

## Book Review

### **Pachangas. Borderlands Music, US Politics, and Transnational Marketing**

Margaret E. Dorsey

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Margaret E. Dorsey focuses on the ways in which marketing and political strategy intersect traditional Mexicano and working class values as represented in the tradition of lower Rio Grande Valley pachangas. A pachanga is literally a party, a celebration that includes music, dance, food, and favours social interaction among friends and relatives. Dorsey takes these events as points of departure in order to show how local traditions are articulated and resignified by national and transnational interests, both political and commercial, under globalization.

Dorsey's goal is to show the contemporary use of pachangas by political agents and transnational corporations. First, she traces the history of pachanga, relating it to the development of corridos as spaces for political struggle and social commentary by Mexican and Mexican-Americans in Southern Texas and Northern Mexico. After establishing this historical background, the author analyzes and compares four specific pachangas and the articulation of these events and other local traditions by four (both local and national) political campaigns. Although some of these pachangas are plain commercial events, most of them show that the boundary between commercial and political marketing is blurry at best when dealing with everyday power and class struggles.

In the first case study, Dorsey analyzes a pachanga sponsored by Univision and Budweiser for a family in South Texas. She shows that, although issues of local and national identification are emphasized and reproduced in the marketing strategies followed by these corporations to introduce themselves into the community, the event also challenges local gender conventions and traditions. The second case discusses a fund raising event for Hispanic education hosted by LaMantia Budweiser in McAllen, Texas. Here, the author emphasizes the corporate power's ability to transform a working-class tradition into a marker of identification for the local upper class. In chapter 4, Dorsey compares the success and failure of two political campaigns in Hidalgo County. Her analysis takes as point of departure two corridos that came to identify the campaigns, proposing that the music's ability or inefficiency to articulate the community's imaginaries of authenticity and migrant roots affected the campaigns' momentum.

The fifth chapter compares two political pachangas (for a local and a national campaign, respectively) that, by failing to engage local traditions and lifestyles, were unsuccessful in producing new voters in the Rio Grande Valley. Here, Dorsey is interested in two things: first, in the ability of a media strategy to turn a disastrous event into a success through national media representation; and second, in the failure of what she calls a "transnational marketing strategy" to articulate a local audience. The last two pachangas analyzed by Dorsey involve the complex relationship between private



entrepreneurship and public political campaigning, and focus on the ways in which Tejano music's power to invoke traditional pachanga imagery (male bonding, working class, etc.) is used by corporations to develop a sense of identification with local costumers.

Dorsey's project is based on fieldwork conducted in the lower Rio Grande Valley, where she attended over 100 pachangas in a period of six months. Her semiotic analysis sheds light on important issues of ethnicity, class, and gender that inform identity construction, the politics of consumption, and the consumption of politics among Mexican-Americans in South Texas. The author's methodology leads her to important conclusions that challenge the most optimistic discourses about the benefits of globalization and transnationalism at the US–Mexico border. Furthermore, Dorsey asserts that the use of traditional cultural manifestations such as pachangas by corporate power does little to empower members of the Mexican-American community, but is rather an example of capitalist strategies devouring local manifestations for the corporations' own benefits.

Central to Dorsey's discussion are Tejano music and the idea of transnational marketing. Although her argument is well researched and documented, and her illuminating analyses are persuasively presented, some of the text's problems are apparent precisely when one confronts the author's rather vague and loose understanding of transnationalism and the Tejano music experience. Throughout the book, Dorsey emphasizes the transnational character of the marketing strategies that inform the pachangas she attended. However, the analyses of the Univision-Budweiser pachanga, the Ace Hardware pachanga, and the unsuccessful

pachanga for Aliseda's campaign fail to be explained as true transnational experiences since they are rather local or at best global experiences. None of the author's analyses show the type of mutual influence that characterizes a transnational experience since they do not show how transnational marketing affects the "other side of the border" or the strategies of corporations beyond a national level. Even in the case of Aliseda's pachanga, organized by a team of marketers from Reynosa, Mexico, the aspect of transnationality seems reduced to an incident of failed international marketing (as the pachanga organizers seem to have not taken into consideration the American voters to which the pachanga should have been aimed at, attracting a largely international crowd to the event). It would have served Dorsey's argument better to focus on the mutually influencing relationship between pachangas in the Rio Grande Valley and their Mexican counterpart in Reynosa or Matamoros. How are Mexican border political rallies related to the Mexican-American political pachanga? How did these types of events develop historically? How did they inform each other as true transnational experiences? Are there any similarities in how Mexican and Mexican-American voters develop border identities? How would these transnational practices of identification inform marketing strategies and campaigns on both sides of the border? Although the author answers some of these questions tangentially (e.g., when discussing a TV show that brings together Mexican and Mexican-American musicians), her argument would have been strengthened if she had directly addressed them. Similarly, the nuances of her argument would have been clearer had she avoided using the term Tejano music in an overly general fashion.

For instance, we never find out what type of instrumentation was used in the campaign corridos, how musically conventional they were, or whether they were in Tejano or Norteño style. Did these corridos feature any influences of cumbia rhythms or the gruper sound that has filtered into the Tejano and Norteña tradition in the last decades? By tackling these questions, the author could have given her readers a better idea of how stylistic differences work as markers of national, ethnic, class, and even gender identification among border citizens. Furthermore, acknowledging these differences would have given an extra dimension

to her discussion of identification and transnational experience in the borderlands.

Regardless of these shortcomings, the interdisciplinary character of Dorsey's task, the originality of her research project, and the currency of the topic at stake make her work worth reading. The book is a must for scholars interested in issues of transnationalism, expressive culture, and identity formation, as they are intersected by capitalist marketing strategies.

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