazines *Furia Musical* and in Monterrey city can be seen a cable channel that broadcasts 24 hours a day music and video clips from a lot of groups and bands that play this kind of music.

The “Hall of fame” of those famous for this activity have names like *Los Bukis*, *Bronco*, *Los Tigres del Norte*, *Los Temerarios*, *Selena y Los Dinos*, *Banda Machos*, *Banda El Recodo*, *Banda Cui-sillos*, *Gerardo Ortiz* and many others. Right after them, there are hundreds and hundreds of names of small groups that have formed and continue to form in all small corners and “*matrias*” – expression created by Luis González that means something like “motherland” – of this suffered but very musical Mexico

### Mexico in the 20th century: profiles of an ***anthroponomic*** revolution

Unlike the process that shaped the social, economic and cultural life of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, in this century, Mexico is experiencing a true revolution not so much in the production of material goods, but in the *production* of human beings.

Daniel Bertaux (1977), in a classic text, which has suffered what Oliver Sacks calls effect “scotoma”<sup>6</sup> produces a solid and

<sup>6</sup> An effect of invisibility within the competitive market of publications in the sociological field, see SILVERS (Ed.). *Hidden histories of science*. New York: New York Review, 1995.

original theoretical development about a very underdeveloped aspect and often poorly worked within the Social Sciences: *the social production of human energy*. According to Bertaux, as well as the economy designating the study of production, distribution and consumption of goods in a society, the term *anthroponomic* can be applied to understand the processes of “production, distribution and consumption” of all human energy. These processes can be seen as the underside of economic processes, but are not confined to them. Any activity, not just work, consume human energy. This human energy must continue to generate more human energy to guarantee the individuals’ life and with that, society’s life.

The *anthroponomic* production is material because it generates the *bodies* that are the widely diverse support of human energy, and is also *immaterial* because it generates *minds*, with specifications, capabilities and aptitudes equally diverse. Bertaux establishes a dynamic relationship between *anthroponomic* production and consumption that helps us better understand and interpret a series of events and configurations of practices that the “rigid thinking” has not been able to place in a right location, among them, the music.

*Making* music consumes human energy, but it produces capabilities, it produces *the musician*, it produces a rich set of relationships and at the same time it produces an internalized complex of social relations between of the social space and society in general. And in these cases, it helps with the direct income for the household.

With time and recognition, that Bourdieu calls *symbolic capital*, which Televisa has had for decades the monopoly of public mediated visibility in the entire field of cultural production (not to mention that it has also achieved in the field of politics<sup>7</sup>), making music goes from *music as expression to music as a commodity*

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<sup>7</sup> As was the case the effect of the media construction of the current president of Mexico in the 2012 elections, favored by the vast Mexican television penetration but had an opposite effect on the internet. See DÍAZ; MAGALONI; OLARTE; FRANCO. *La geografía electoral de 2012*. México: Center for US-Mexican Studies y Centro de Análisis de Políticas Públicas, 2012. Disponible en: <http://es.scribd.com/doc/110070353/Cf11d6-Mex-Eva-bro-geo-Ele2012>. For a pioneering case study #YO SOY 132 (#I AM 132), see: GALINDO; GONZÁLEZ-ACOSTA. *#YO SOY 132. La primera erupción visible*. México: Global Talen University, 2013

On the other hand, it highlights the work of women within the family structure, which has *produced and produce* children by investing a lot of time and dedicated attention that consumes a large amount of human energy of these women, who produce themselves simultaneously as “mothers” (grandmothers, daughters, sisters, maids, nannies, nurses, bridesmaids etc.). It is an *anthropo-nomic* production and consumption in constant evolution.

The process of *formation of structures* where they are placed put the social layers in certain positions of society, is what constitutes the true process of *anthroponomic distribution*. It means the distribution of human beings (bodies and minds) to different places in society.

In the case of the field, at least from the 1980s in Mexico, different mutations and public policy settings under pressure globally, discouraged the subsistence economy, which generated basic goods, in favor of commercial agriculture. Those who could not become agro-entrepreneurs (i.e. the majority) were sentenced to serve as laborers, to rent their land, or to migrate to other places where labor without higher qualifications was required. This is the case of the construction in large cities and the intense migration to the United States.

The construction of *families' case stories* focuses on the study of the formation of social structures of everyday life, within those that produce, distribute and consume the energies and the human beings. This perspective is being enriched in a productive dialogue with complex systems and is nourished by the comparison of multiple studies like this in different countries inspired by the works of Bertaux (1994; 1996).

Nowadays, the family structures operate as *micro systems* directed to the production of their own member's **human energy** and, over the generations transmit to the future, with different strategies, positive or negative relationship to resources (economic cultural, social, moral etc.) that enables them to be placed in an unequal structure of objective positions.

Thus, we can see how the “poor” families, their negative relationship with the structure of distribution of resources, full of disadvantages, generally is also transmitted from generation to generation, despite the amount of work to be reversed. It takes



more than a lot of effort to excel, i.e., not to *de-energize* too much and in time, to slip out of this destiny that marks society.

Mexico has experienced since the well known revolution of 1910-1921 another revolution on the *anthroponomic* processes. This “other” revolution (GONZÁLEZ, 1995a) can be made visible through the confrontation of the formation and development of *cultural equipment* in Mexico linked to the *stories of families’ cases*, which the structural representation of those families in time and social space and their differential relation to the equipment and specialized fields can be constructed in parts. We can then read all the major social processes within the universe of relations, strategies and temporalities that trims down the trajectory of the parental networks that make a family.

To document this idea, since 1993 we have started a national research project to generate descriptive and exploratory information of some of the cultural change processes in this century in Mexico (GONZÁLEZ, 1994).

This involved the organization and implementation of a network of emerging research communities (GONZÁLEZ, 1997) throughout the country to work in the construction of a *cultural mapping* for the development of eight different types of cultural fields, and the system of institutions specialized – in any degree – in the *anthroponomic* production (religion, education, health, art, publishing, food, entertainment and distribution) in four eras of Mexico’s history: the pre-revolution (1900-1910), the post revolution (1930-1940), modernization (1950-1960) and the beginning of the crisis (1970-1980) (GONZÁLEZ, 1995b).

Similarly, we worked with ten cases of *family stories* (and within each one *three life stories*) in which we understood as three generations of relatives, of whom we found out about their occupational, spatial, marital, religious and educational paths throughout their life. Finally, we conducted a comprehensive national survey in 34 cities with over 100.000 inhabitants to study quantitatively the practical differences and habits that Mexican society relates to this set of institutions specialized in the *anthroponomic production* (GONZÁLEZ, 1996)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Although we were working with Daniel Bertaux, it wasn’t just until the end of the fieldwork in 1995 that we began to know the *anthroponomic* perspective that greatly helps to make sense of the massive information that this study has generated.

As a sequel to this first major study, we located this study to a family of musicians to learn from a villager perspective, the global processes of production of music's cultural industry.

### Between biographical and historical time

With this background, a quick *anthroponomic* look at our object, we are led to establish different levels of processes that require different informative configuration about the situation of social time and space.

In this case, it is important in this approach the relationship amongst *individual time* (Juan, Tiano, Inés, Carlos, Leonel), family time (cycles of family growth and production stages, and growth trajectories of children), *local time* (rural Comala to developing Comala), *national time* (stages management and field consolidation of entertainment and music in Mexico) and *world time* (formation of international structures of production, distribution and legitimation of music and musicians). We are definitely tied up at the intersection amongst different “wavelengths” of social change in Mexico in the century, some in the wide range as the creation of the broadcasting infrastructure and gramophonic production and from there to television, as well as other infinitesimal variations, the villager scale where “common” children for rural production or trade became *musician children*.

### The professional musician's path: from playing *the vihuela*<sup>9</sup> and the trumpet to the equalization of the 'master'

The family transforms into a musical organization and in this way stamps their way into the “world” of music. Tiano gets married and starts his own band when he is 12 years old, playing in the *Comala Band*, which along with other people and friends was formed, in 1953, under the tutelage of Mr. Espiridión Nolasco.

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<sup>9</sup> The *vihuela* is a type of guitar that was used by the *Mariachis* of the early twentieth century along with violin and harp. The sound of the trumpets was subsequently added. See J. JÁUREGUI. *El Mariachi. Símbolo de identidad nacional*. México: Banpaís-INAH, 1990.

From then on, music will be a fundamental part of the economical strategy in this household. Once created a small but important *specific capital* (social relationships, musical knowledge and musical instruments), it is possible to transmit something.

### The transmission of the job

The two sons of this family – as we saw – were “incorporated” at different times to the band and with Tiano, a musician with a very rudimentary knowledge of music theory, and his wife Inés, who is duly responsible for raising their children, “produce” two musicians on the next generation (BERTAUX, 1993).

At the time of the first band, the musical deficiencies of Tiano prevented him to be his own musical director, but his personality and organizational skills would immediately make him the *manager* of the group. Carlos, his oldest son, was *forced into* his musical career:

My dad locked me in a room to practice with the snare drum<sup>10</sup> and if he didn't hear me play he would get angry at me, hit me and force me to learn the rhythm of cumbia's<sup>11</sup> “Mar y Sol”. I was very young and I wanted to go out and play with friends, but my dad saw that the man who played the *tarola* in the band was an alcoholic and was often absent, so in a little time and with a little luck, I would have a place in the band. But I had to forcibly learn the rhythms (Carlos, 32, a taxi driver, musician and manager of *Comala Band*).

Carlos gradually acquired the management role of the father (since he was 12 years old, he was responsible for carrying the agenda of commitments and helped his father to write contracts).

So, Tiano passed on his job (and passion) entirely to Carlos, his oldest son, while *investing in the future* of Leonel, his youngest son, who given his own story and social conditions could never be a true *musical director*.

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<sup>10</sup> N.T.: A kind of musical instrument.

<sup>11</sup> N.T.: The Mexican cumbia is a musical genre originated in Colombia, adapted and merged with other rhythms of Mexican folklore, among them, el huapango.

Carlos and Leonel are taken in 1984, by their father, to participate in the formation of the Children's *Comala Band*, directed by the conductor Maestro González Ortega, director at the time of the Colima Band<sup>12</sup>.

Of the two sons, Leonel is who the family encourages and stimulates to study music more formally, with all the discipline and skills that will make him, who brings the first rupture and division in 1990, become the musical director when he is 18 years old<sup>13</sup>. Today the artistic name of the *Comala Band* is registered under his name and Carlos (representing his father) is the owner of the band<sup>14</sup>.

The attempts to incorporate the youngest daughter to the band were not successful. This daughter was named after Saint Cecilia because she was born on November 22nd, Saint Cecilia's day, the patron saint of musicians.

Meanwhile, although Tiano is dedicated to establish and strengthen the production of their children's musical skills, the mother, Inés, gives her blood, sweat and tears in "producing" (nourish, heal, cleanse, beautify, maintain etc. ) the *body and mind* of their children. Throughout the whole life of the family, Inés has cooked in the house and also in the evening, sold food *out*. This lifestyle is overwhelming.

Inés keeps all the family memories and her house is the center of the lives of the three homes and remains, as it has for decades, the music center where musicians from different bands of the Beltrán have practiced and still practice.

Both sons had their own families (in these cases means the addition to the family network of two new "daughters" (daughters in law), plus future grandchildren).

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<sup>12</sup> Several of the best musicians in the first *Comala Band* played at the *Banda del Estado*, which Tiano was never part of it because of his very rudimentary knowledge of music theory.

<sup>13</sup> However, the family support favoring Leonel musical studies at the University of Colima, was constrained to continue (he did want to be a professional musician) his studies at the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City.

<sup>14</sup> Tiano still owns the bus, instruments and sound equipment and together form a partnership not formalized but with family ties.

With these unions, a complex household with three homes, the energy drained from the mother is globally recovered.

The music, however, did not make enough and so it was never the only source of work and resources. In this family, on the paternal side, while the children did not work, Tiano was the tailor and the hairdresser of the neighborhood. On the maternal side, it has always been linked to the selling of prepared meals, first with the small restaurant business organized and served by Inés (with Tiano as an assistant when he was not travelling) and then with a *Taco stall* that they have in their house. Now, Inés still cooks, Tiano continues helping her by buying ingredients, the other women help her selling food at night.

Leonel and his wife also tried to open a *Taco stall* in their own house, after helping his mother in her business. But one thing is to see, another is to do – the attempt failed - perhaps because they did not inherit the customers that Inés and Tiano acquired for many years. Now, Leonel and his wife joined forces at the *Taco stall* of his parents.

Carlos also became the official driver of the band; he worked as a taxi driver in the morning or when there was no work in the band. For both sons, the priority is always the music. Just as his father did, they have a riskier mobility that is guaranteed by the permanent presence and stability of the women in the house<sup>15</sup>.

### The transformations of the band

We have another set of clues and findings that shapes up the organization of the band. Apparently the same internal structure and their outlined conditions (GONZÁLEZ, 1989) make the bands in this region of the music field, very unstable organizations with an important mobility flow of the musicians between groups and diverse genres.

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<sup>15</sup> Carlos Beltran died in March 2013 in an accident while on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Talpa. Cfr. <http://www.diariodecolima.com/2013/03/11/muere-en-tragico-accidente-integrante-de-banda-comala/>.

The process of continuous composition and decomposition of the bands come from children's bands that from long ago continued to practice and operate like a hotbed of musicians willing to play and learn in older, larger and more ambitious organizations.

The history of the band shows at least three types of “function” which this group has gone through.

a) First, we have the **Ritual Band**. Managed and maintained by the Church or by municipal power, which operates as an important semiotic device of ceremony<sup>16</sup>. This quality linked to a strongly institutionalized external demand, makes the repertoire and instruments of the *Band of Comala* to be locked inside a ritualized sphere that “crystallized”, so to speak, the interpretations, songs, techniques and productions of the same musicians.

Figure 1: Members of Band of Comala (Circa 1975)



Source: Personal Archive of Beltrán-Fuentes family

Over time, this process of ritual fixation became an “insulation” to the public taste, that received through many channels other types of music, changed their taste and demanded more songs to feel and express themselves dancing. Not only to “celebrate”. The Band starts – by a public demand – to work on another frequency. Without letting go of its highlighted role and

<sup>16</sup> According to Cirese (1977), a process of *ceremonialización* transforms facts in signs.

symbolic stamp in the religious or civic celebrations, it begins to share another function (“secular”, we might say) detached from the fixed ritual meaning: From an ornamental band to a band that has a dialogical interaction with “its” public, in situations of actual fun, not paying attention to the first ceremonial sign

b) *The Ludic Band* – For this reason, the band draws an updating strategy and restructuring that culminates in the trip of Tiano in 1970 to Los Angeles, California, to buy, using funds from the town, the bank and their own musicians, other instruments (especially tuba, clarinets, snare drums, trumpets) so that the band, while continuing to fulfill the traditional tasks (that is, to remain “the” *Comala Band*), may open an important space in the region as a group to “produce” attractive dances and parties. With the restructuring happening, the copycat band of the famous *Sinaloense del Recodo Band*, of Mr. Cruz Lizarraga, for the first time, can “exploit” for profit, their gigs. This forced them to completely restructure their repertoire and costumes.

Figure 2: Two times of the *Comala Band*



Source: Personal Archive of Beltrán-Fuentes family

Thus, they had to recruit new band members, buy more instruments, the uniform became more professional and their repertoire - besides the usual, known for being played in religious or civic functions – starts to play what is in music’s national market. When the first band broke up, at the same time that Tiano invested in vinyl records and cassette tapes to listen to and copy (within the limits of the imitable and of their own musical knowledge)

groups and songs that played on radio which music went beyond the melodic limits and processions of tones, national holidays and bullfights. The “new” band consists of young musicians who are honored to belong to the *Comala Band*, for then, from party to party, stamp their name in the region.

c) **The techno Comala Band** – As a result of the process initiated some time ago and after the definite breaking up of the founding members of the first *Band of Comala*, two organizations are created: “The Original Band” of Comala (with its former musical director) and The *Comala Band* (with Tiano and his children). The success of the Tiano’s strategy was absolute – with the breakup of the old *Comala Band*, only Tiano’s band was able to “sound” good and complete. For this reason (and because Tiano had the management rights) the *Comala Band* was able to meet the commitments they had immediately after the break up. The other band (“The Original”) only after some time was able to take off. With this new band, Leonel (with a vision and fully prepared for battle) is ready to conduct the record of their first demo tape funded by the same band. But on the release of this first product that sold out immediately, some internal fighting breaks up the band again and because of that a new band is created, now fully involved in the boom of the bands and their music nationwide. The *Comala Band* focuses its new restructuring exclusively for the music market. They will not play in religious “events” anymore nor will they serve as a symbolic device adjacent to the town’s rituals. Now, they will focus their efforts in being the exclusive *centre of attention* in all the parties, balls, concerts and presentations. Because they became a “Techno-Band”, the tuba is replaced by a bass guitar, and the clarinets and snare drums by keyboards, electric guitar and drums. Goodbye to the traditional band uniform. Not only they were a new *techno-band* but they should look like one, too. So, in 1993, 40 years after of the creation of the *Comala Band*, is born the *Tecno-Banda Comala®* which – not to Tiano’s liking – replaces the tuba with the bass guitar, mixing table and singers. The repertoire, instruments, equipment and performance radically change and is brought into line with the industrial phenomenon of “*group wave*”. A strictly market oriented organization requires not only new elements, songs and instruments. It needs to adjust its cultural capital and its specific knowledge to



be “distinguishable” in that universe and also requires a new specific capital of mobilizing social relations, clearly scarce and out of reach from most of the town’s bands and musicians. Coincidentally, after a successful concert at a party in Comala, the band “meets” a person, a composer who has external “contacts” within some record companies. Overnight he becomes their agent and, through him and his relations, manages to record their first “master”. But this relationship would also promote a journey of surprises, disappointments, deception, fraud and abuse of trust over them.

The great *Tecno-Banda Comala* also had to pay its “admission” to the market of professional musicians. This is how the band recorded their first CD after a complex initiation process, which makes them lose money, friends and a lot of time, but earns them a contract with MCM, the company of the most famous bands in Mexico and the United States. The proximity to the “gravitational” field of cultural music industry operates a significant mutation in the function of the ludic band to modulate it into a process of relative specialization and diversification. It is born the **business-band**<sup>17</sup>. Later, in 1999, the band returns to the musical concept of *Sinaloense* band and begins its fight for position in the world of the country’s bands. And within that path, it calls itself *La banda más banda*. (Literal translation “The band more band”)

Figure 3: New image and composition of the Comala Band (circa 1993).



Source: Personal Archive of Beltrán-Fuentes family

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.bodaclick.com.mx/bodas-mx/musica-para-bodas/banda-comala.html> and <http://www.comalaweb.net/index.php/folklore/musica-tradicional/132-banda-comala-inicios.html>

Nowadays, the band returned to their brass instruments, appearing regularly either in many squares around the country or in many cities in the United States and have recorded 13 albums<sup>18</sup>.

### Tensions and dissonances

Throughout all these transformations they appear as a constant structural instability of groups. Its founder says: “When the band sounds better, it always falls apart by internal fights”<sup>19</sup>.

What are the reasons for this pessimistic wisdom? What are the factors involved in the organic discontinuity of the bands?

Possibly, the type of organization and the type of skills required to play the repertoire of the bands, bring particular benefit for them to be their own representatives, or at least that is usually the perception of others. And as we know, the definition that people have of their own reality – however mythical or unfounded – are always *real* in their consequences.

Our band has undergone several internal crises of which the resolution has usually always led to the disintegration of the previous band, the formation of competing groups and the initiation of new members, younger and younger to “complete” the necessary instruments.

In Comala, we find entire musical genealogies of at least three generations. As it is a small village, everyone knows each other and at some point had a fight. Jealousy, competition, insults, quarrels and common lawsuits accompany these processes in the bands.

Anyway, when we look at the musical activity in Comala, doesn't only look like a distraction, but represents and has represented a major activity of an extra income in a continuum of family strategies.

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<sup>18</sup> In 2003 the *Banda más Banda* mounts on the success of the TV show *Big Brother VIP* and makes a ballad tribute to the winner of that edition, Omar Chaparro at the same time manages a popular cover of the rock group Molotov, Frijolero showing an attitude of ethnic identity of Mexican migrants to the United States. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvLKFEMzk-w>

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Tiano Beltrán, founder of the band.

In the village there are many *Mariachis*, trumpet players, singers, Norteño Bands, (counter bass, accordion and guitar), groups technologically equipped and several bands that share the demand for *local music and entertainment, music and devotion* and they are actively trying to have their piece of the promised paradise of *music and promotion*.

Dreams of fame, magazines, tours, interviews, presentations, concerts and the ostentatious profit of the big figureheads, are always behind the activities of our village musicians.

But what are the limits of this sort of “industrial reengineering” of the bands?

Certainly, as we have seen, some of those limits are linked to the *specific cultural capital* of the musicians, that is, their skills, their sound quality, their performing abilities; but others are more linked with other determinations that far from being purely technical, are social, especially the access to the relationship networks that “orbit” closer to the core of music industry’s production, radio and operate as *gatekeepers*, true valves of restricted access to scale positions into the social space of bands.

Other limits are in the *hexis* (all techniques of staging and social uses of the body) of the musicians, that result in a natural expression in front of the cameras and it is converted into the art of being admired by the “fans”.

It does not matter how they sing, play or dance, but *how they look*, how they are portrayed in front of the cameras, how they are screened – to “feel” them – Thousands of eyes and feelings conditioned by a market that always look at and recognizes them. Thus, in this stage the quality of their “looks”, the complexity of the lights and amplifiers, the mixing tables, etc, are decisive.

Its unequal distribution and access give us an overview of the exclusion of thousands of musical groups which will never reach the success they long for, before having an internal argument, split and continue. What are the constant exercising conditions of this musical parthenogenesis?

The field of music’s cultural industry, to be able to create “stars” needs a huge and dispersed “critical mass” of composers,

musicians and groups as they prepare to acquire a more professional and competitive level of performance, generates a plethora of compositions and staging that once within the logic of the market, forces them to seek for a type of standardized “originality”.

Not too fancy, not too villager in order to adjust them to the demand.

Because of the uneven distribution of talents and basic elements (repertoire, scores, wardrobe, choreography, contacts, *hexis*, etc.) very few will manage the quantum leap from villager level to the industrial platform.

The great majority will get stuck in the small local circuit and in the arguments and quarrels of local gossiping. This process certainly requires the mutation of the anthroponomic production conditions. Other “bodies” and other “minds” are required.

This step involves a change from handcraft production to a proper industrial production, from musical expression to music as a commodity. Between both, there are an almost infinite gradient of variants and continuous adjustments between technology and knowledge, between the staging of the body and its modulations and between the social capital that each musician and group has and keeps acquiring to be able to play in the dynamics of the field of cultural production.

For this reason, unceasing promotional staging carried out by the editing organizations (television, radio and magazines) (GONZÁLEZ, 1994) is considered the balance point, and the styles of composition (lyrics, rhythms, arrangements, melodic embellishments) of the “famous” since this villager dimension was created, focus their “creation” in an impersonation of a dominant boss, mixed with touches of localism (shouts like: “Don’t give up, Comala!”).

The same thing happens with the body. Musicians must transform their hairstyle, their clothes and movements, to “look” good. This is facilitated by a good colorful lighting team, which in the consecrated big groups is inevitable and represents a significant financial investment. Similarly this mutation of *anthroponomic* conditions, calls for a more business like mentality, more open,

secular and oriented not to survive but to build up good elements.

In economic terms, it is equivalent to passing from the logic of value of use (*M-C-M*) to the logic of exchange value (*D-M-D'*) (FOSSAERT, 1978).

Public and musicians appear as perfectly “synchronized” in the sense of what is worth or not. In the signs that tell you that you are in front of an idol or in front of an average joe who sings as he wishes. Multiple semiotic and social devices are responsible for marking and highlighting differences. In Mexico today there are over 1500 such bands with an average of 47 groups per state<sup>20</sup>.

What are the channels of public learning regarding such codes? How are the differences and distances that define the structure of social space constructed?

On the one hand, we have two main areas: a production circuit extended and regulated by a music market, and on the other hand, a set of social, always historical and structural conditions, the interweaving of that industry with those stories and structures that shape up the village everyday.

Figure 4: The Banda más Banda in 2011 and in 2013 without Carlos Beltran.



Source: <http://empresasnc.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/gerardo-ortiz-banda-comala-el-colmillo-jueves-7-de-abril/>

<sup>20</sup> See <http://contrataciondegrupos.blogspot.mx>

## Conclusion

We have seen how the emergence of a band from a small village in west Mexico occurs between the movement and crossing of two vectors. On the one hand, that comes from the everyday life and time of the village's people, and on the other that comes "from above" the specific constructions of the temporalities and spaces of the huge cultural industry of music.

From the family point of view, a specific strategy was organized with particular *anthroponomic* costs and investments, in order to produce *musicians* to conduct and control a band. Once the 'bodies' and 'minds' of these two young men were taken from their normal circuit of peasants production (and their father had been "taken out" for fatal and fortuitous circumstances) and small businessmen, they started to transform (and for that reason they had to break and divide the band several times) the "raw material" in order to be detectable and perceptible within the structure of the field of music production. Nowadays, *Comala Band* has recorded over ten albums and their contracts flow throughout the year at numerous festivals, celebrations and concerts in Mexico and the United States, where the Mexican and Colima population are a loyal public.

Another logic and *anthroponomic* form of production of bodies and minds, this time *industrial*, entered the game. The story does not end here<sup>21</sup>.

The *Comala Band* (its name was changed from a descriptive and strongly regionalized function to a symbolic function, for commercial purposes) is still in the game of changes and adjustments that the field requires. But that is a topic for another text.

I would be glad here if I have pointed a fruitful *anthroponomic* perspective to account for the ways in which society produces, distributes and consumes human energy, and how in this role, the family time in tune with the village's time, is placed in a dual *material and mental* relationship with the historical time of the

<sup>21</sup> Carlos Beltrán, who always played percussion, died in a car accident in March 2013. The *Comala Band* continues touring the state of Colima, the country and the United States. See: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_i9f9-SMR4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_i9f9-SMR4)

macro social structures that produced in three generations “apt” musicians, was born and progressively grew stronger a complex cultural industry that testifies the relative fine tuning of a village time and the other industrial – cultural temporalities.

At the intersection of this two *rhythms*, were produced changes that altered and guided the lives and trajectories of this family over nearly a century. The likely future of this band, this family, this town and the music industry is still being written.

In the intersection of both were produced changes that altered and oriented the life and trajectory of this family throughout almost a century. The probable future of this band, this family, this people and this music industry is still being written.

In this paper we have tried to explain a set of questions that guide our research in order to prepare the ground for the unfolding of the methodological strategy that we are building to stalk satisfactorily the phenomenon of a complex, multiple and uneven encounter between two vectors: the market logic of a cultural industry, which survival resides in being able to please a growing number of “customers”, and on the other hand, a range of different needs ranging from complementing the subsistence as a survival strategy, to the ludic expression of a population that despite recurring crises, refuses to stop singing and dancing, at least to make life less of a burden and sometimes even more enjoyable<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> It is constant the inclusion of double meaning spice lyrics within the repertoire of these groups and bands. Sometimes the contents are decidedly challenging of situations of injustice and others, mixing class claim with sexist themes. To give an example: “When you see that a doctor or an engineer become “wet backs” because they want to progress, or that a “cacique” sell his land and cattle to cross the River Bravo, that you’ll never see” (“El otro México”, *Tigres del Norte*). “I can *acomodate* it for you, young lady, open the door that I will put it *inside*”. (“El acomodador”, *Banda Comala*).

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**Jorge A. González**

Professor and Senior Researcher of LabCOMplex – Complex Communication R+D Laboratory, at Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades (CEIICH), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. He is author of the books: *Sociología de las culturas subalternas*; *Mas(+) cultura(s)*. *Ensayos sobre realidades plurales*; *Entre cultura(s) y cibercultur@(s)*. *Incursões e outras rotas não lineares* etc. He founded and coordinated Área Comunicación, Hegemonía y Culturas Subalternas en la UAMXochimilco (1980-1984) and Programa Cultura-CUIS at Universidad de Colima (1985-2000). Tinker Professor (University of Texas-Austin, 2002). Visiting professor since 1984 at universities in several countries.

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