

## CAPULLO Y SORULLO<sup>1</sup>

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I have always loved la “Cumbia de la boda.” I say always, but I first heard this song the summer of 1990 when I was graduating from college. A friend, her family, introduced me to La Sonora Dinamita y Los Bukis. They even took me to a dance in Oakland where I danced all night with a chaparrito whose name I never asked. I have always lived in music—but I was new to cumbia. My house has never been a Spanish language household. And, my friend, her father, had a special distaste for that part of me—pinning my lack of understanding on a deep shame he was certain I had for being Mexican. English is my first language—though I can talk a decent game with lyrics from Emmanuel, and now, Sonora Dinamita, because I live in music, in the house that language built.

“And, what I say is not one lie.” I’m telling you the testimony given in this cumbia. This cumbia that knows, “y el silencio se hace daño.” I know too—a word is spoken not against the silence, but within it. This cumbia tells a story of the end of one relationship—the journey of departing from each other once a truth is spoken. Capullo y Sorullo have a marriage long enough to bring to life nine children. Eight of them the same “rubio, como madagilla” of their mother. There are a lot of ways to tell this—this is only one—each story has a social life, when a story told speaks to a moment. I’m not talking about “mama’s baby and papa’s maybe” right now—not directly. I’m talking Sorullo—not as allegory but as one of us. I’m talking the youngest child—not as allegory, but as one of us. The song’s refrain is a familiar one—is that child mine? The reasoning is familiar too—I see something in him I do not see in myself.

I'm not ashamed to be Mexican; I am not ashamed to be the who and what of me. I grew up in the sonic socioeconomic nabe I did—me and my folks: Ask Dorothy, I will never deny my people. Capullo's punch line hits me in my compromised abdomen every time. "Oye, Sorullo, el negrito es el único que es tuyo." Hit: el negrito. Hit: the laughter at this joke from a community of listeners and a community of singers. Hit: the meaning found, and repeated. Hit: "Ella se fue con los ocho, Y el con el negro cargo." Hit: truth parts ways, and blackness is both a punishment and a lie. Hit: Si los amaba a todos por igual y los tenía en el alma, ¿por qué dejó "el negrito" con Sorullo?

When you lay down to put your jeans on, everything seems to fit better. Cumbia. I'm not speaking casually. When we dance our way out of our constrictions, we can dance our way into them as well. I think, because it ain't illegal yet.

The who and what of my life is something I'm constantly reminded of—from the community of listeners and the community of tellers. When I speak, I say things. When I say some things, I'm told, "that's my x talking." I have a lot of xs: studied words (a PhD), ancestors (Diné, Congo, Mexican), sexuality (is all you ever need), neighborhoods (Potrero Hill, Streets of San Francisco) and gods (Roman Catholic, descendant of spiritualists and paleros). This idea: Because I have a lot of xs, they shape what I say, and how it is heard. As a person, my being, my thoughts, and my actions are accepted or rejected—based on the perception of my xs, and a perceived policed relationship that these xs have to us. An us some wants to believe to be without so many xs).

The "Cumbia de la boda" amplifies and rests on desire—particularly the desire to speak of intimacies in terms of individual bodies, especially individual bodies paired in heterosexual unions, and the so-called biological productions of these unions. The "Cumbia de la boda" amplifies and rests on desire—to locate the

existence of us in a single body, a single moment, a temporary temporal, perhaps a lifetime, an accidental love, a violation, a reason, a location, or an explanation. All of that keeps us from being us—and strains the relations we have with us, pretending we remain somehow connected, but not a part of each other.

This is not my x talking.

Cumbia. Give me a map and I will identify the black and red in the idea of Latin America. These islands (Cuba, Puerto Rico and the DR), here, these maroon(ed) communities, here, even the global south seems to be a southern Latin America, not Mexico. Herman Bennet already told us: Mexico was home to a diverse number of Africans in the 17th century (the largest and most diverse black community in the Americas of the time)—were they contained? In what containers? This is not The Ballad of Capullo. This is not “Cucurrucucú Paloma,” not even if sung by Mireya I. Ramos of Mariachi Flor de Toloache. This is acting like we know where Africa ends and America begins—because we claim those ends and beginnings can be located in singular lives, moments, and times. In me, and my xs, and in Is like mine, not an I/we of us. Some of us attempt to convince ourselves we know a—what, where, who, and why blackness.

Adin<sup>2</sup> here is a list of names of black Latinx people. K'é: relations. I am pointing to us ourselves: each one everyone. I/we are the black community—regardless of national or linguistic heritages and relations (slavery and colonization). Adin here are the questions: Where did your curls come from? Who is the Navajo? Why even tell people you're Congo, you can pass if you want to (subtext: I would)? When we try to locate blackness in these distant, accidental, or one-time relations we only push it away—outside. We leave with the butter. I grew up with these rules, and not only because of my camouflage. Our cousin Phillip would not allow my Uncle Don to acknowledge him when

they were at Sacred Heart. My uncle had to act as if they were strangers. Even though his brother, my Uncle Norman, was the perfect Chief Bromden, he could not acknowledge his cousin Phil either. Everyone knew Norman was Don's little brother, and who wants to be an Indian anyway. Cousin Phil was French and Basque—neither black or Indian.

Like the Isley's, I got work to do. We got work to do together. We aren't the only ones, but you can't do someone else's work, you can only do your own.

There are other intimacies, histories, and structures that need attending, as one attends a beloved life, especially when that beloved life is their own. A possibility space of an I/we, gente, could be to move away from linear, causal, temporal individuals, known as the lineal descendant. We are not a community of lines produced by marriage. We can think of me in another way.

Love. Carrying us/them in the I/we soul. There is something beyond acceptance of me, my differences, all my xs that seem to give you the impression that I (my thoughts and politics) could not come from inside of you. Baby, can I touch your body? Conquer our own disbelief. This is my message to you: This is the truth, baby. You're just another part of me.<sup>3</sup>

C/S

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> La Sonora Dinamita, "Capullo Y Sorullo" featuring América Sierra, November 18, 2016, music video, 4:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiW0RSwDBZo>.

<sup>2</sup> Diné Bizaad for zero, nothing, often used to indicate something is absent.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Jackson, "Another Part of Me," music video, October 2, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vwHQNQ88cM>.