


Musical Messaging: The Social and Anti-Social Affordances of WhatsApp in the Football Culture of the Latin American Southern Cone

LUIS ACHONDO 

Abstract

Argentine, Chilean, and Uruguayan *hinchas* (soccer or football supporters) cheer for their teams primarily through contrafacta of popular music. Until recently, chants were mainly composed in stadiums and other physical spaces of fan socialization. However, the increasing dominance of the messaging app WhatsApp has altered these sociomusical relations. Drawing on ethnographic work, I argue that the messaging app has fostered both sociality and anti-sociality within and between fanbases. *Hinchas* employ its creative affordances to digitally decentre creativity from individuals through the distribution of inventive tasks between different people. However, WhatsApp also contributes to football violence by intimately spreading hate memes, aggressive chants, and videos of torture, among other forms of violent media. In illustrating that the messaging app can immerse and infect subjects in both productive and destructive relationalities, this article ultimately underscores the social and anti-social potentialities of viral media and digital technologies.

All the *hinchas* (soccer or football supporters) were checking their phones while talking and drinking wine in the dark and cold Parque Forestal, an iconic urban park in the historical downtown of Santiago de Chile. These hangouts were common after the weekly meetings in which the *hinchada* (group of organized *hinchas*) of football club Universidad de Chile (henceforth U. de Chile) discussed their social and political activities. With his hands inside his pockets due to the freezing temperature, Miguel asked me to explain my research to him one more time.¹ I said that I was studying the circulation of football chants and sonic practices of fandom throughout Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay – a region known as the Latin American Southern Cone.² ‘I’ve sent a couple of chants to the *hinchada*’s WhatsApp

Email: laachond@uc.cl

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- 1 I have changed names to ensure anonymity.
- 2 Readers familiar with South American cultures, societies, and transnational relations might find this designation arbitrary as porous borders characterize the region. Furthermore, people familiar with South American football might argue that the entire region – including southern Brazil – shares a common fan culture. My definition of the Southern Cone as a space constituted by Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay responds to conceptual and methodological issues. First, the term emerged natively to discuss cultural, social, and economic exchanges between these three countries. Second, I employ the concept to give a certain finitude to my multisided ethnography. Although my findings resonate with other South American football cultures, including other countries would have been methodologically

group’, he proudly replied, ‘everyone is always sending chants so that the group could arrange them’.³ I was not surprised by the centrality of this ubiquitous messaging app in the collaborative composition of chants, as I had heard similar statements elsewhere. As a piece in the popular Argentine newspaper *Clarín* pointed out, ‘football chants are now written on WhatsApp’.⁴

In a previous meeting, I had overheard Miguel vocalizing the melody of Bad Bunny’s hit ‘Callaíta’ (roughly, ‘Little Quiet One’) with lyrics celebrating the loyalty and passion of the U. de Chile hinchada. I asked him if this was one of the chants he sent to the WhatsApp group. He confirmed it while lamenting that only a few hinchas engaged with the contrafactum, either texting edits to the lyrics or sending audio messages with some melodic alterations.

At the time, he added, the WhatsApp group was mostly focused on a more hostile contrafactum of ‘Imposible’ (‘Impossible’) by Argentine rock band Callejeros. Originally adapted by the hinchada of Argentine team River Plate, an U. de Chile hinchas modified the chant to blast their arch-rivals Colo-Colo – a club named after a Mapuche warrior from the colonial era:⁵

Ay, zorra, yanacona cobarde	[Ow, whore, coward yanacona (Mapuche
Siempre pidiendo ayuda	word for an indigenous traitor)
La mafia inventó a Colo-Colo	Always asking for help
Para hacerlo campeón	The mafia invented Colo-Colo
Nunca va a decir la verdad	To make them win championships
El que escribe en los diarios	They will never tell the truth
La prensa, la TV y el gobierno	Those who write the newspapers
Te juraron amor	The press, the TV, and the government
Jugar los partidos arreglados	Swore love to you
Ay, qué cara dura	Playing fixed matches
Donde tu gente de mierda	Ow, so shameless
En las malas no se ve ninguna	Your fucking people
Tener estadio regalado por la dictadura	Never show up at bad times
Son todo lo que no queremos ser	The [Augusto Pinochet] dictatorship gave
‘Que se vayan todos’	you a stadium
Cantaste otra vez	You’re everything we don’t want to be

challenging and analytically unproductive. For more on translocal imaginaries of football in Latin America see Pablo Alabarces, *Héroes, machos y patriotas: el fútbol entre la violencia y los medios* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2014); Pablo Alabarces, *Historia mínima del fútbol en América Latina* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 2018). For more on the Southern Cone, see Alejandro Grimson, *On Argentina and the Southern Cone: Neoliberalism and National Imaginations* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

3 All quotations and conversations in Spanish present in this article were translated by the author.

4 Mariano Gavira, ‘Nuevos poetas del tablón: las canciones de cancha ahora se escriben por WhatsApp’, *Clarín*, 26 October 2016, www.clarin.com/sociedad/verdaderos-poetas-tablon-canciones-cancha_0_Hk-XVzp1l.html.

5 The Mapuche is the largest indigenous community in the Southern Cone.

Todos nuestros hijos
 Saben esta verdad
 Hijos de Piñera
 Nietos del General

'Everyone must leave'
 You once sang
 Our children
 Know this truth:
 Children of Piñera
 Grandchildren of General [Pinochet]]

The chant underscores the radical alterity of Colo-Colo and its fanbase. U. de Chile hinchas claim that their rivals lack their resolute steadfastness and unwavering loyalty. They also posit that Colo-Colo has been historically supported by hegemonic powers, including the right-wing president Sebastián Piñera and the infamous dictator Augusto Pinochet, who brutally ruled the country from 1973 to 1990.⁶ A couple of weeks later, the chant's final audio was circulating widely on WhatsApp and other social media, eventually reaching the stadium's stands.

I open with this ethnographic vignette to foreground the significance of the sonic and the digital in the transnational culture of football fandom of the Southern Cone. Accompanied by drums and rhythms taken from the Buenos Aires carnival, hinchas vocalize football chants non-stop during games. These compositions range from liminal speech utterances – rhythmic expressions with little to no variation in tone and pitch (see [Example 1](#)) – to contrafactum compositions involving verses, bridges, and choruses. The melodies of the song-like chants range from political marches to jingles to the latest hits circulating on mass and social media.

Although scholarship on sports has slowly begun to pay attention to how sound shapes football experiences,⁷ the role of technology in the mediation of fan sociality remains

6 Until he was elected Chile's president in 2010, Piñera owned approximately 13% of Colo-Colo's stocks despite being a fan of another team. Pinochet also sought to link himself to the club to gain popular support. He was awarded an honorary presidency and promised to pay for their new stadium in the late 1980s. Although the latter has not been proved, U. de Chile hinchas claim that the Colo-Colo stadium was built by the dictator. For more on the relationship between Colo-Colo and Pinochet, see Daniel Matamala, *Goles y autogoles: historia política del fútbol chileno* (Santiago de Chile: Patagonia, 2015). For more on the political history of Chilean football see Brenda Else, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Joshua H. Nadel, *Fútbol!: Why Soccer Matters in Latin America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014).

7 Studies on football fandom have overwhelmingly focused on violence and masculinity, rarely paying attention to sonic practices of fandom. When they have, these studies have largely focused on textuality and genealogy. Recent studies have started to examine the sociosonic implications of fan practice. See Luis Achondo, 'A Cry for Palestine: Vocal Practice and Imaginaries of Palestinian-Ness among Chilean Football Supporters of Club Deportivo Palestino', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 30/2 (2021); Luis Achondo, 'The Silent Majority: Social and Aural Silence in the Games of Chile Men's National Football Team', *Soccer & Society* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2022.2053523>; K. E. Goldschmitt, "'Joga bonito pelo mundo, guerreiro': Music, Transmedia Advertising, and Brasilidade in the 2006 World Cup", *Popular Music and Society* 34/4 (2011); Eduardo Herrera, 'Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding in Synchrony', *Ethnomusicology* 62/3 (2018); Max Jack, 'The Crowd in Flux: Atmosphere and the Governance of Public Affects at FC Union Berlin', *Ethnomusicology* 65/3 (2021); Michael O'Brien, 'El Bombo Loco: Sounding Alterity and Populism in Buenos Aires', *Ethnomusicology* 62/3 (2018); Michael O'Brien, 'From Soccer Chant to Sonic Meme: Sound Politics and Parody in Argentina's "Hit of the Summer"', *MUSICultures* 47 (2020).



Example 1 Non-melodic football chant.

unexplored. The aforementioned practices of fandom originally crystallized in Argentina in the 1960s, but they have long circulated throughout the region via television broadcasts, cassettes, and compact discs. The transnationalization of this fan style has intensified in the last couple of decades thanks to the expansion of digital technologies, especially social media. Even though stadiums are still central spaces for fan sociality, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and especially WhatsApp have become key sites for creative and social relationality.

Yet digital circulation has also advanced the fandom's violent dynamics. Since the culture's emergence, *hinchadas* have brawled to defend the honour and prestige of their clubs and peers.⁸ Today, violence functions as a form of social capital that can be transacted in larger networks with players, coaches, administrators, politicians, and the police. The primary trope to conceptualize the positivity of violence is *aguante* (roughly, 'endurance or stamina'), a concept that, signifying the fandom as a whole, receives significant attention in this article. If the circulation of chants has helped transnationalize the fandom, the discriminatory slurs, death threats, and stories of combat present in the lyrics have crucially mediated the dissemination of *aguante's* violent potentialities.

Drawing on virtual and in-site ethnographic work in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, this article examines uses of WhatsApp in *aguante*. I argue that the messaging app has fostered social and anti-social relations within and between *hinchadas*. *Hinchas* employ its creative affordances to digitally decentre creativity from individuals through the distribution of inventive tasks between geographically distant people. However, WhatsApp has also contributed to football violence by intimately spreading hate memes, aggressive chants, and videos of torture, among other forms of violent media. In illustrating that the messaging app can immerse and infect subjects in productive and destructive relationalities, this article ultimately underlines the social and anti-social potentialities of viral media and digital technologies.

Music scholars have amply discussed digital media's musical *affordances* – that is, the 'functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object'.⁹ Studies on fandom note that, bridging the virtual and visceral realms, social media has nurtured sonic ecosystems that promote intimate

8 Pablo Alabarces, *Crónicas del aguante. Fútbol, violencia y política* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012); José Garriga, *Haciendo amigos a las piñas: violencia y redes sociales de una hinchada de fútbol* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007); José Garriga, *Nosotros nos peleamos: violencia e identidad de una hinchada de fútbol* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2010); María Verónica Moreira, 'Etnografía sobre el honor y la violencia de una hinchada de fútbol en Argentina', *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales* 13 (2007); María Verónica Moreira, 'Aguante, generosidad y política en una hinchada de fútbol argentina', *Avá* 12 (2008).

9 Ian Hutchby, 'Technologies, Texts and Affordances', *Sociology* 35/2 (2001), 444.

relations, engender novel genres, and nurture participatory cultures.¹⁰ In positing that the production, consumption, and dissemination of digital media have encouraged musical interaction, this body of literature has ultimately married virality to sociality.

But while scholarship on the sociality of viral music media expands speedily, (ethno)musiological writings on the anti-social affordances of digital technologies remain scarce. Media scholars have noted the dangers of social media, but they have paid little attention to how digital sounds contribute to the violent erosion of social relations.¹¹ Even if some studies have examined hate speech utterances in multiplayer online video games, they have failed to theorize how digital media can negatively affect sociality.¹² Highlighting the socially destructive potentialities of WhatsApp, this article argues that sonic virality has fostered sociality and anti-sociality within and between hinchadas. The messaging app has not only facilitated the creation and socialization of chants but also the dissemination of violent media, which has contributed to the erosion of social relationality in the digital and visceral realms. All in all, this article foregrounds that the virological metaphors commonly employed to analyse digital circulation also present a deadly dimension.

Visceral and digital aguante

Sports ethnographers have stressed the radical worldview of football *supporters*, distinguishing them from *fans* based on their active engagement during matches and sociopolitical involvement in their clubs.¹³ Supporters see themselves as neither consumers nor devotees of athletes but as the central constituent of their clubs' social fabrics. Being more important than players, coaches, and directors, supporters claim that their practices of fandom are the fundamental component of the football spectacle. As Cachila, a Uruguayan hinchita, once told me, 'We all believe that we're the spectacle and not those twenty-two fuckers on the field.'¹⁴

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- 10 Paula Harper, "Unmute This": Captioning an (Audio)Visual Microgenre', *The Soundtrack* 9/1–2 (2016); Paula Harper, 'BEYONCÉ: Viral Techniques and the Visual Album', *Popular Music and Society* 42/1 (2019); Kyra D. Gaunt, 'YouTube, Twerking & You: Context Collapse and the Handheld Co-Presence of Black Girls and Miley Cyrus', *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 27/3 (2015); Byrd McDaniel, 'Popular Music Reaction Videos: Reactivity, Creator Labor, and the Performance of Listening Online', *New Media & Society* 23/6 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820918549>; Kiri Miller, *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kiri Miller, *Playable Bodies: Dance Games and Intimate Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 11 Milena Tsvetkova and Michael Macy, 'The Social Contagion of Antisocial Behavior', *Sociological Science* 2 (2015); Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 12 William Cheng, *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Wayne Marshall, 'Social Dance in the Age of (Anti-)Social Media: Fortnite, Online Video, and the Jook at a Virtual Crossroads', *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 31/4 (2019)5.
- 13 Alabarces, *Héroes, machos y patriotas*; Eduardo Archetti, 'Fútbol y ethos', *Monografías e Informes de Investigación* 1/7 (1984); Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26/1 (2002); Jack, 'The Crowd in Flux'.
- 14 Supporters tend to disparage other forms of fandom, perceiving expressions of devotion to performers as passive and inauthentic. Unsurprisingly, they tend to gender these forms of consumption and admiration as feminine – views that echo dominant narratives on fandom. Underlying how women exert agency through their fan practices, the literature

Social scientists have convincingly argued that a discourse known as *aguante* informs Argentina's culture of football.¹⁵ Even though *aguantar* (the infinitive of *aguante*) means to endure or support something or someone, the concept also points to a hyper-masculine honour code and prestige system that marks hinchas as tough, loyal, and passionate men. Although these scholars have noted that *aguante* sometimes signify expressions of loyalty and passion outside hinchadas, they emphasize that hinchas mostly prove and accumulate it through violent practices. Enduring fights, displaying bravado, and exhibiting combat knowledge mark hinchas as real men, bestowing them with notoriety and reputation. Those who actively participate in this violent mode of sociality have developed illegal networks with club workers, police, and politicians where they exchange their *aguante* for economic, social, and political goods.

Despite this increasing interest in the specificities of *aguante*, how sound mediates football experiences remains largely unexplored. Through sound and music, hinchas not only cheer for their teams but also compete internationally, promote stranger-sociality, stage ideological messages, and engage in conflict. Vocalizing football chants is the most conspicuous sonic practice of *aguante*. The content of these *contrafacta* ranges from expressions of camaraderie to the total dehumanization of rivals. Through sexist, homophobic, and racist profanities, the most aggressive types of chants depict rivals as men unable to fulfil heteronormative conceptualizations of manhood.¹⁶ In their lyrics, hinchas pit themselves against these allegedly failed embodiments of masculinity by presenting themselves as tough, loyal, and passionate subjects. The often-aggressive performance and vocalization of these chants play a key role in validating and giving meaning to the hostile values of *aguante*. As Eduardo Herrera writes, 'participatory moving-and-sounding in synchrony creates a performative social space that both enacts and gives frames of interpretation to manifestations of *aguante*'.¹⁷

Yet *aguante* can no longer be circumscribed to Argentina as it has taken over the entire Southern Cone.¹⁸ In the 1980s, this set of sonic practices began to circulate throughout the region at continental tournaments and via television broadcasts, putting geographically distant fans in dialogue and conflict both viscerally and analogically. If the regional Copa Libertadores de América (America's Liberators Cup) had already configured an imagined Latin American football community in the 1960s,¹⁹ the massification of television channels

on fanatics has overwhelmingly focused on female forms of fandom, somehow vindicating the conflation of consumption, mass culture, and femininity. See Norma Coates, 'Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s', *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15/1 (2003).

15 Alabarces, *Crónicas del aguante*; Garriga, *Haciendo amigos a las piñas*; Garriga, *Nosotros nos peleamos*; Moreira, 'Etnografía sobre el honor y la violencia de una hinchada de fútbol en Argentina'; Moreira, 'Aguante, generosidad y política en una hinchada de fútbol argentina'.

16 Javier S. Bundio, *La identidad se forja en el tablón: masculinidad, etnicidad y discriminación en los cantos de las hinchadas argentinas* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2020).

17 Herrera, 'Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Football Chants', 491.

18 Achondo, 'A Cry for Palestine'.

19 Pablo Palomino, *The Invention of Latin American Music: A Transnational History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

and devices reinforced this transnational public in the 1980s,²⁰ allowing Chilean and Uruguayan hinchas to consume and hear Argentine hinchadas on a weekly basis.²¹ Migratory processes, cable shows dedicated to specifically broadcasting the sounds of aguante, and DIY cassettes and compact discs densified these transnational networks in the 1990s. The growth of social media, expansion of continental championships, and proliferation of cable and streaming services fortified aguante's transnationalization in the twenty-first century. Today, hinchas outside Argentina not only consume but also adapt and repurpose practices of aguante, sometimes bypassing or influencing Argentine hinchadas in the process.

Digital media has also facilitated the collaborative creative processes favoured by hinchas. Chants have never been created by only one individual; artistic tasks have always been distributed equitably among members of hinchadas. Historically, these collaborations occurred in the cavernous spaces underneath the stands. Hinchas got to these spaces hours before games so as to mingle and discuss potential sources for chants. Once they found a suitable melody, everyone started to propose stanzas. When the chants were finally composed, they were taught to other hinchas. With the emergence of social media, these creative and pedagogical processes have shifted from the visceral to the digital world. Hinchas now create chants outside of co-present groupings at stadiums, putting them into circulation on Facebook pages, YouTube channels, Twitter accounts, and Instagram profiles before games. They interconnect these spaces via trans-platform hashtags labelling clubs, musicians, and hinchadas. The most popular sites accrue millions of views and followers, turning their administrators into transnational trendsetters of aguante. It is in the geographically distant distribution of creativity that WhatsApp has become the main medium to create football chants.

The affordances of WhatsApp

Created in 2009 and acquired by Facebook in 2014, WhatsApp is the default mode of message communication outside Canada and the United States, averaging two billion users worldwide. As SMS messages have never been free of charge in the Southern Cone, the app has conveniently filled this communication vacuum, becoming the default 'passage point for the management of friendship, family, and work routines'.²² Although it emerged as a messaging network, it has rapidly evolved into a form of social media. South Americans perceive WhatsApp 'as a highly versatile, all-encompassing space of encounter, meaning-making, and coordination where entrance barriers are low and exit costs are high'.²³ It has gradually moved away from simple one-to-one text exchanges, affording the sharing of videos, images,

20 Pablo Alabarces, *Fútbol y patria* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2007).

21 Between 1978 and 1990, the Argentine football league was arguably the most competitive one in the world. In that timespan, the Argentina national team reached three World Cup finals, winning two. Argentine football was accordingly a highly popular and profitable product.

22 Mora Matassi, Pablo J Boczkowski, and Eugenia Mitchelstein, 'Domesticating WhatsApp: Family, Friends, Work, and Study in Everyday Communication', *New Media & Society* 21/10 (2019), 2194–5.

23 Matassi, Boczkowski, and Mitchelstein, 'Domesticating WhatsApp', 2195.

sounds, emojis, stickers, GIFs, geolocation, and the forwarding of media taken from other digital ecosystems, both in group and in person. Developers have recently created a desktop version that, including all the aforementioned sharing capacities, allows users to access and put into circulation files from their computers.

Legal scholar Chinmay Arun notes that WhatsApp presents ubiquitous, private, and data-tracking affordances.²⁴ In addition to mediating friends, family, and professional networks, users understand the app as secure and private, mainly due to its end-to-end encryption. Per developers, only the person sending the message and those receiving it can read it; not even WhatsApp can see these exchanges. The fact that the app removes metadata when compressing information enhances its perceived privacy. All in all, WhatsApp allows users to privately, securely, and intimately craft and share discrete forms of media, thus functioning as a formidable technology for content creation and dissemination.

WhatsApp contains a plethora of sonic affordances. In addition to allowing the viral circulation of sonorous media such as songs and music videos, it facilitates the creation of sonic content through its live audio recording option – a feature that was later imitated by iPhone and other messaging apps such as Signal and Telegram. Pressing the microphone icon at the interface's bottom right, users can record sounds and immediately share them with individual people and groups (see [Figure 1](#)). Although WhatsApp crystallized as a text messaging app, people in the Southern Cone use this recording option extensively – sometimes even more than texting. These recordings range from sung melodies to voicemail-style missives, being used while walking down the street or simply to avoid the rather small smartphone keyboards. [Figure 1](#) illustrates how these audio recordings are embedded in group conversations, with users freely responding via text or audio. Since some people tend to share long audios – larger than a minute, sometimes – developers have introduced a feature that allows their acceleration by 1.5 and 2.0 times. For example, listening to the 24-second recording of [Figure 1](#) takes 16 seconds with the 1.5 option or 12 seconds with the 2.0 option.

Since the implementation of audio recording and sharing, WhatsApp has become the central space for musical creativity among hinchadas. It has allowed geographically distant hinchas to share musical ideas, collaboratively work on chants, and ultimately craft and distribute content.

Media, creativity, and circulation

Although hinchas interact on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, WhatsApp is the default space for digital sociality. 'It's where everything is organized and shared', Miguel once told me. In fact, everyday interactions mostly occur through the messaging app – especially through groups, where hinchas debate ideas, organize political activities, and develop meaningful connections regardless of physical place. The translocality of WhatsApp is particularly useful in distributing creative tasks, fostering artistic interactions, and creating media content. The following ethnographic vignette illustrates its creative affordances.

24 Chinmayi Arun, 'On WhatsApp, Rumours, and Lynchings', *Economic and Political Weekly* 54/6 (2019).



Figure 1 (Colour online) Screen capture of a WhatsApp group.

I had been following the Facebook page Trovazules (‘Blue Troubadours’) for a while when I decided to message them requesting an interview. Many of the chants they had uploaded to social media had gone viral among U. de Chile hinchas. Unlike most of the contrafacta sung by the hinchada, their lyrics tend to avoid violent and disorderly utterances, focusing instead on group belonging and club loyalty. See, for instance, their contrafactum of ‘20 Veces’ (‘20 Times’) by Chilean cumbia star Américo:

Te lo digo otra vez
 Llevo al Bulla en la piel
 Aún recuerdo esos duros momentos
 Vividos en el descenso

[I tell you again
 The Noise [U. de Chile’s nickname] is under
 my skin
 I still remember those difficult times

Si vuelves a perder	During the relegation
Volveremos otra vez	If you lose again
Porque nadie dijo que era fácil	We'll be there again
Ser un bullanguero	Because nobody said that it would be easy to
Si vuelves a caer	be a bullanguero [an U. de Chile hinchista]
En la cancha estaré	If you fall again
De pendejo te he seguido	I'll be in the stadium again
De pendejo te he alentado	I've followed you since I was a little kid
Te llevo en el corazón	I've cheered for you since I was a little kid
León, te juro	I carry you in my heart
Que no importan los resultados	Lion [U. de Chile's nickname], I swear to you
De pendejo te he seguido	Results don't matter
De pendejo te he alentado	I've followed you since I was a little kid
La U. de Chile es mi pasión	I've cheered for you since I was a little kid
Sin condición	U. de Chile is my passion
Por ti estoy descontrolado	With no conditions
Como un loco enamorado	You drive me crazy
	Like a mad lover]

Joaquín, the project's organizer, replied to my message almost immediately, sending me his phone number so that we could chat on WhatsApp. He invited me to his house on Saturday morning because they were going to record some chants before the U. de Chile game. Like most young proletarians, he still lived with his parents. As he knew that I was not familiar with La Granja (an impoverished neighbourhood in southern Santiago), he attached a map alongside the address so that I could avoid the turfs dominated by rival hinchadas (Figure 2).

It was a cold morning, and his room – a homemade second floor filled with musical instruments – was freezing. For different reasons, the other members of Trovazules did not show up, so we ended up talking for hours. Joaquín told me that, although he has come up with most of their chants, they are always collectively arranged and finalized on WhatsApp. To do so, they make extensive use of its audio recording option. He even told me that one of the most popular videos on Facebook was a mashup of different WhatsApp recordings. He then pulled up his phone and showed me the Trovazules group, which interwove text messages with audio recordings of a contrafactum of the cumbia 'El Club del Amigo' ('The Friend's Club') by the local band Guachupé:

Será que por algo	[I know there's a reason
Esta hinchada está loca	Why this hinchada is insane
Dale, dale, oh	Let's go, oh
Va descontrolada	It's out of control
Y nada le importa	It doesn't care about anything



Figure 2 (Colour online) Map shared by Joaquín.

Son más que 90
 Una vida alentando
 Dale, dale, oh
 Siempre estoy contigo
 Perdiendo o ganando
 Vamos, vamos, vamos, León
 Bulla, a mí tú me enseñaste
 Nunca te voy a dejar
 Si al final siempre te voy a amar
 Porque este amor
 No se puede olvidar

It's more than 90 [minutes]
 It's a life cheering for you
 Let's go, oh
 I'll always be there for you
 Losing or winning
 Let's go, Lion
 Noise, you taught me
 I'll never abandon you
 In the end, I'll always love you
 Because this love
 Can't be forgotten]

While the texts were lyrical amendments, the audios were mainly melodic alterations. Some members considered the melody of 'El Club del Amigo' unsuitable for collective singing, suggesting an intervallic simplification (see Example 2). The final version ended up respecting the original melody.

I have observed similar uses of WhatsApp throughout the entire Southern Cone. In fact, when I began my preliminary fieldwork in 2016, a journalistic piece on the Argentine



Example 2 Melodic simplification of ‘El Club del Amigo’.

newspaper *Clarín* titled ‘The New Poets of the Stands’ caught my attention.²⁵ The article was based on an interview with Escuela de Tablones (‘The Schools of the Stands’), a group of hinchas of the Argentine team San Lorenzo that is often signalled as the most creative collective in the region. Indeed, most of the chants sung in South American stadiums are adaptations of their contrafacta. In the *Clarín* piece, an Escuela de Tablones member explained how the creative process functions:

I was on the bus, for example. While traveling on the 126, a musician got onto [the bus] and began to sing ‘Mi historia entre tus dedos’ [‘My Story In Between Your Fingers’] by [Italian balada singer] Gianluca Grignani with a ukulele, and I thought that it would be a great football chant. During the trip, which lasted half an hour, I came up with two stanzas. Once at my place, and for three weeks, I finished it and sent it to the WhatsApp group, where we all fixed it.²⁶

When I eventually met Escuela de Tablones a few years later, they confirmed to me the centrality of WhatsApp in their creative process, explaining that it allows them to engage in creative collaborations while geographically distant. Although the inventive process is enacted when one specific member sends an audio recording, colleagues immediately upload recordings with changes to lyrics and melody. Once they are done with the chant, they record it, upload it to social media, and share it with other San Lorenzo hinchas. Today, they rarely compose chants in stadiums.

These statements resonate with writings discussing the contingency and sociality of creativity. Ethnocentric accounts often define it as a ‘solitary, ex-nihilo’ process carried out by ‘highly exceptional and gifted individuals’.²⁷ Grounded on Romantic thought, however, these understandings tend to obscure the relationality and cultural contextuality of creativity.²⁸ Involving interactive, communicative, distributed, and improvisational dynamics, creativity is rarely fully located in one individual, involving many subjects and processes. Shaped

25 Gavira, ‘Nuevos poetas del tablón’.

26 Gavira, ‘Nuevos poetas del tablón’.

27 Eitan Wilf, ‘Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014), 398.

28 Nicholas Cook, *Music as Creative Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Pierre-Michel Menger, *The Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement under Uncertainty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Marc Perlman, ‘Meta-Ideologies of Textuality: Authorship, Plagiarism, Copyright’, *Signs and Society* 7/2 (2019); Michael Pickering and Keith Negus, ‘Rethinking Creative Genius’, *Popular Music* 23/2 (2004); Jessica Silbey, *The Eureka Myth: Creators, Innovators, and Everyday Intellectual Property* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Wilf, ‘Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity’.

by contingent frameworks, moreover, ingenious thought and praxis vary greatly depending on time and space. As anthropologist Eitan Wilf points out, ‘the ethnographic record suggests that creative agency results from socially informed and consequential, albeit always contingent, processes of socialization that can take many forms and that find expression in a broad spectrum of institutional sites’.²⁹ Informed by local conventions and relations, aguante conceives of creativity as a social practice. Creating chants is a collaborative process in which creative tasks are equally distributed among hinchas. Since these practices have traditionally occurred in physical spaces of fan socialization, they have played a key role in reinforcing communal bonds within hinchadas.

A trans-spatial, immediate space, WhatsApp has facilitated the distribution of creative tasks among distant peers, thereby affecting the sociality of aguante. Until recently, the creation of chants depended heavily on face-to-face encounters: hinchas discussed individual contributions, melodic alterations, and lyrical amendments for hours before games. After creating a chant, they had to introduce it to their peers, first under and then in the stands. The process of composing a chant, teaching it to others, and finally reaching the stadium could last months. WhatsApp has allowed hinchas to bypass these barriers of mediation. Like in other South American participatory cultures, the messaging app has limited the number of necessary rehearsals and face-to-face encounters.³⁰ Social media platforms, and especially WhatsApp, have become central arenas for communal expressions of creativity, digitalizing aguante’s collaborative dynamics. Stadium interaction is now about practising chants, collectively enjoying sound practice, and competing with rival hinchadas.

Social media has thus sustained and expanded the sociality of aguante’s creativity. This digital relationality has nurtured processes of remediation – the act of repurposing media across different platforms.³¹ In fact, many contrafacta have become media content that is consumed exclusively online. For example, Escuela de Tablones have videos with almost one million views that have never reached the stands (see [Figure 3](#)). In other words, hinchas flock to social media not only to learn but also to listen to chants.

However, the messaging app has disruptive potential, too. As Arun writes, ‘it is possible that WhatsApp exacerbates and amplifies harmful speech’, thereby inciting violence.³² In the aguante world, it has helped curate and make violent content viral.

The virality of violent media

I immediately regretted not having turned off the auto-download option while I shakily paused and deleted the video someone sent to the WhatsApp group. I had assumed that it was connected to the group’s main purpose: coordinating the activities of an educational project for the children of Puente Alto, an impoverished neighbourhood in Santiago. Instead, the

29 Wilf, ‘Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity’, 401.

30 Violet Cavicchi Muñoz, ‘Vibrant Media: Animating Music and Indigeneity in an Andean Musical Technoculture’ (DPhil diss., Brown University, 2020).

31 J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

32 Arun, ‘On WhatsApp, Rumours, and Lynchings’, 31.



Figure 3 (Colour online) Escuela de Tablones's YouTube video.

shared media showed U. de Chile people torturing a Colo-Colo hinchita. It was the source of the memes of a naked, beaten-up man that had been circulating within the U. de Chile hinchada over the past couple of days. Like on Facebook, many hinchitas celebrated the video and torture on the WhatsApp group. Some even asked why the tormentors did not kill the brutalized hinchita – a member of a violent collective of the Colo-Colo hinchada. A,³³ a female hinchita, eventually complained about the torture video, respectfully yet forcefully asserting that the WhatsApp 'group was not created for sharing violence'. B, a male hinchita notoriously known for his involvement in criminal and violent activity, defiantly responded, 'Do you think they shouldn't have done it?' C and D backed B, as the following exchange illustrates:

C: Glad those dogs got what they deserved.

D: More than happy. Actually, they should've got more.

C: I've fought face to face with those morons and they're pussies. I was lucky to make it [alive], otherwise who knows what would've happened.

B: [Clap emojis] That's why I asked. I don't know who sent that [message].

D: They should've stabbed his bare ass.

B: That fucker stabbed the guys in Russia during the World Cup. That fucker kidnaped X years ago and dropped him on the highway. That's why I'm asking the person who sent that message [why they said that].

33 As this is sensitive information, instead of giving pseudonyms, I have decided to anonymise everyone who was involved in this translated digital conversation.

- C: I understand the way of thinking of those who don't share our way of living and that they would be surprised that something like this could happen. But you must understand that those morons are worse than that, brother.
- B: I don't understand it. I think it sucks. [The person who sent the message] could snitch on us. Or something else.

A did not back down and kept condemning the act, adding that she did not want to get those kinds of videos on her phone. Nevertheless, the hinchas kept harassing A, who eventually decided to exit the WhatsApp group permanently, terminating her participation in the community project.

This pithy digital exchange illustrates that WhatsApp can help infect intimate spheres with destructive media. Focusing mainly on cyberbullying, media scholars have noted that the messaging app has contributed to violence by allowing abusers to intimately harass victims.³⁴ In the preceding instance, WhatsApp forced A to deal with the torture video and subsequent distressing conversation in the intimacy of her phone. Yet this violent intimacy not only infested her digital but also visceral world. After the digital conflict sparked by the polluted video, A left the group and ceased her participation in the educational initiative. She had previously told me that, until finding this fan project, she had found it difficult to navigate the hinchada's hyper-masculine networks. After finally carving a space for herself within the U. de Chile fanbase, she was once again ostracized due to the digital violence that intimately infested her phone.

The vignette also foregrounds that WhatsApp has permitted the aestheticization and virulent spread of violent media. Hinchas have taken advantage of the app's content-creation affordances and have turned warfare acts into finite expressions of expressive culture. While fights, tortures, and other violent practices used to be experienced only by perpetrators, bystanders, and targets, hinchas can now record and live stream these events, using them to later create memes, videos, and other forms of media content. It is well known that social media networks have contagiously platformed misinformation and hate speech despite, and sometimes because of, its algorithms and moderators.³⁵ Yet unlike other digital platforms, WhatsApp is an unmoderated network, allowing the free circulation of violent texts, images, memes, audios, and videos.³⁶ In so doing, the messaging app has created a digital infrastructure in which aestheticized expressions of aguante warfare have gone viral.

WhatsApp's unmoderated, creative, and repurposing affordances have also facilitated the infection of non-violent contrafacta with hostile meanings. David Novak has noted that

34 Dana Aizenkot and Gabriela Kashy-Rosenbaum, 'Cyberbullying in WhatsApp Classmates' Groups: Evaluation of an Intervention Program Implemented in Israeli Elementary and Middle Schools', *New Media & Society* 20/12 (2018).

35 Emilio Ferrara and Zeyao Yang, 'Measuring Emotional Contagion in Social Media', *PLOS ONE* 10/11 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0142390>; Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

36 Vaidyanathan, *Antisocial Media*.

remediation can unpredictably feed circulating media into new practices and expressions.³⁷ K. E. Goldschmitt has similarly highlighted the decontextualizing affordances of transmedia, showing that circulation can infect musical and football media with new meanings.³⁸ Although Trovazules and Escuela de Tablones, the two collectives discussed in this article, do not employ aggressive utterances in their lyrics, most hinchas in the Southern Cone do so – even when adapting the contrafacta of these non-violent groups. See, for instance, this arrangement made by the hinchada of Boca Juniors of one of Escuela de Tablones’s chants:

Al gallinero ya se lo prendimos fuego	[We already burned down the henhouse
A San Lorenzo lo corrimos en Boedo	[River Plate’s stadium]
A Avellaneda lo defiende un policía	We kick San Lorenzo’s asses in Boedo [San
Ay, qué putas que son las hinchadas unidas	Lorenzo’s neighbourhood]
Quiero que sepan que el Xeneize es mi	The police guard Avellaneda [the
alegría	neighbourhood of two rival teams]
Aunque no entiendan que por Boca doy la	Ow, all the hinchadas are a bunch of whores
vida	I want them to know that the Xeneize [Boca
Cuando me muera no quiero nada de flores	Juniors’s nickname] is my happiness
Yo quiero un trapo que tenga esos colores	Even if they don’t understand that I give up
	my life for Boca
	I don’t want flowers when I die
	I want a banner with these colours]

Some contrafacta have been infected with discriminatory expressions, as well:

Qué feo ser bostero y boliviano	[How awful is to be a bostero [manure-
Y en una villa tener que vivir	person, nickname for Boca Juniors fans]
La hermana revolea la cartera,	and Bolivian
La vieja chupa pijas por ahí	To have to live in a slum
Bostero, bostero, bostero,	The sister sleeps with everyone
Bostero, no lo pienses más	The old lady gives blowjobs somewhere
Andate a vivir a Bolivia,	Bostero, bostero, bostero,
Toda tu familia está allá	Bostero, don’t think about it anymore
	Move to Bolivia
	Your entire family is there]

Thanks to digital media, hinchadas endlessly consume, recreate, and repurpose chants, inserting hate slurs, stories of combat, death threats, and other destructive utterances into originally non-violent compositions.

37 David Novak, ‘Cosmopolitanism, Remediation, and the Ghost World of Bollywood’, *Cultural Anthropology* 25/1 (2010).

38 Goldschmitt, “Joga bonito pelo mundo, guerreiro”.

Although it may be tempting to assert that these utterances remain in the symbolic realm, they do have sociosonically destructive effects. In May 2017, for instance, the Afro-Colombian player Frank Fabra left the game between his squad Boca Juniors and Estudiantes de la Plata after the rival hinchada sang a racist chant against him for several minutes. As he later recognized in an interview, the sonic intensity and aural immersion created by the collective vocalization of the disruptive *contrafactum* overwhelmed him, breaking his poise.³⁹ Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case as several athletes have reacted similarly after being sonically targeted through discriminatory chants.

Although infected content is not always sonorous, chant remediation has uniquely contributed to the digital and material metastasis of *aguante's* lethal potentialities. The reflexive circulation of the *aguante* discourse has been significantly mediated by the consumption and repurpose of *contrafacta* – many of them contaminated with death threats, hatred slurs, and stories of combat, among other violent utterances. In resonating with contingent conditions of violence and alienation, sonic media has helped exacerbate local hostilities and subjectivities. When vulnerable organisms have reflexively engaged in the *aguante* discourse, they have frequently been sickened with extreme views – many of which portray others as radical alterities that must be violently dominated, if not exterminated. These radicalized groups engage in sonic and material conflict not only with rivals but also with peers – clashes that end up eroding both inter- and intra-group relationality. This virulent process began with analogue and face-to-face sonorous exchanges, but digital sounds have played an essential role in turning *aguante* into a pandemic force with the potential to destructively infect fan sociality both digitally and viscerally. The violent virality of *aguante*, in other words, is significantly sonic.

Divergent digital and legal infrastructures between the Global North and South partly inform *aguante's* destructive virality. Arun argues that weak legal safeguards and forms of conflict alien to northern developers make the southern populations vulnerable to the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI).⁴⁰ She writes:

[I]f privileged white men are designing the technology and the business models for AI, how will they design for the South? The answer is that they will design in a manner that is at best an uneasy fit, and at worst amplifies existing systemic harm and oppression to horrifying proportions.⁴¹

The articles by Mike Levine and Anaar Desai-Stephens in this volume illustrate that uneven technological conditions in Cuba and India have enacted forms of virality that differ from those in Euro-America. Regretfully, creators in the Global North have designed their technologies without taking into account conditions of digital and material scarcity and inequality in

39 *Infobae*, 'El duro relato de Frank Fabra por los insultos racistas', 9 May 2017, www.infobae.com/deportes-2/2017/05/09/el-duro-relato-de-frank-fabra-por-los-insultos-racistas/.

40 Arun, 'On WhatsApp, Rumours, and Lynchings'; Chinmayi Arun, 'AI and the Global South: Designing for Other Worlds', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*, ed. Markus D. Dubber, Frank Pasquale, and Sunit Das (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

41 Arun, 'AI and the Global South', 591.

the Global South. As Arun points out, tools such as WhatsApp, when ignoring contingent dynamics of hate, can exacerbate and amplify local inequities and modes of violence.⁴² In the aguante context, the messaging app has created unmoderated channels where remediated tortures, unruly chants, death threats, and other forms of hostile content have infected disparate smartphones. WhatsApp's ubiquitous, unmoderated, and data-tracking affordances have intersected with larger dynamics of inaudibility in impoverished spaces – a disregard for the lives of the poor that has caused conflict to erupt into violence.⁴³ In this process, aguante's virality has become infectiously deadly – a destructive contagion that has eroded and sometimes destroyed social relationality not only digitally but also viscerally.

Digital violence underscores the destructive dimension of the virological metaphors commonly employed to discuss media circulation. Digital violence, like digital sounds, can be viral, contagious, infectious, and even pandemical. Martin Daughtry argues that 'like sound, and in part through sound, *violent acts are immersive and omnidirectional*, enveloping perpetrators, bystanders, and targets into a single, expansive field of variegated and unpredictable effects'.⁴⁴ The resonance between sound and violence noted by Daughtry can also be expanded to social media, which can epidemically spread violence in myriad and unpredictable ways. As Manuel Castells aptly points out, the productive affordances of technology should not obscure its destructive potentialities.⁴⁵ In making this argument, I do not seek to excuse subjects from their role in the production and dissemination of violence, but rather underline the fact that social media has configured digital infrastructures upon which human-created content can easily go viral and contaminate social relationality both digitally and viscerally.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the social and anti-social affordances of WhatsApp. I have shown that the messaging app mediates musical creation in aguante, illustrating that a significant portion of the sociocreative relations involved in chant-creation occurs digitally nowadays. It affords the socially distanced distribution of creativity among hinchas, decentering it from solitary geniuses. In promoting sociocreative relations, WhatsApp has digitally expanded the musical sociality of hinchadas.

Yet the messaging app has also fostered anti-sociality in viral and intimate ways. Violent sounds, images, and videos have spread widely on WhatsApp. In many ways, WhatsApp has become more unmanageable, infectious, and ultimately more dangerous than any other social media. It is telling that most of the current disinformation circulating throughout

42 Arun, 'On WhatsApp, Rumours, and Lynchings'.

43 Achondo, 'The Silent Majority'.

44 J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 175.

45 Manuel Castells, 'The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy', in *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy*, ed. Gustavo Cardoso and Manuel Castells (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2005).

Latin America spreads through the messaging app. WhatsApp illustrates that digital violence, like digital sounds, can be infectious.

This dialectic of sociality and anti-sociality departs from existing trends in sports and media studies. While football scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on the more violent aspects of supporter cultures, studies on digital music have mainly examined the socially productive potentials of circulation. If football fandom can be about sociality, digital contagion can also be about violence. Digital aguante ultimately illustrates the destructive and productive, social and anti-social, utopian and dystopian potentials of virality.

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