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Grassland Geopoetics: Son Jarocho and the Black Sense of Place of Plantations and Pastures

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Abstract: This essay considers how the grasslands of the Mexican region of El Sotavento entangle with the history of racial capitalism and with traditional Sotaventine music. Throughout this text, I argue that *son Jarocho* music and its poetics counterpoint racist colonial discourses making space for ways of being beyond racial capitalism. I review the history of Sotaventine grasslands, counterpointing their historical becomings with ethnographic materials and current poetic expressions. I especially focus on two sones: *La Caña*, written in the 1990s by Patricio Hidalgo Belli regarding sugarcane, and the 18th century *Toro Zacamandú* that speaks of cowboying. Using scholarly writings on the plantation and plantation histories from McKittrick and Glissant, King's work on fungibility, scholarship on Maroon landscapes and marronage, and an array of writers who explore poetics and geopoetics, we shall see how racial capitalism and the historical becomings of plantations and pastures are reflected and overturned in Sotaventine sounds.

Resumen: Este ensayo considera la relación entre los pastizales y plantaciones cañeras de El Sotavento mexicano, la historia de capitalismo racial en la región y la música tradicional sotaventina. En este texto planteo que el son y la poética jarocha hacen contrapunto a los discursos racistas coloniales, abriendo espacios para otras formas de ser más allá del capitalismo racial. Esta es una revisión de los pastizales sotaventinos que contrapuntea su devenir histórico con materiales etnográficos y expresiones poéticas contemporáneas. Me enfoco específicamente en los sones de *La Caña*, escrito en los 1990s por Patricio Hidalgo Belli, que versa sobre el paisaje cañero sotaventino, y *El Toro Zacamandú*, presente en la región desde el siglo XVIII y que trata de la vaquería jarocha. A través de las teorías de la plantación e historias plantacionistas de McKittrick y Glissant, el trabajo de King sobre fungibilidad, estudios sobre paisajes cimarrones y cimarronaje, y cuestiones de poética y geopoética, veremos cómo el capitalismo racial y el devenir histórico de pastizales y plantaciones es reflejado y retado por los sones de Sotavento.

Keywords: racial capitalism, music geographies, cultural ecology, Sotavento, fungibility, Maroon landscapes
Palabras clave: capitalismo racial, geografías de la música, ecología cultural, Sotavento, fungibilidad, paisajes cimarrones

...place re-creates its own Plantation, and from it this voiceless voice cries out.
É. Glissant (2010:209)

...ese canto agrícola del son jarocho
...donde la gente se comunica a gritos, donde la gente se grita,

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…cuando van a cantar ya tienen la voz colocada.
G. Gutiérrez Silva

Introduction

I studied primary school, and the graduation that every campesino has is this:
After primary school you go to the field.
So I went with my brother, the eldest.
I went to cut cane.[1]

Claudio Vega, a musician from the state of Veracruz, starts the story of his musical career in this way. His cane-cutting days were brief, as his brother kicked him out of the field after a near-accident that triggered a series of events that led him to become a traditional musician of renown. Claudio speaks of this in 2018 in a roundtable discussion at the yearly seminar that takes place at the Luna Negra Ranch on Tacamichapan Island. Contrary to what its name might suggest, the Luna Negra Ranch is more an ecological restoration project than a ranch; a patch of forest in a landscape dominated by pastures. Here, enthusiasts and amateurs gather in a yearly seminar/encampment where local musicians teach *son Jarocho*,[2] that is, the traditional music of the region of El Sotavento in southeast Mexico.

The sun is setting. Maybe it's set already. Tents are scattered across the designated camping area, pitched under the canopies of tall young trees. Claudio sits beside his tent, playing his guitar alongside Carlos López, assistant professor in ecological economics at El Colegio de México (hear Track 1).[3] Friends, family, and nosy onlookers surround them—I'm among the latter, with my recorder in hand. "I'm just giving some loving to my guitar", says Claudio; "she's always sweet to me, I'm just being reciprocal". Claudio slides a bull's horn plectrum across the four strings of his small cedar chordophone. He starts playing *El Toro Zacamandú*. Carlos joins in. Bulls' horns attack nylon strings—they would have been cattle gut strings back in the day. Nobody sings but the sounds speak of cattle; after all, they're playing the Zacamandú Bull. Listeners cheer them on by shouting *¡TORO!*; a call that praises the bull or warns of its presence.

While this field recording shows only the sound of Sotaventine guitars, there are numerous instruments used in son Jarocho: from eight-stringed jaranas, to equine jawbones, to wooden platforms played by dancing upon them with wooden-soled shoes. Usually, these instruments come together in fandangos—musicians' gatherings that revolve around *son* and dance. This field recording and Claudio's story are not only a reference point for Sotaventine music or its organology; they also already speak of the two grasslands of the region that I consider throughout this text. In this paper I will explore how son Jarocho relates to Sotaventine cane plantations and cattle pastures, two landscapes that are the result of a long historical process in which the Black inhabitants of the region played an important part (García de León 2014).

To the Leeward

El Sotavento ("The Leeward" in English) stretches to the south of the port of Veracruz through the coastal plains of the Gulf of Mexico across the basins of the Papaloapan and Coatzacoalcos rivers; its name comes from its position in relation to the dominant winds and the port—it is to the leeward of Veracruz (Domínguez Pérez 2015; Thiébaut 2013; Velasco Toro 2004; see Figure 1). The port of Veracruz was important since it was the only transatlantic port of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Chaunu 1960; García de León 2002, 2014); thus, Sotavento was shaped by centuries of encounters between Indigenous communities, Spanish colonisers, and Black peoples in the hinterland of the port. Like the region and the port, son Jarocho emerged from this colonial history and the relations that developed through it (García de León 2009).

Besides the port, Sotaventine grasslands are perhaps the most relevant spaces when considering the Black geographies of Sotavento. In this paper I survey these landscapes by drawing upon ethnographic research undertaken in the region, and on historical accounts of son Jarocho and Leeward grasslands. In this way, the Black histories and geographies of these landscapes and their music become apparent. I approach the sugarcane plantation and the cattle pasture through two sones whose subject matter matches these grassy landscapes: the recently created *La Caña* and the historic *Zacamandú*, which we heard earlier. We shall see

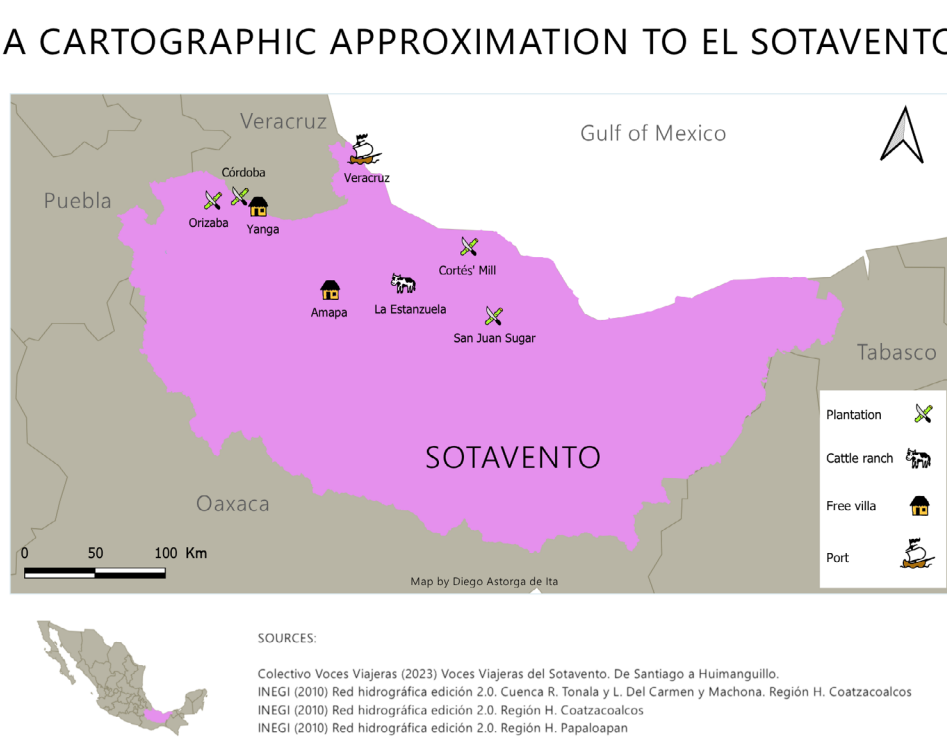

Figure 1: This map brings together hydric-historic and cultural definitions of the region of Sotavento; since the region has no clearly defined borders, this is an approximation.

how Sotaventine grasslands emerged; how they entangle with resistance, oppression, and Spanish colonialism; how they are and have been an integral part of racial capitalism and Leeward economics; and how they influenced the conformation of the region and everyday life in it.

I focus on Sotavento's music not just because of the presence of grasslands in its lyrical poetics, but because in music alternative histories and geographies are kept and performed. Music—particularly traditional music—counterpoints hegemonic discourses, especially when considering spaces with complex colonial histories in which subaltern voices are silenced. Music brings forth memories and histories kept in sounds, making space for other ways of knowing and other ways of being in the world, becoming a means of resistance beyond official narratives and dominant systems (Astorga de Ita 2022). Just like the blues in the Mississippi, in Sotavento son Jarocho is "a system of explanation that informs … daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion and social movements"; it is a "tradition of interpretation" (Woods 2017:16). Music goes beyond sound; it is "a popular consciousness … [that] attempts to create a new regional reality" (Woods 2017:25). As Glissant (2010:73) notes, "[t]hese musical expressions … assembled everything blunt and direct, painfully stifled, and patiently differed into this varied speech. This was the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world".

Music provides us with means to survey complex histories of resistance. McKittrick (2011:948) argues that "Black diasporic histories and geographies are difficult to track and cartographically map", but rather than map it cartographically perhaps we could map it musically and poetically. Here I argue that the poetics of sugarcane and cattle in son Jarocho capture the memory of historical processes—of oppression, struggle, and freedom—and provide new imaginations of space. Music provides an alternative geographical testimony to official ordinances, processes, and maps; a Maroon geopoetics, "a poetics that envisions a decolonial future" (McKittrick 2013:5). Through music, ways of knowing and being beyond the logics of racial capitalism can be found. Music provides new avenues to "imagine and practice liberation" (McKittrick 2021:3).

As such, this essay contributes to the field of music geography by bringing together geopoetics with racial capitalism, plantation histories, and other spatial theories from the Black radical tradition. In this text I examine the relationship of colonialism, grasslands, and music in Sotavento, developing a cultural ecology of son where the Black sense of place of these landscapes becomes apparent. I do this by exploring the dialectic between the Black history of grasslands that remains in Sotaventine music and geopoetics, and the ways music affects the inhabiting of these historical landscapes. As Glissant (2010:72) points out, "what remained, what still remains, is the dark side of this impossible memory, which has a louder voice and one that carries farther than any chronicle or census". In this essay then, I consider the ways in which aural and geopoetic practices are not only depositories for this history but also provide the tools to reread, recreate, decolonise, and inhabit the landscapes that remain.

But before we delve into grasslands and son, allow me to further survey the theories that will permeate this paper.

Jarochised Theoretics

This study of Leeward grasslands is (theoretically) rooted upon notions of geopoetics. The idea of geopoetics, first proposed by Scottish author Kenneth White, has grown beyond its initial individual and Eurocentric iteration into a critical geographical concept increasingly used by decolonial scholars from the Global South (Balasopoulos 2008; De Leeuw and Magrane 2019; Ferretti 2020; Graham 2011; Magrane 2015; Nassar 2021; White 1992).

In this paper I use geopoetics as a means of approaching and bringing together different "texts"—historical accounts, poems, sones, ethnographic materials, and academic writings. This in line with Magrane's (2015:86) notion of geopoetics as a "transaesthetic" practice where "poetry is geographic and geography is poetic". Furthermore, geopoetics allows for an understanding which includes "both the diachronic and the synchronic, historicity and spatiality" (Balasopoulos 2008:9), which is what this paper does by bringing together historical, ethnographic, and poetic elements. My consideration of Sotaventine grasslands through geopoetics follows Ferretti's (2020:598) proposal that "different notions of geopoetics are needed, and non-Western cultures can nourish them", and builds upon McKittrick's (2013:14) idea that "decolonial poetics produced by diasporic communities who have survived violent displacement and white supremacy allows us to identify unseen and uncharted aspects of … life".

Following these authors, I propose that geopoetics is a means for understanding heterogeneous spaces and spatial practices that emerges not only from the individual but also from collective historical experiences. This notion of geopoetics entangles with the works of McKittrick (2011, 2013) and King (2016), who have explored different aspects of racial capitalism, in particular the plantation and Black fungibility.

Plantation theories emerge when considering grasslands, particularly sugarcane fields, which were central to the plantation system in the Caribbean. From this grassland was born what Glissant (1996:116), citing Rex Nettleford, calls "Plantation America" spanning across "the Caribbean, the eastern littoral of the [continent]".

The plantation not only became a central part of Caribbean culture and economy, it was a central fixture of racial capitalism. Racial capitalism, as proposed by Robinson (2000), posits the idea that modern capitalism is not tangentially related with colonial projects, transatlantic slavery, and the exploitation of racialised workers, but rather this entanglement is inherent to this mode of existence and to Western modernity. Thus, racialisation and capitalism are inseparable, meaning that capitalism is always already racial capitalism (Melamed 2015).

In this context, the plantation stands as "one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation" (Glissant 2010:65). The plantation is then the basis of racial capitalism as well as the symbolic lingering geography that remains; as McKittrick (2013:3) writes, "plantation history … instituted an incongruous racialized economy that lingered long after emancipation and independence movements".

Plantation histories speak of racial capitalism and are entangled with a Black sense of place (Dorries et al. 2022; McKittrick 2011; Pulido 2017; Robinson 1987).

"With a black sense of place in mind", says McKittrick (2011:949), "the plantation notably stands at the centre of modernity. It fostered complex black and non-black geographies … and provided the blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement". Plantation histories and a Black sense of place are present in Sotaventine geopoetics, particularly in Leeward grasslands. But the plantation is not the only geography from which these landscapes' sense of place arises.

From historic challenges to the plantation resulted Maroon landscapes inhabited through flight and resistance. Petit and grand marronage were historic means of resistance across Plantation America—the history of an 18th century Sotaventine Maroon community notes that "according to … the elders … there have always been [*palenques*], since the conquest of this kingdom" (cited in García de León 2014:575). Wright (2020:1137, 1142) conceptualises these constant spaces of marronage as "unruly environments" that show "nature's anticapitalist and anticolonial capabilities", and that are "viewed as lacking in exchange value" by the racial capitalist establishment. Other authors see Maroon geographies as extending across time, and ascribe to marronage transhistorical political possibilities; to Roberts (2015:23, 10), "this novel act fundamentally reshaped the conceptual landscape of modern political thinking", because of its "poeticist political imaginary". Alongside plantations, marronage was an important element of Sotaventine grassland histories, and of the complex Black sense of place present in these geographies.

In this paper we shall see how plantations and Maroon landscapes are present in the grasslands where Black fungibility unfolds. Here I follow in King's (2016) work on fungibility, who draws upon Saidiya Hartman's and Hortense Spillers' scholarship and explores Black fungibility beyond Afropessimism. To King (2016:1023), fungibility is:

> the capacity of Blackness for unfettered exchangeability and transformation within and beyond the form of the commodity, thereby making fungibility an open-ended analytic accounting for both Black abjection and Black pursuits of life in the midst of subjection.

While these theories—except for Robinson's racial capitalism—have been developed and deployed in Antillean and Anglo-American rather than Latin-American geographies, here I present them as Jarocho theoretics, not only because I will apply them to the case of son Jarocho, but because Jarochoness emerges from Black histories in Sotavento. Jarocho is nowadays a demonym for people and things from the state of Veracruz, but it originally referred to Afro-Sotaventine cowboys, as its proposed etymologies demonstrate.

The word "Jarocho" is said to originate in the Afro-Sotaventine cowboy's main instrument, the "*jara*"—a spear with a crescent-shaped blade in its end, used to herd and hamstring cattle. Other etymologies point towards the term "*jaro*", meaning "pig" in Sephardi and "ruddy" in Iberian Arabic, or to the Ibero-Arabic "*xara*"—"excrement". These potential etymologies speak of the racist and derogatory connotations this term once had (García de León 2014:370; Siemens 1990:157). Here I propose one more alternative, this one arising from the cattle landscapes where Jarocho's laboured: in de Covarrubias' (1611:487) 17th century dictionary, *jara* "means also riverbank". This is relevant considering that in his first

letter from Veracruz, Cortés (2013 [1519]:83) described the region as "a very flat land with beautiful rivers and lowlands, so beautiful that in the whole of Spain there are none better … and convenient to … keep all kinds of cattle".

We already begin to see some ways in which the Black theories outlined above map onto Leeward experiences, as the racist comparison of Black peoples with pigs gives an example of Jarocho fungibility. Furthermore, the definitions related to colonial cowboying culture, lead us into the grasslands in which these theoretics will further Jarochise as they mix with the geopoetics of *son* and Black Sotaventine histories.

Grassland Histories

Sugarcane plantations and cattle pastures were important landscapes in the construction of racial capitalism and of the Black sense of place of Sotavento. Both colonial landscapes were transplanted into Sotavento a few decades after the arrival of Spanish colonisers when the Leeward lowlands—depopulated by epidemics and genocide—were turned into cattle *estancias*, further transforming Sotaventine ecologies and landscapes (Butzer 1992; Crosby 2003; Sluyter 1999, 2012).

Throughout the colonial period grassy landscapes became closely intertwined despite plantations and pastures being somewhat distant from each other. This entanglement emerged from Maroon mobilities, since *palenques* were established away from plantations and close to pastures in order to escape the sphere of influence of planters and to be near the *encomiendas* where Maroons worked for cattle barons. Therefore, though entwined, both grasslands remained as distinct landscapes with particular power dynamics and phenomenologies, as we will soon discover.

The Marquis' Mill

The first sugar mill in mainland Plantation America was established in Sotavento by the conquistador-turned-marquis, Hernán Cortés. Cortés' enterprise was founded in the 1520s in the microregion of Los Tuxtlas, within Sotavento (Blume 1985:221; Delgado Calderón 2014; Thiébaut 2018:176; see Figure 1). The sugar produced was sent downriver to warehouses and stored alongside cowhides; from there Black workers—free and enslaved—would pack and move the Marquisate's products to the port of Veracruz for export to Europe (Delgado Calderón 2014:28). Although it went bankrupt decades later due to poor management and competition with the growing Antillean and Brazilian plantations (Blume 1985; Delgado Calderón 2014; Thiébaut 2018), Cortés' mill is a good case study of Sotaventine plantations and of the origins of racial capitalism in these parts.

The configuration of racial capitalism in the Caribbean started not with African enslaved workers, but with the exploitation of Indigenous peoples. As Robinson (2000:125) points out, "the production of sugar required a labor force that was larger and more politically and morally unencumbering than Europe could supply … in the beginning the alternative had been the 'Indian'". When Indigenous slavery was abolished by the Spanish crown in the second half of the 16th

century, Indigenous slaves in Plantation America were substituted by Black slaves trafficked mostly from West Africa who were brutally exploited in the sugar mills (Delgado Calderón 2014). Nevertheless, Indigenous communities remained immersed in the structures of racial capitalism: they were forced to subsidise the mills with food, fabrics, building materials, and other equipment through the taxes levied by Spanish *encomenderos*.

Besides sugar, alcohol became an important part of the plantation's "political economy" (ibid.).[4] Liquor became part of this exploitative system, as sellers targeted Indigenous communities, leading to debt and alcoholism. However, alcohol also became a means of subversion for Indigenous and Maroon communities, who planted sugarcane for moonshine, which was sold in neighbouring regions as contraband (ibid.).

For the remainder of the colonial period, sugar in New Spain was produced mainly for local consumption, though still in large amounts. Sugar mills moved away from the Atlantic coast and closer to the tropical intra-mountainous valleys, which were better connected to Mexico City (Blume 1985:221; García de León 2014; Thiébaut 2018). In the case of Veracruz, plantations moved to Córdoba and Orizaba, northwest of Sotavento (see Figure 1). These settlements were also a response to Marronage, with Córdoba having "since its foundation … a captain of war for its defence against Maroons" (Chávez-Hita 1979). As a result, this region became a bastion for planters, cementing slavery in the region.

Pastures and Cowboys

The history of cattle and pastures runs parallel to the history of sugarcane and the plantation. In Cortés' plantation, oxcarts were used to transport sugarcane from the fields to the mill, and in his warehouses sugar and cowhides were stored together (Delgado Calderón 2014). As in the case of sugar, and as the term "Jarocho" attests, race and cattle herding are closely linked in Sotaventine history.

Like cane, cattle arrived with colonisation. Using Black labour, transhumant cattle herding was transplanted from Southern Spain to Sotavento, in such a way that "around 1571, cattle dominated large blots of the local landscape" (García de León 2014:133–134). The cowboys who looked after cattle were usually Black, and, while at first slaves worked alongside freedmen, by the 17th and 18th centuries cowboys were mostly free Black men—albeit their freedom was not always recognised by Spanish colonists.

Through the 17th century "the production of cattle, left to reproduce freely, became … something resembling a hunt more than animal husbandry" (García de León 2014:345). Cattle were hunted by Jarochos with their *jaras* for hides and tallow, which were an important resource for New Spain's silver mines (Sluyter 2012).[5] However, it wasn't until the 18th century, when the port of Veracruz became large enough, increasing the demand for beef, that cattle herding became more than a wild hunt, developing into an important economic activity in and of itself throughout Sotavento (García de León 2014). Still, throughout the first centuries of colonial history, cattle herding was significant for Sotaventine culture and everyday life:

> the permanence of cattle in the region is due mostly to the effects that it had … in the original landscape, in the vast territories occupied by rambling cows … as well as on the social and symbolic space of the natural economy of the communities involved in different ways, voluntarily or forcefully, with raising and hunting bovines. (García de León 2014:345–346)

Cattle transformed the coastal plains of the Gulf, providing the material conditions that became the means of survival for numerous Leeward communities, including Maroons. While Maroon settlements were located in remote forested hills and piedmonts—and while their survival strategy was diverse and included banditry, subsistence agriculture, and smuggling—cattle herding was arguably a central activity, since it gave Maroons the horse-riding and spear-wielding skills they used in their armed resistance against the Spanish establishment. These skills were also related to animal husbandry in the Gulf of Guinea, from where many Maroons originated (García de León 2014:567). Thus, in spite of being a landscape resulting from colonialism, cattle pastures can be read as "unruly" (Wright 2020) and constitute an important Maroon landscape in Sotavento.

A 1600 official ordinance from the Province of Pánuco, another important cattle region neighbouring Sotavento to the north, also highlights the intersection of cowboying, riding, and race. It declares:

> … no free mulatto or black should have herds of mares or horses nor irons nor run wild mares … there are many persons of those forbidden for they do this excess … doing others robberies and damages for which I have been asked that said ordinances be kept. (Provincia de Panuco 1600)

The date of this ordinance is significant, as at the turn of the 17th century, in central Veracruz, the Maroon rebellion led by the African-king-turned-guerrilla-fighter, Yanga, grew stronger. Yanga's uprising was so successful that in 1640 the Spanish government agreed to the Maroons' terms, allowing them to form an autonomous community in the Veracruz highlands: *San Lorenzo de los Negros*—the Free Villa of St Lawrence of the Blacks, now known simply as Yanga (see Figure 1). With this, the Maroons became subjects of the Spanish crown and runaway slave catchers (Cruz-Carretero 2005; Domínguez Domínguez 2016). We can see why, amid this turmoil, the colonial authorities would want to control the access of Black riders to horses.

The term used for wild mares is also worth noting: *cimarronas*, that is, maroons. As Roberts (2015:5) notes—and as we see above—feral animals and people fleeing slavery were all considered *cimarrones*; they were all Maroons.[6] In this Maroonness we see Jarocho fungibility emerging again, as the lines that separate Black humanity from feral animals come undone.[7] Black fungibility, as King (2016:1023) remarks, shows how "colonial conceptions of Blackness mediated the ways the natural world could be imagined as manipulable … an open landscape of flux". Alongside the landscape, Black bodies are in flux; in Spanish colonial conceptions of Blackness, Black men and women seeking freedom are like feral beasts, so much so that captured Maroons were branded like cattle. The Maroonness of pastures derived from this racist fungibility is not exactly liberating;

nevertheless, the unruliness remains and this fungibility is subverted and reappropriated through resistance and, later on, geopoetics.

Through the 18th century, grand marronage was tolerated—even encouraged—by Sotaventine authorities and cattle owners, who hired Maroons to intimidate competitors, look after bovines, or protect warehouses and villages, as was the case at *La Estanzuela* (see Figure 1). This employment of Maroon communities illustrates the complex dynamics of racial capitalism, as Maroons were used to illegally evict Indigenous communities so Spanish cattle owners could introduce cattle into those territories (Carroll 1977:498). An example of this is the Maroon community of *Palacios de Mandinga*, which would relive Yanga's history. There were two factions among the Maroons of Mandinga: one wanted to oppose Spanish rule and grow their numbers; the other looked for the official status of freedmen. The latter group succeeded with the help of local authorities and cattle barons. This, alongside their enrolment as spearmen in the Viceroy's army—who, in the midst of the many Anglo-Spanish wars was attempting to fortify the Leeward coast against potential British incursions—led to their recognition by the colonial order. They handed in their rebellious companions and, like Yanga, founded a free village—*Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Morenos de Amapa* (Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Swarthy of Amapa; see Figure 1)—becoming slave catchers for the Spanish crown (Carroll 1977; Cruz-Carretero 2005; Díaz-Sánchez and Hernández 2013:188; Domínguez Domínguez 2016). The now-freedmen of Mandinga settled far from Córdoba and Orizaba, away from the plantations and their influence in land offered by the owners of *La Estanzuela*, which was part of a contested territory between this *estancia* and neighbouring Indigenous communities.

The complex histories of marronage in Sotavento remit us once again to racial capitalism. Firstly, because the accumulation of capital on the part of the Spanish *encomenderos* took place through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, coerced by hired Maroons. But also, because the conversion of Maroons to slave catchers shows the ways in which these Black communities were swallowed by the structures of racial capitalism, helping maintain the system against which they once rebelled. If we follow in Roberts' (2015:15) idea of marronage as flight, where marronage is "multidimensional, constant and never static", we can see in the assimilation of Maroon communities into colonial society not merely manumission, but an end to their marronage. Nevertheless, marronage remains in musical texts and practices in which Leeward grasslands abide.

Sugar After Abolition

While the 18th century saw an increase in marronage, slavery was not proscribed until the independence movement of the early 19th century. In the decades leading up to Mexican independence, the Spanish territories in Plantation America grew as agro-industrial enclaves, taking over the niche left by the loss of the plantations of Saint-Domingue after the Haitian Revolution (Mintz 1985; Moreno Fraginals 1976; von Grafenstein 1997).

In Mexico, this economic boom would not last, as sugar production decreased with the War of Independence, which raged throughout the 1810s. In the midst

of this rebellion, abolition was decreed by José María Morelos in *The Sentiments of The Nation* (his insurgent manifesto) and was later formalised in Mexico's first constitution; thus, it was proclaimed that "slavery be abolished forever, likewise the distinction of castes, being henceforth all equal, and the only distinction between one American and the next shall be vice and virtue" (Morelos y Pavón 1813).[8] In spite of this, racial distinctions remained, as did the haciendas where supposedly free workers were bound to life in peonage.

While independence negatively impacted sugar production, it also brought new exporting opportunities and foreign investments. George Henry Ward (1828:72), a British envoy, pointed out that sugar production in Mexico was "well worthy the attention of capitalists". This British diplomat marvelled at the potential of Veracruz for producing sugar and spoke of the "possibility of cultivating the sugar-cane … by a system of free labour", saying that in "no country except Mexico … the experiment has been fairly tried upon a large scale" (Ward 1828:67). "The distinction of castes", abolished years earlier, was still a defining factor in Ward's conception of the plantation. According to the English emissary:

> … a more debauched, ignorant, and barbarous race, than the present inhabitants of the sugar districts, it is impossible to conceive. They seem to have engrafted all the wild passions of the negro upon the cunning, and suspicious character of the Indian; and are noted for their ferocity, vindictiveness, and attachment to spirituous liquors. (Ward 1828:69)

Ward's racist report on business opportunities in newly-founded Mexico was effective: by the late 19th century numerous transnational sugar companies—among them the British Cuatotolapan Sugar Co., and San Juan Sugar Co.—had considerable investments in Sotavento (Aurrecoechea et al. 1993:84). While they were driven out in the 1930s with the agrarian reform, their presence is still felt today: some still call the Sotaventine town of Juan Díaz Covarrubias "*San Juan Sugar*", and the area in which the engineers from the mills lived is known today as "*la loma de los ingleses*"—the hill of the Englishmen (see Figure 1).

Besides foreign investment, the 19th century sugar boom brought environmental devastation. In Cuba, "sugar exterminated the forests" in order to supply the sugar mills' unending demand for fuel (Moreno Fraginals 1976:76). We can still see the enduring voracity of Cuban mills in Nicolás Guillén's 1931 poem *Caña*:

El negro	The black man
junto al cañaveral.	next to the cane field.
El yanqui	The Yankee
sobre el cañaveral.	over the cane field.
La tierra	The earth
bajo el cañaveral.	under the cane field.
¡Sangre	Blood
que se nos va!	that flows from us!

Guillén's verses present us with vivid images of exploitation for profit; the earth and the Black workers are both exploited by foreign investment—in this case US American—the externalities of the system paid in blood. Here, there seems to be another instance of fungibility, with the Black man and the earth confounded—we can't quite tell whose blood it is. Here, environmental degradation is hard to tell apart from racial capitalist exploitation.

A similar fate seems to have befallen Sotaventine forests. Descriptions of the 19th century Veracruzan landscapes can be found in García Cubas' (1884:179) "universal" geography textbook: "one's sight delights in the beautiful perspectives of … the dense forests of enormous plants that cover the eastern slope of the mountain range … beautiful forests and mangroves … extend along the rivers' margins". However, at the time of these descriptions, or shortly thereafter, in the lower Papaloapan, "agricultural activities undertaken … caused an important change in land use through deforestation" (Thiébaut 2018:179), in such a way that by the early 20th century "a sugarcane dominated landscape" was the norm (ibid.).

In these accounts of sugar landscapes, we see the perpetuation of racial capitalism even after independence and abolition movements. Ward's report clearly shows that behind business ventures that are "well worthy the attention of capitalists" the plantation system remained and, even after emancipation, racialised workers continued to be exploited. Not only does this speak of racial capitalism, the Blackness of the "inhabitants of the sugar districts", also speaks of Sotaventine plantation history and the resulting Black sense of place.

While Guillén's poem speaks of the Cuban plantation, the same poetics emerge in Sotavento. The Leeward plantation remained a site of racial capitalism and complex power relations, as grassland poetics, which we have begun to consider and into which we will delve next, will demonstrate.

Plantation Poetics and Musical Marronage

In poetry and music, we hear the history of Sotaventine sugarcane plantations and cattle pastures, as well as the Black sense of place they foster. In the geopoetics of Sotaventine verses and sones Jarochos, entangled colonial relations, environmental changes, and stories of resistance are enacted and remembered.

"¡Que yo soy como la caña!"

A geopoetic plantation emerges when we read or listen to sugarcane verses. These geopoetics show the grim reality of the plantation, as we saw in Guillén, but they also make space for resistance—as Césaire wrote, "the poem is not a mill for / grinding sugarcane absolutely not" (cited in Roberts 2015:7). In sugarcane poetics, "[l]andscape retains the memory of time past" (Glissant 1996:150); here "[t]he individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process" (Glissant 1996:105–106). When we consider the geopoetics of sugarcane we see the entanglements of the landscape and its inhabitants, and hear the memories that counterpoint formal or official narratives.

In Guillermo Cházaro Lagos' *Romance de Santiago Tuxtla* the sugar mill appears as a space of exploitation; a reminder of Guillén's *Caña* and an echo of McKittrick's (2011, 2013) plantation as space of otherness and death:

¡Cuántos romances te han dicho	How many ballads there are
Santiago del Santiaguero!;	Santiago of Saint James' folk!;
¡Cuántos romances que tienen	How many ballads that have
tu sabor de pueblo viejo!,	your taste of village of old!,
del pueblo que se quedó	of the old village that stayed
en tu romance primero,	in the first ballad you sung,
cuando Fernando tenía	back when Hernando still had
marquesado y un ingenio	sugar mill and Marquisate
y plantó su planta ruda	and he planted his tough plant
con cientos de esclavos negros	with hundreds of Black slave hands
que ya venían marcados	that arrived already marked
del plantador con su fierro,	by the branding iron's flames,
que de aquí se emanciparon	and took freedom from this land
en los siglos venideros.	in the centuries that came.
Y aquí surgió el mestizaje	And here, the mixture arose
de los indios y los negros;	from the Indians and the Blacks;
arranque de los jarochos	the Sotaventine beginnings
contra todo encomendero	against settlers in the land
que venían de tres cruces	for they came down from three crosses
del blanco, el indio y el negro;	the White, the Indian, the Black;
manantiales de la sangre	the flowing springs of the blood
que bajaron de tus cerros,	that from your mountains ran down,
que fueron agua llovida,	they were the water of rain,
luego lagunas, y esteros,	then lagoons, lakes, and wetlands,
¡Oh, los ríos de la sangre	Oh, the rivers of the blood
que se forman de muy lejos!	that run their course from afar!
Agua cristalina y pura	Water crystal-clear and pure
con verde del verde tierno,	with green of the tenderest greens,
¡Que tú tienes verde tu alma	For you have the greenest soul
y es verde tu nacimiento!	and you have the greenest birth!

(Cházaro Lagos 2018:39)

Although Cházaro Lagos lived in Tlacotalpan, here he writes of the neighbouring Santiago Tuxtla, which is near the site of Cortés' first mill.[9] This ballad carries the memories of Cortés' first sugar mill, of the people trafficked across the Atlantic for sugar cultivation, and of the racial origins and identities of Sotaventine peoples. Here, Cházaro Lagos retells incidents of rebellion and freedom (vv. 13–20), which remind us of (and likely refer to) the Maroon guerrillas of Yanga and Mandinga.

In this *romance* we see that the memories of times past are kept in verse, "for it is poets who are / the first to sing history's song / before the wise men in books / declare who were and what was …" (ibid.).[10] However, these geopoetics show histories not always present in official writings. In this poetic approximation to the plantation, we find a counterpoint to Ward's 19th century appraisal of the plantation and its inhabitants. The racial make-up of sugarcane workers presented in this ballad is sharply different from that of the 19th century British diplomat. In the poem, the white Spanish are added to the mix and, rather than racial determinism, the complex and violent history of colonial encounters is portrayed. Here, it is exploitation, suffering, and a painful but ultimately fruitful struggle for freedom that characterises "the inhabitants of the sugar districts" and their descendants. Pain and death are palpable (vv. 21–26) and, as in McKittrick's (2013) work, the plantation past reaches across time, as "rivers of … blood" reach us from afar. While Cházaro Lagos was not Black, through the poetics of the plantation and its complicated history, a Black sense of place emerges; after all, as McKittrick (2011:950) says, "a black sense of place is not … homogeneous", and the plantation leads to "complex black and non-black geographies" (McKittrick 2011:949).

As in Cházaro Lagos' ballad and in Guillén's poem, there are echoes of the plantation in Hidalgo Belli's son *La Caña*:

Morena tierra sembrada	Oh, brown earth you have been sown
por la injusticia, el dolor	with injustice and with pain
mirando el sol acostada	you lie down, look at the sun
del pueblo trabajador	and from working people's sweat
bebes del surco mojada	wet, you drink from the furrows.
Mi hermano si te has perdido	My brother if you are lost
dentro de la cañalera	alone inside the cane field
lanza en el aire una espiga	raise a shoot up in the air
que te sirva de bandera.	it's a flag for you to wield.[11]

The plantation is injustice and pain where one can get lost. However, while the sugarcane field is a space of exploitation, it is not one that exploits, but one that is being exploited and that survives alongside the exploited peoples. Furthermore, it becomes the flag that saves those lost within it. In his poetry, Hidalgo takes the sugarcane plant and fields and reinterprets them beyond the logic of the plantation. This reminds us of the cane fields planted by Maroon and Indigenous farmers who sold their produce as contraband. Under this light, sugarcane is no longer solely a sign of exploitation; it is now the means of resistance and the thing that makes life worth living:

Caña dulce, caña brava,	Oh, sweet cane, tough sugarcane,
caña de lo lei lo lía,	cane oh lei-lo-lei-lo-lie,
¡que yo soy como la caña	I am like the sugarcane
que va endulzando la vida!	that grows tall sweetening life!

Caña dulce, caña brava,	Oh, sweet cane, tough sugarcane,
caña le lo lei lo lero,	cane oh lei-lo-lei-lo-lie,
¡que yo soy como la caña	I am like the sugarcane
que me queman y no muero!	they burn me but I don't die![12]

Sugarcane sweetens life, as does the singer. Sugarcane is cut and burnt, as is the singer and his people, but they are still here. The Black Mexican peasant singer parallels sugarcane: they were both brought across the Atlantic to a land foreign to them, and they were both exploited for profit; but they also set their roots upon the new land, they thrived, and they are now and evermore a part of the Sotaventine world. The story of exploitation is still acknowledged, but there is a new ontology of the plantation.

This leads us back to King's (2016:1023) notion of Black fungibility, which "recognizes the violence of the plantation and its afterlife while simultaneously acknowledging the ongoing capacity for the making and remaking of Black life in the midst of plantation violence". Hidalgo's son does the same. In Hidalgo's verses, as in King's (2016:1034) fungibility, where "Black bodies are porous and can merge with … nature", the borders of the labourer's body come undone, the sugarcane cutter becomes cane; and the space of the plantation, in spite of its exploitative nature, is reinterpreted as a space of identity where there is life. Sugarcane becomes unruly through this musical marronage. Black fungibility in this case can be read as a form of Black geopoetics, since geopoetics is a "hybrid approach, blurring the distinction between humankind and nature" (Ferretti 2020:600). This instance of fungibility is contrary to colonial fungibility where free Black folks were put in the same category as feral animals or plants like the instance where Spanish colonists in America thought "if a Negro were not hanged, he would never die … we were sure that, like oranges, they had found their habitat … after they were put to work in the *ingenios* … many of them died" (Bartolomé de las Casas, cited in Robinson 2000:127). Unlike this botanic fungibility, where Black bodies have no agency, in Jarocho geopoetic fungibility, the Afro-Jarocho singer's kinship with cane is an active means of resistance.

Hidalgo's fungibility is particularly interesting given his endeavours at rescuing the Black music and history of Sotavento,[13] and because of its implications for the plantation. For McKittrick (2013) the plantation demands rebellion, which is to be found in the garden and in life-making, but there is no kinship with the plantation crop and there is no life in the field itself. Yet, here something has led the Afro-Jarocho poet to see the space of sugarcane as a place of resistance, life, and identity, instead of a space of absolute otherness and death. By this I do not mean to say McKittrick's analyses are not valid, nor that there are no echoes of the plantation in Sotavento—by no means. Indeed, Hidalgo recognises the presence of the plantation; following Alejo Carpentier he speaks of "the sugar mill as factory" with "the same conditions, the same exploitation and ambitions" (Hidalgo Belli et al. 2021:121). But in his poetics and music, there is a different reading of this space and of this history: a reading of history and landscape that makes space for life with sugarcane, in spite of the

plantation system. Kinship with cane is enacted through geopoetic fungibility. Hidalgo sings:

¡Que yo soy como la caña!
¡Que yo soy como la caña!

"I am like the sugarcane!" By blurring the borders of his humanity, the singer can grow in the expanse of the grassland, like sugarcane; they burn without dying; they sweeten life; they will never die. This sung fungibility leads to resistance, and resistance allows the singer to live life. And yet it does not do away with the system of oppression that remains.

The sugar industry, expropriated with the 1930s agrarian reform, continued to grow under the umbrella of state capitalism to the point that in the 1980s the largest sugar mill in the world was located in Southern Veracruz (Blume 1985:218). Soon thereafter, neoliberal policies led to the privatisation of the sugar mills, and by the turn of the century sugar production was again in private hands. Throughout this process of nationalisation, growth, and privatisation, sugar remained an important industry in Veracruz (Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz 2019), and part of everyday life in Sotavento. One often sees trucks loaded with vast mounds of sugarcane cruising through small Leeward motorways—the same motorways in which, in the 1990s, Hidalgo Belli wrote *La Caña*, south of the Tuxtlas mountain range, near Cortés' first mill.

Not only sugar remains; the complex inheritance of the plantation's oppressive configuration is also present. In recent years there have been workers' strikes in Sotavento, demanding that sugar mills pay sugarcane growers what they are owed (Morales 2019). Plantation echoes are also present in Claudio Vega's story at the beginning of this paper. Vega says he went off to cut cane because that was the logical next step, and because the mill gave cane-cutters food parcels with animal crackers, and, as a 12-year-old boy, he really liked animal crackers. Here, once again, the complexity of the Black sense of place of sugarcane fields emerges. I may be wrong, but as far as I know the Vegas don't claim to be Afro-descendants—their patriarch is nicknamed "*El Güero*", that is, "The Blonde"—nevertheless, their family worked the cane fields.[14] This anecdote of life with sugarcane brings up issues of exploitation that are concurrent with the plantation and that remain as part of sugar landscapes in Sotavento and throughout Mexico. The plantation and Black history permeate diverse experiences today because of the history that is embedded in grassy landscapes.

Zacamandú

While the plantation is a landscape of oppression, re-read and redeemed as a poetic territory of identity, struggle, and survival, the pasture is—at least at first sight—an unruly Maroon landscape that makes space for freedom and resistance. The pasture allowed Maroons to challenge colonial powers and maintain their independence, enabling them to exist in the world as something other than slaves. Resembling Glissant's Maroons, historic Jarochos can be seen as a

complex and sometimes contradictory (anti-)heroic figure that resists colonial domination.

The endeavours of Jarocho cowboys are present on Sotaventine music. Gilberto Gutiérrez Silva, a notorious son musician, says that in son Jarocho "a very important space was the world of cattle … Ranchers sung different sones, of course, but the one that was related [to them] was '*El Zacamandú*'". Gilberto goes on, saying that Sotavento is "the world of cowboys, of the field, where people communicate by shouting. They scream at each other, so when they're going to sing, they have their voice set" (hear Track 2).[15] Cattle history is heard even in the aesthetics of the music itself, as cattle herding has influenced the way voices are deployed in Sotaventine son and everyday life.

A cedar fiddle plays the galloping melodies of *El Zacamandú*. Cedar shoes and jaranas keep the beat. It's a fandango night at Santiago Tuxtla, in honour of a group of visiting Japanese musicians. Aldo Flores—Swiss-Sotaventine singer-poet—hants a verse:

¡Ay nomás nomás!
Yo tengo un torito bravo
que no sabe de corral…

"I have a little wild bull / that knows nothing of enclosures." In the Zacamandú's poetics maroon cattle comes out. Joel Cruz Castellanos—musician from the renowned son group *Los Cojolites*, who tonight is playing the violin—responds to Aldo's verse. This is the "agricultural singing" that Gilberto speaks of; the melodic shouting of grassland workers who need to make themselves heard across the open fields.

…me lo llevé pa' Santiago
me lo traje pa'l nopal
lo fui a bañar en un lago
y no lo pude domar.
¡Ay amor amor!

Aldo's improvised verse speaks of neighbouring places where visiting musicians come from, and of the untameable bull that travels through them. After Joel's response, Aldo sings a refrain and musicians call out to the dancers:

¡TORO!

¡TOROOOOOOO!
¡TORO!

¡TOROOOOOOOO!

Once the singing is done, dancers let loose on the *tarima* and the melodic instruments unleash the *Zacamandú*, bulls' horns vibrating with the strings.

The tune follows that pattern. At any moment a verse is called-and-responded and dancers soften their steps; then comes the chorus among shouts of *¡TORO!* Another form of fungibility emerges as the dancers start to paw at the *tarima*: the

Figure 2: *Zacamandú*, San Andrés Tuxtla

woman shakes a neckerchief daringly and the man charges at her as if he were a raging bull. Sometimes both of them shake handkerchiefs as bull/fighters taunting each other, sometimes the woman will become the bull (see Figure 2 and gifs in supplemental materials).[16]

The *Zacamandú* continues. Aldo sings of crossing borders and Sotaventine bulls in Japan; I sing of bulls' horns in the waxing moon; Joel sings of Sotaventine plains and cowboys. The poetics of *El Zacamandú*, as Gilberto often says of Sotaventine poetics generally, "speak of life, death, and everything in-between". In this case, in relation to cattle.

People of Broken Colour

Just like the history of cattle herding, the history of *El Zacamandú* is entwined with the lives of the Black inhabitants of Sotavento. This tune was prosecuted by the Spanish Inquisition in the late 18th century since they considered it "provocative" and "very dishonest". Early 19th century inquisitorial processes recount the dancing: 200 years ago, as in today's fandangos, "the woman provokes, and the man becomes dishevelled; the whole man becomes horns to charge against the female bullfighter" (cited in Sheehy 1979:29). Furthering the racialised narrative we are told that this "provocative" and "dishonest" son was introduced "by a Black man from Havana who was incarcerated in … San Juan de Ulúa" (Ortiz 2005:128).

The *Zacamandú* was subjected to the same processes of racialised Othering as Jarocho cowboys and plantation workers. It was considered an "obscene dance" associated in inquisitorial processes with "peoples of broken colour", that is,

people of mixed racial heritage. In these proceedings lack of propriety, dishonesty, and illegality were seen as characteristics of racialised peoples. As in Ward's "sugar districts", in the *Zacamandú* Blackness was equated with debauchery.

Race converges dually in this son. On the one hand, the history of Black cowboys and of the landscapes of cattle feeds into the subject matter of the music. On the other hand, the racial aspects of its practitioners and of son itself are emphasised by colonial powers in their Othering narrative. *El Zacamandú* reminds us of instances of Black fungibility in which colonial institutions likened rebellious Black folks to wild cattle and horses. This Black fungibility is dehumanising. It speaks of notions of the unruly that the Spanish associated with certain landscapes, cattle, and Maroons, and which they sought to tame; an unruliness that lies at the centre of Maroon resistance (Wright 2020).

As counterpoint to the fungibility of official colonial discourses, we have the musical one, for in *El Zacamandú* dancers become bovines. In the *mudanzas*, the quiet dancing before the refrain, the dancer's feet paw the wooden dancefloor. The same thing happens in verse; although the unruly bull is sometimes the singer's or cowboy's adversary, it often parallels their life. Here, fungibility reverberates not with colonial dehumanising bureaucracy, but with the geopoetic fungibility of Hidalgo's sugarcane and with a transhistorical marronage. Here, son is a space of resistance, not only because it unsettles the official discourses that liken the Black inhabitants of the region to beasts, but because it survives in spite of the inquisitorial intents to silence it. Son reverberates like Glissant's (2010:73) plantation musics: "chants, syncopated, broken by prohibitions, set free by the entire thrust of bodies … the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world". *El Zacamandú*, brought into Sotavento by a Black man, is set free, still played, sung, and danced; through its history and performance, cattle grasslands become once again landscapes of Black resistance.

Conclusions

The Black history of Sotavento is long and complex and has strong ties with the region's landscapes and economy, particularly the grasslands. It can be heard in song and dance. Even if it is not always explicit, this racialised history is present in Leeward music, and its grasslands are imbued with a Black sense of place.

We can see the heterogeneous Black sense of place of Sotaventine grasslands in the complex relations established by the Black inhabitants of the Leeward. Both slaves and freedmen worked and lived in these grasslands in heterogeneous ways, ranging from slavery to freedom, from resistance to collaboration, and through numerous stages in-between. This is not to say that the colonial system in which they were embedded was not exploitative or racist—Spanish colonialism relied upon white supremacist ideologies that have left a legacy of racism across Latin America—rather that race relations among Afrodescendants, and between them and the Spanish and Indigenous populations, were complex and multi-layered.

As McKittrick points out time and again, a Black sense of place is inherently complex. We can see this as in spite of poetic and musical resistance, Sotaventine

grasslands are entangled in multifaceted geographies. Oppression and subversion are present in both plantation and pasture, though these two grasslands act as mirror images. The plantation is an archetypal space of oppression (McKittrick 2013); however, in its musical iteration there is a sense of belonging and resistance that emerges through a geopoetic kinship with cane—resistance blooms in the midst of the plantation. The pasture, on the other hand, is a Maroon landscape, an unruly space of freedom through which rebellious Black communities thrive; at the same time, especially in the early colonial period, enslaved peoples were involved in cowboying, and runaway slaves were considered wild animals by dehumanising colonial ideologies. Although it brings liberty to some, the relations established in the grasslands are not entirely emancipating, as we've seen in our glance at the intricate history of Sotaventine marronage.

The Black histories and sense of place of Leeward grassy landscapes are still experienced today by most inhabitants of the grasslands, not just Afrodescendants. The morning after Claudio's talk, at breakfast, somebody approaches and gives him a bowl full of animal crackers. "Thanks! This is great!", he says laughing; "I don't have to cut cane anymore!" The exploitation of the plantation and the freedom of the Maroon pasture are present in musicians' experiences and son Jarocho geopoetics, and are enacted through music and dance, not exclusively by the Black communities of the region, but thanks to them and their histories of resistance.

Afrojarocho geopoetics like those of Hidalgo Belli's *La Caña* or of *El Zacamandú* are decolonial geopoetics that "provide the context through which black futures are imaginable" (McKittrick 2013:12). These geopoetics remind us of Roberts' (2015) notion of marronage as a post-Western, transhistoric political tool; thus, we could think of these Jarocho geopoetics as a musical marronage that still challenges the plantation. Music is the descendant of histories of rebellion, it is "historical *marronage* intensified over time to exert a creative *marronage*" (Glissant 2010:71). These geopoetics subvert and redeem the nature of the plantation and re-enact the cattle pastures. The space dictated by colonial agro-industrial enterprises throughout the centuries and the imaginative spheres where the plantation is still owned by the merchant capitalist are taken over by the worker one chord at a time until the poetic grassland is his own; conquered not wielding machetes or spears, but *jaranas* and guitars.

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Data Availability Statement

Ethnographic research data, other than excerpts presented in text and recordings and images in supplementary materials, are not shared.

Endnotes

[1] All translations are the author's, unless otherwise stated.

[2] "*Son*" refers to both a genre of music, in this case Sotaventine music (*son Jarocho*), and to specific tunes in the repertoire.

[3] Tracks 1 and 2 are available online with notes further expanding the contents of these field recordings: https://antipodeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Astorga-de-Ita_notes-on-tracks.pdf

[4] Although Glissant (2010:67) argues that, "socially, the Plantation is not the product of a politics but the emanation of a fantasy".

[5] While *desjarretaderas* were forbidden throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, recurring prohibitions seem to indicate that these ordinances were not effective, as Sluyter (2012:55) notes: "[t]he killing of … cattle continued … the profits … in hides and tallow made with the desjarretadera outweighing the ability of the Mesta to enforce ordinances". Besides, the legality—or lack thereof—of *desjarretaderas* was likely not a major concern for Maroon communities, themselves considered illegal by the colonial government.

[6] Freedmen and Indigenous peoples who refused to pay tribute to Spanish *encomenderos* and joined runaway slave settlements were also considered Maroons (García de León 2014:344).

[7] The term "mulato", derived from "mule", is another instance of racist fungibility. This relates to Spanish notions of "purity of blood" and its manifold "castes" (Martínez 2004), and points towards the histories of Afrodescendant muleteers travelling to and from Veracruz, also present in *sones* like *El Ahualulco* or the now-defunct *Los Arrieros* (García de León 2009). However, since this would lead us away from the landscapes at hand it lies beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] Morelos' proclamation is particularly interesting considering his own ambiguous racial origins: marked as "Spanish" at birth, called "African" by his detractors, and born in a region with a large Indigenous population.

[9] Cházaro Lagos (1919–2010) was a prolific Sotaventine poet, widely recognised in Veracruz, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

[10] "*que la historia los poetas / la van cantando primero / antes que sabios infolios / nos digan qué fue y qué fueron…*"

[11] Hear Patricio Hidalgo Belli and Chuchumbé, "La Caña", on Chuchumbé's *¡Caramba Niño!* (Producciones Alebrije, 1999) and Caña Dulce y Caña Brava and Patricio Hidalgo Belli, "La Caña", on Caña Dulce y Caña Brava's *Sones Jarochos* (Fonarte Latino, 2015).

[12] Hear Patricio Hidalgo Belli and Chuchumbé, "La Caña", on Chuchumbé's *¡Caramba Niño!* (Producciones Alebrije, 1999) and Caña Dulce y Caña Brava and Patricio Hidalgo Belli, "La Caña", on Caña Dulce y Caña Brava's *Sones Jarochos* (Fonarte Latino, 2015).

[13] Patricio Hidalgo's band—"El Afrojarocho"—seeks to bring out the Afro side of Jarocho culture, experimenting with different percussions and genres, and deploying poetics that speak of the Black sense of place of Sotavento. They are worth a listen.

[14] Of him, his daughter Martha Vega says: "He used to cut cane, that's been one of his occupations".

[15] Interview with Gilberto Gutiérrez Silva by Diego Astorga de Ita, Veracruz, 2018. Tracks 1 and 2 are available online with notes further expanding the contents of these field

recordings: https://antipodeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Astorga-de-Ita_notes-on-tracks.pdf

[16] See gifs online: https://antipodeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Astorga-de-Ita_gif_Mexico-City-Zacamandu.gif and https://antipodeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Astorga-de-Ita_gif_San-Andres-Tuxtla-Zacamandu.gif

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