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## 'The body is our masterpiece': learning to transform in Lima's *tambores* music

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I discuss the use of rehearsal drills among the *tambores* musicians of Villa El Salvador (VES), an underprivileged yet emerging district of Lima, Peru that was built and populated by Andean and mestizo settlers starting in the 1970s. *Tambores* is a drum genre derived from Afro-Brazilian *batucada* music that incorporates community-oriented values inherited from the seminal ideological principles established by the first wave of rural settlers. Starting in the early 2000s, grassroots organisations led by VES adolescents began developing and disseminating local pedagogies to promote *tambores* music as a conduit for galvanising communal engagement and solidarity. The article shows how VES musicians deploy rehearsal routines to fortify their grassroots initiatives, seeking to enfranchise other adolescents by incorporating bodily techniques for self-empowerment and dynamic socialisation. Through this pedagogical programme, *tambores* musicians employ the rehearsal as a space where the district's youth may fine-tune and 'transform' their bodies and social attitudes in order to become engaged and positively motivated members of the VES community.

### KEYWORDS

Peru; practice theory; *batucada*; music pedagogy; neo-Andean youth cultures

It is a cold afternoon in Villa El Salvador (VES), an underprivileged district inhabited by migrants of mestizo and Andean descent in the outskirts of Lima, Peru. The members of La Retumba (The Resound), a cultural organisation and drum group formed by local teenagers, begin rehearsing on the dusty roadside of a congested street. The group's leader, twenty-two-year-old Omar, is standing in front of the group carrying a *repique* (midsize drum). After conducting stretching exercises, he counts off, makes a sign by raising his hand, and ten adolescents start playing their drums with grace and command. They are learning the rhythmic patterns of a Brazilian *batucada* style and developing the ability to keep a steady beat while syncing their various patterns into a unified texture. One of the hallmarks of *tambores*, another name given to this brand of *batucada* music in VES, is the precise coordination of interlocking patterns, that is, individual segments integrated into a rhythmically harmonised sonic structure.

A single musician cannot play *tambores* alone. An ensemble requires at least three different sections of drums, commonly named *repique*, *bombo* (bass drum), and *tarola* (snare drum) played in an interlocking fashion. Due to this requirement, *batucada* is envisioned in VES as an intersubjective art form: its cornerstone is the synchronisation of

physical activity between partners. Tambores demands one-on-one cooperation and coordinated physical effort. Thus, musicians tend to gauge the quality of their music not necessarily based on the final sonic product but on the success of achieving a state of communal entrainment. Within tambores cultural organisations, the enactment of entrainment has become both a symbol and embodiment of social unity. Participants believe that their performances are concerned more with the articulation of local sociomoral values and thereafter they perform with their bodies to cue important civic ideals. In this context, the VES adolescents approach rehearsals as spaces where they can train their bodies, as well as their emotions, beliefs, and cognitions, in a way that benefits not only the quality of the music but also the wellbeing of their organisations.

The practice routines maintained by these groups not only strive to produce technical or stylistic perfection, but to achieve a tight organisation of communal bodily movement. Rehearsals take place in parks and on street corners every week. During these public appearances, musicians such as Omar and his team work on developing stamina and coordination. Oftentimes, participants relate the aesthetic enjoyment of their performances to their enactment of togetherness and sustained loudness (*potencia*). Musicians who belong to La Retumba and other similar organisations affirm that such transient but memorable moments of communion are morally desirable and meaningful. Because participants consider their organisations to be their ‘true families’ (*nuestras verdaderas familias*), these enactments of entrainment substantiate forms of empathy that hold together members by interconnecting their lives through shared emotion and experience. The joy and fulfilment they manifestly undergo while honing their skills also form part of a process by which a legitimising cultural capital is embodied, performed, memorised, and praised. Such capital is the process itself and its motor mechanics is based on bodily activity that promotes resilience.

During my fieldwork (2012–2013), I learned that tambores participants describe entrainment, the process by which independent but coupled rhythmical systems or living organisms assume the same or related periods (Lucas et al. 2011: 2), as instances in which ‘there was *energía*’ (energy), or they ‘felt *energía*’ while playing. Moreover, when asked about the most fascinating aspect of being members in their organisations, musicians of La Retumba affirmed that ‘experiencing *energía*’ constituted the main drive behind all their efforts. Considering participants’ commitment to a strict agenda of practice sessions—something that rarely pays back in terms of monetary compensation or official recognition—*experiencing energía* stands out as an important goal in tambores learning activities, a goal that as I will show correlates to their pledge to cultivate a socially conscious music education.

In this article, I examine the rehearsal routines by which VES musicians build *energía* and empathy. Their grassroots initiative seeks to enfranchise the adolescents by incorporating techniques for self-empowerment and dynamic socialisation. Through this means, they advance learning processes emphasising focal determination, skill mastery, and spontaneity. Ultimately, tambores leaders wish to use their rehearsals as spaces where the adolescents can ‘transform’ their bodies and social attitudes into facets of an ideally engaged and positively motivated member of the community. However, the type of transformation they often refer to should not be summarily categorised as ‘healing’ or ‘trance,’ for instance, even though participants certainly recall experiencing profound states of joy and *communitas* during and after rehearsals. As explained below, in tambores

performativity, ‘transformation’ does not refer to a concrete event but to interlinked chains of events: a *process of becoming socially proactive* by reactivating and fine-tuning relational actions and skills. Similarly, transformation points to a common notion shared by VES tambores leaders, which is the realisation that the local adolescents have been rendered vulnerable, passive, and physically rigid through the deleterious reinforcement of experiences of racism in the Peruvian capital city. In this context, leaders argue that the ‘bodywork’ carried out by their organisations is meant to tackle the physical vestiges of discriminatory policies that has been a staple of Lima’s ruling *criollos* (Western-educated white and mestizo elites) since colonial times (1550–1824). My usage of the term bodywork builds from Tatro’s investigation of extreme physical exertion among Mexico City’s working-class *punk* vocalists. Tatro argues that through physical exertions like screaming vocalizations ‘Mexico City’s punks also perform a kind of bodywork’ that enables them to mediate their everyday experiences of social marginalisation as members of a neglected blue-collar work force in a liberal metropolis (Tatro 2014: 435). Tatro introduces an insightful approach to music-making as bodywork in order to stress the importance of paying attention to the kinetic schemes that shape aural discourses but also the way in which these schemes are molded by the body’s interactions with societal requirements and pressures [Figure 1](#).

Analysing the process by which VES adolescents transform into proactive members of their community by means of bodywork and entrainment provides a case study that clearly interconnects the role of music pedagogy and bodily movement as platforms for efficacious political action in underprivileged urban regions of Latin America. While



**Figure 1.** Batucada rehearsal at Parque Huascar, Villa El Salvador (June 2013).

this study touches upon the performance of Afro-Brazilian batucada music—a practice that is part of a growing transnational movement around the world and that has been already aptly documented and discussed (see Pravaz 2010)—my focus here is not on the VES adoption and stylistic transformation of this Afro-Brazilian tradition, which I have addressed elsewhere (Odría 2018a, 2018b, 2017, 2016), but on the social and bodily processes by which participants reshape an idealised sociomoral identity. The shared emotions that give rise to their experiences of *energía* have become the source of embodied cultural capital mediated through kinetic guidelines.

### VES tambores: a brief introduction

VES is located on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, seventeen miles south of downtown Lima. This area used to be a desert. Over more than forty years of communal work, that started in 1971, local *vecinos* (neighbours) have transformed the land into a liveable environment which, nonetheless, still requires extensive improvement to its infrastructure. Most *vecinos* are migrants of Andean and mestizo descent. In the early 1970s, they left their villages and towns to escape the generalised poverty and lack of prospects decimating the Peruvian Andes. At least 80% of this original population came from the Central and Southern Andes. Many were Aymara and Quechua-speaking peoples as well as rural residents of mixed ancestry. They came to Lima hoping to provide a better future for their families.

Due to the political and economic centralism that has characterised the country since its colonial inception (Gootenberg 2014; Jacobsen 1993; Nugent 1994), Peru's rural inhabitants have been neglected. The central state based in Lima has sponsored a disdain for indigenous communities and their cultures while enforcing the primacy of *criollo* values loosely based on the Western concepts of liberalism, development, and progress but also on post-colonial assumptions regarding the interconnection between race, class, and power (Archibald 2003; Cadena 2007; Escobar 2011). Based on perceived race, *criollos* have constructed a hierarchical aspect to Peruvian society where indigenous peoples and blacks are placed at the bottom. Thus, communities living in poor rural locations have struggled to improve their low socioeconomic status.

Within this context of post-colonial marginalisation, the most effective strategy for social mobility has been seen to involve migrating to Lima. In some cases, migration allowed peasants to access the benefits of the city's infrastructure. Nonetheless, despite the migrants' determination to achieve their dreams by, for example, studying or working steadily, state policies have thwarted the ability of migrants to access resources that are readily available for white and certain mestizo power groups in Lima (Barrón 2008).

The VES 'pioneers' (Degregori et al. 1986) who arrived in Lima in the early 1970s, are the parents and grandparents of today's tambores participants. Once established in the desert, the pioneers fulfilled basic needs with little help from the government. They lacked drinking water, electricity, food, health facilities, housing, paved roads, and transportation. Yet, inspired by Andean forms of socioeconomic organisation, such as *minga* or collective participation (Cervone 1998), as well as a host of ideas coming from socialism, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2005), and Liberation Theology (Gutiérrez 1988), migrants established the Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria Villa El Salvador

(Self-Managed Urban Community of Villa El Salvador, CUAVES). This organisation provided a sociomoral framework from which to approach duties regarding everyday communal work needed to construct the city. CUAVES has been the foremost institution in the district, one that conferred a prominent role to the sustenance of collaborative relationships, solidarity, and democratic participation (Burt 1988; Coronado and Pajuelo 1996; Montoya 2010; Ramos Quispe 2010).

CUAVES's moral guidelines of solidarity and democratic participation play a role in the work of present-day tambores organisations. These grassroots arts programmes started to appear in the early 1990s. Led by young actors, clowns, story-tellers, and musicians who were trained under the CUAVES agenda and its subsidiary arts centre, the Centro de Comunicación Popular y Promoción del Desarrollo (Centre for Popular Communication and Development Promotion, CPC). The centre's main means of operation was the performance of *pasacalles* (parades) and street festivals seeking to galvanise the community and strengthen the politics of reciprocity and participation. Pasacalles involved boisterous and colourful parades led by clowns, jugglers, and improvisatory marching bands that performed traditional Andean pasacalle music with a modern and playful twist. The most common pasacalle genre was the seminal *ritmo de Santiago* which originated in the Peruvian Central Andes and has been described by some as 'circus music.'

Following a pasacalle, musicians and neighbours would gather together on a nearby patch of empty ground for a socially-orientated theatrical performance organised by CPC actors. These plays were inspired by the work of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (2000) and Peru's influential arts collective Yuyachkani. VES's first cultural organisations, such as Arena y Esteras, Cijac, and Vichama, pushed forward this methodology that combined art and activism as educational platforms for a young population that still was immersed in the process of adapting to the hostile environment. The organisations' rationale was that children in the area were craving to attend these pasacalles featuring clowns and puppets. By bringing their children to the free and public shows, parents were in a sense 'forced' to congregate with other adult neighbours. Eventually, this spontaneous social gathering helped to awaken synergy and public discussion of important affairs. The pasacalles, children's storytelling, and clown shows would culminate with the performance of the educational play signalling the arrival of the more formal pedagogical section in the festivities. Plays' topics covered aspects of life in the community, the importance of developing self-sustainability, the reinforcement of CUAVES sociomoral values, and the protection of water and other scarce resources.

In the early 2000s, the pasacalle introduced in the 1990s underwent a radical transformation. A new generation of young participants, some of them tambores leaders whom I interviewed between 2013 and 2018, perceived the Andean-derived circus music used in the parades as anachronistic and as falling short of achieving its original attention-grabbing effect. The VES teenagers of the 2000s were certainly different from those of the 1990s in many regards. The advent of the Internet and a more fluent access to transnational cultural resources, plus a growing sense of cultural autonomy from the dictates of criollo values, made the VES adolescents willing to experiment with alternative sonic options. Here is when the adoption of Afro-Brazilian batucada music appeared as an unconventional but effective solution to reignite the synergistic power of the pasacalle.

Informed by politically driven rather than aesthetic concerns, leaders such as Pamela Otoyá, Leonardo Chacón, and Eric Chacci moved on to replace the circus music of the

1990s with that of an Afro-Brazilian batucada ensemble. They took this step after learning the rudiments in 2005. That year, the three leaders met Leandro Mikati and Santiago Comin, two Argentinean travelling artists who at the time were conducting batucada and circus arts workshops in Lima. Mikati and Comin had brought a comprehensive programme for teaching batucada music to Peru for the first time. Upon their arrival in Lima, they founded the collective arts group La Malandra and began providing intensive workshops for the residents of affluent districts such as Barranco and Miraflores.

Comin, a professional percussionist who had studied batucada and Afro-Brazilian music during several residences in Salvador de Bahia, focused his teaching agenda on the communal aspects of the genre. His pedagogy emphasised the interdependent nature of batucada performativity rather than the sonic product of the performance. 'I don't teach batucada in an academic way, I only teach batucada when I encounter people who are part of a social sphere or community [*un ambito*],' Comin said in a conversation (personal communication, 19 September 2018). He added: 'when I find such a community, I don't teach [batucada] music with a focus on formal technique, rather I teach it as a method for coexistence, I teach people how to live together and how to consolidate a group' (ibid.). Mikati also had a background as a musician but his main area was acting. He introduced Pamela, Leonardo, and Eric to the use of *dinámicas* (group dynamics), which are theatre-derived techniques, games and exercises that are undertaken without instruments. *Dinámicas* and acting were, according to Mikati, a way to increase the expressive potential of the batucada. He and Comin taught the VES teenagers a brand of batucada that the Argentineans conceptualised as holistic performance: a combination of movement, sound, and a strong physical presence on the stage. 'In my teaching,' Mikati explains, 'I use *dinámicas* in order to loosen the body, to be able to intermix dance, music, and bodily performance; but also to enable players to accept and liberate the activity they enact on the stage without a sense of shame' (personal communication, 5 October 2018).

When Pamela, Leonardo, and Eric visited La Malandra in 2005, they quickly became interested in joining the group. Taking notice of their youthful and strong commitment, Comin and Mikati decided to offer them scholarships to attend several workshops. After a few months of learning the rudiments and studying acting techniques, Pamela, Eric, and Leonardo started to teach batucada themselves to other VES teenagers at no cost. The three were very excited about this new grassroots initiative; they had been looking for a way to revitalise the old 1990 pasacalle and decided that batucada music offered the best option for optimising the parade's sonic format.

They chose the Afro-Brazilian ensemble for various reasons. The music was rare in the area and appealed to many teenagers who, according to Pamela, were tired of the traditional sounds of Peru's folk music, mainly because they associated this music with the cultural policies imposed by criollos. Andean music and *música criolla* (music of the criollos), an umbrella term used in Peru to refer to a host of genres involving waltzes and Afro-derived genres such as *marinera* and *tondero*, were traditions linked by the adolescents with the racism and inequality they and their families had experienced. More importantly, Pamela believed that Peru's own folk music expressed and reinforced regressive codes that instilled a sense of inferiority and powerlessness in the local adolescents. Thus, pasacalle music had to be replaced by the energising and unusual framework provided by batucada, which in turn did not carry a demeaning subtext.

Learning batucada equipped members of the 2000s cultural organisations with a sense of agency and self-determination. The interlocking rhythms that sustain the music's poly-rhythmic texture facilitated embodied experiences of solidarity that aligned with the CUAVES sociomoral ideals. At last, placing the sheer sonic power of the batucada drums in front of the parade was an effective strategy for attracting curious children and adults to the streets. VES leaders affirm that, during those years (roughly 2005–06) being able to congregate people in the streets was already a huge step toward challenging the social apathy that had profoundly affected the community after years of political violence and disarray caused by the Shining Path guerrilla movement and the repressive policies established by Alberto Fujimori's dictatorship (1990–2000). As I show in the next sections, the innovation introduced by these VES leaders led to the development of teaching methodologies that were not limited to the reproduction of standard sonic models—for instance, the sound of Salvador de Bahia's original batucada groups. This methodology, influenced by Mikati's and Comin's focus on the benefits of communal music-making, sought to strategically deploy the mechanics of a batucada teaching agenda in order to show students how to use their bodies to challenge social apathy.

### Theoretical framework

To illustrate the way in which tambores musicians challenge social apathy, I focus on the process by which they achieve group entrainment. Rehearsals and *dinámicas* seek to modify negative behaviours that hinder musicians' ability to synchronise. Participants transform themselves when they experience a modification in their relational attitudes toward others. In this way, leaders believe, those who practice tambores learn to be more open, spontaneous, and sociable. Specifically, Leonardo Chacón speaks about the notion of 'becoming a social being' through tambores practice. Such an openness of the self toward socialisation is a condition that can be learned and improved. When the condition is achieved, practitioners feel more at ease relating with their peers in the context of music sessions but also outside the rehearsal domain, in the day to day of life within the community. Furthermore, according to seminal CUAVES principles, VES adolescents are supposed to be recognised as the most important sector of the population. This is a natural consequence of realising that only young and dynamic leaders would be able to push forward the slow and difficult process of development in the area (1973). Consequently, since there is a local demand for raising socially engaged individuals who could maintain the social dynamism that sustains VES solidarity, the tambores concept of transformation carries important moral weight.

Leaders argue that *dinámicas* instil fluent demeanour so that practitioners can align their movements with others. *Dinámicas* show how to use the body in a way that nurtures healthy relationships with others. Given such emphasis on relationality as the foundation of tambores holistic pedagogy, I employ elements of Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory (IRT) to shed light on the type of intersubjective encounters that shape the tambores concept of transformation.

Collins (2004) asserts that the momentary realities people enact during intersubjective encounters should be situated in a realm of culture and society that is permanently in an emergent state. Actions carried out either pre-reflectively, intentionally, or even randomly within an ecology of intercorporeality instantiate modes of bodily counterpoint that can be

infused with moral and aesthetic value (Marrato 2012; Merleau-Ponty 2013). Within this view, ritual is the ‘chief form of micro-situational action’ (Collins 2004: 7) and reveals itself as a fluid system that engages individuals in powerful forms of sensorial dialogue and transformation. Thus, ritual is also a conduit for communicating personal experiences by means of intercorporeal empathy (Hollan and Throop 2011). Embodied empathy involves not abstract or mental events merely; it can be profoundly *sensed* (Csordas 2008) and is therefore a powerful path to the arousal of sensory intuitive knowledge (Barth 1995; Csordas 1990). When performing actions that are intensively focused on a shared activity (such as playing interlocking rhythms), Collins affirms, ‘individuals’ bodies resonate with emotions’ (Collins 2004: 6). Building upon such premises, Collins summarises the foundation of IRT as follows:

The central mechanism of interaction ritual theory is that occasions that combine a high degree of mutual focus of attention, that is, a high degree of intersubjectivity, together with a high degree of emotional entrainment—through bodily synchronization, mutual stimulation/arousal of participants’ nervous systems—result in feelings of membership that are attached to cognitive symbols; and result also in the emotional energy of individual participants, giving them feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action in what they consider a morally proper path. (ibid. 2004: 8)

IRT centres in small-scale, face-to-face interactions. Such a lens makes IRT appropriate for my exploration of tambores performativity. For instance, I primarily consider personal testimonies regarding instances in which tambores practice have reshaped members’ lives in relation to other participants. IRT begins by focusing on micro-situational actions—two individuals synchronising their bodies in order to co-create a structure of sounds that express meaning and experience. Then, IRT delves into the details of the intersubjective event and may ask questions such as: How do bodies relate to each other within this relational structure? How is emotional connection established within the event? What kinds of attitudes inform agents’ performance modalities and how is entrainment conceptualised? In what way does shared emotion become cultural capital?

Through IRT it is possible to trace connections between the micro-ritual and other additional considerations regarding ethnic and cultural narratives. Having in mind that Collins perceives micro-rituals as emergent processes, discussions regarding historical context need be suspended at the outset in order to give prominence to the core intersubjective venture. This provisional bracketing is important because IRT does not posit structural claims, that is, micro-rituals are not necessarily interpreted as the logical outcome of a historical continuum.

Several important musical ethnographies dealing with Peru’s Andean communities (Mendoza 2000; Romero 2001; Tucker 2013; Turino 1993) deal with populations located within well-delineated geographical locations. Within these regions, inhabitants tend to share or contest a sense of ethnic identity (albeit one which is malleable and intrinsically complex). These ethnographies lucidly explore the tensions that propel notions of ethnicity that have a bearing on the aesthetic constitution of regional music traditions. Although it is always important to acknowledge the fluid nature of the relationships between social identity and creative performance, and how these constantly shape each other and alter notions about heritage, the VES tambores case should not be placed under similar forms of scrutiny.

The VES population has historically maintained a chameleonic posture on matters of ethnic self-identification. Even today neighbours describe their district as a ‘little Peru;’ they see their city as an amalgam of the many communities that migrated to the desert from the country’s most distant and diverse regions. Concurrently, neighbours tend to highlight the importance of sociomoral Andean principles (e.g. solidarity, mutuality) inherited by the pioneers. But they do so without framing these principles as part of a defining Andean heritage. Along these lines, even though most tambores participants can trace their families’ ancestries back to specific Andean or rural locations, the adolescents with whom I worked usually prefer to distinguish the uniqueness of each member not in terms of ethnic provenance but by considering VES inhabitants’ common immigrant roots. These ‘roots’ also pertain to an ethos of solidarity, communal effort, and perseverance carried out through an unfinished process of settlement, adaptation, and survival. In short, an ‘authentic’ VES ethos, as decoded through my many interviews and conversations with local cultural participants and musicians, calls for the respect and maintenance of a social consciousness and economic system based on interrelated communal actions with pragmatic purposes. Those who acknowledge these principles and maintain an active social life while collaborating in the development of the district are true to the original CUAVES spirit and can claim their VES ethnic roots.

Notions of cultural identity are shaped by this ethos of mutuality and collaboration that oftentimes disregards specific regional or ethnic pinpointing. Thus, there is a need to suspend preliminary assumptions about race or ethnicity among participants and instead focus on the face-to-face interactions that are the kernel of their political activities.

### **The rehearsal domain**

Some *dinámicas*, such as the ‘walk-run-freeze routine,’ centre on training musicians to move freely while being able to refocus corporeal movement quickly and effectively. Other *dinámicas*, such as ‘zip, zap, boing,’ employ acting techniques to explore spontaneous bodily postures that foster mental and muscular agility. These and other *dinámicas* constitute a medium for modifying corporeal behaviours that are deemed negative by the adolescents. *Dinámicas* are believed to provide a conduit for personal change. Participants use them to develop a responsive somatic sensibility to musical sounds, to loosen their bodies, and to shorten the reaction time to other participants’ actions. When acquired, these skills enable performers to interact more freely with their peers [Figure 2](#).

In this regard, tambores rehearsals function as exploratory events where the adolescents seek transformation by means of skill acquisition. Social apathy, reclusion, and individualism are damaging attitudes that affect the quality of the organisations’ well-being, a condition which also neglects the quality of the ensemble’s sound. A co-leader of La Retumba described a situation in which the sound of his group ‘was too robotic’ due to the lack of communication between participants. Pamela Otoyá portrayed beginner drummers as ‘little trees’ who lack the ability to move gracefully or spontaneously; their bodies are stiff because they have not acquired the skills for transforming and maximising their social potential.

Leaders stated that, due to its deterring effect on intra-group rapport, social apathy affects the cohorts’ flow and ability to sync. Consequently, apathy and lack of flexibility had to be gradually challenged through *dinámicas* and drills. For this reason, too,



**Figure 2.** Son Batuke members performing *dinámicas* to loosen the body.

Pamela Otoya and Leonardo Chacón described *dinámicas* as activities integral to the *tambores* movement.

Pamela, who was one of my most insightful interlocutors, conceptualises *tambores* as a method to teach the adolescents how to ‘improve themselves’ by challenging social apathy (interview, 3 August 2013). In this same vein, Gerson Incio, co-leader of La Retumba, categorically affirms that, when it comes to identifying the most fundamental achievement of *tambores*, he realised that ‘the body is our masterpiece’ (interview, 5 January 2019). This statement, which was offered in reply to my question regarding the usefulness of *dinámicas*, encapsulates the general opinion shared by most leaders in relation to the learning experience. Participants were insistent that the ultimate aesthetic accomplishment of *tambores* music is experienced through the body. They believed that such bodily experience is intersubjective in nature and depends on their interlocking activity.

Within the Kilombo organisation, members did not base their learning on imitating well-established Brazilian *batucada* groups. Leaders acknowledged that their efforts centred on adopting socially conscious bodily action (e.g. solidary actions) as a source of advancement. Within the rehearsal domain, a notion of acquiring somatic knowledge and effecting personal growth was invested in efforts to fine-tune motor skills that allow intragroup synergy.

Most exercises featured mirroring activity between experienced and beginner members. Through these interactions involving imitation of movement, new members start the learning process. During the session described at the outset, Omar was not pleased with the sound of La Retumba. He stopped the drums frequently. He asked musicians to repeat a passage exactly as he was playing it until they could harmonise all parts with precision. While repeating this passage forcefully, members laughed and smiled. They were enjoying the practice and did not seem to resent Omar’s pressing corrections and instructions. But participants also showed concentration on their faces. They swayed their arms and bodies gracefully, punctuating rhythms while striking their drums with enthusiasm, stomping their feet and bouncing their shoulders to match Omar’s beat on the snare

drum. After some minutes, Omar asked the group once again to stop, readjust their hands and arms, and resume playing. This procedure, involving repetition of patterns followed by breaks in which technical aspects were discussed and corrected, occurred numerous times and constituted a core drill.

Figures 3 and 4 include excerpts transcribed from this rehearsal. The excerpts show the complementary quality of five interlocking patterns that make up a *batucada-son* genre in the span of an eight-beat phrase. This rehearsal had as a goal the synchronisation of the five layers. The patterns were performed with *tarolas*, *fondos* (mid-size bass drums), *bombos*, and *repique*. In order to exemplify the use of interlocking action, I labelled all parts with sequential descriptors (Pattern A, B, C, D, and E).

In Figure 5, I demonstrate La Retumba's use of interlocking action by rendering standard Western notation (shown in Figure 3) into binary symbols (X and O). This helps to visualise more clearly the interactions between patterns. 'X' represents a stroke and 'O' the absence of a stroke. The interlocking activity appears in the chart both horizontally, in the context of individual performances (Pattern A, B, C ...), and vertically, where the music is depicted in relation to the beat (1, 2, 3 ...). The vertical alignment of 'Xs' illustrate the interconnectedness of the discrete patterns. Such interlocking quality defines most other genres practiced in VES, such as *batucada-funk*, *samba*, *maracatu*, and *batucada-reggae*.

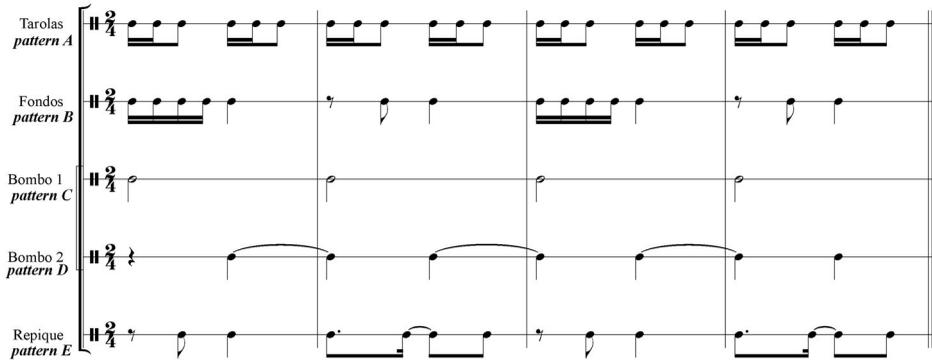
There are groups such as Kilombo, Kataplum, Son Batuke, and Intinya-Batu which also spend several evenings a week practicing and socialising in the streets. Leaders, such as Jesus Peña (*Rumba Urbana*) and Carlos Olivares (*Kataplum*), affirmed that their organisations devote a great deal of time carrying out team-building activities. For them, the rehearsal domain constitutes 'an alternative artistic space that helps to socialise and educate the adolescents ... to dissuade them from pursuing negative or destructive behaviours' (interview with Jesus Peña, 16 September 2018). Such space is not physical, since organisations cannot afford to buy or rent facilities. The rehearsal domain is enacted based on interactive bodily activity. It is a relational space/event constituted through purposeful mutuality.

VES organisations cultivate these spaces to 'fight crime and gang-related violence,' because learning *tambores* is 'a type of activity that offers the adolescents the possibility to build character and, in that way, [they] can collaborate on improving the standards



The image shows a musical score for five different drum patterns, labeled Pattern A through Pattern E. Each pattern is written on a five-line staff with a 2/4 time signature. Pattern A (Tarolas) consists of a steady eighth-note rhythm. Pattern B (Fondos) features a similar eighth-note rhythm but with a distinct accent on the second and fourth beats. Pattern C (Bombo 1) is a simple quarter-note pulse. Pattern D (Bombo 2) consists of quarter notes with a slur over the second and fourth notes. Pattern E (Repique) is a complex eighth-note pattern. The patterns are arranged vertically, and their interlocking nature is evident as they play together.

Figure 3. Excerpt transcribed from a La Retumba's street rehearsal at Avenida El Sol, Villa El Salvador (June 2013).



**Figure 4.** Excerpt transcribed from a La Retumba’s street rehearsal at Avenida El Sol, Villa El Salvador (June 2013).

of living in our district’ (interview with Carlos Olivares, 22 September 2018). The bodily activity or bodywork that Carlos discussed is believed to ameliorate practitioners’ lives not only by ‘building character’ but also by helping them invigorate the community by setting up constructive relational attitudes. During rehearsals, musicians use *dinámicas* to achieve these goals.

**Dinámicas**

Leonardo outlined a typical rehearsal as follows:

We begin with a basic preparatory section. This includes a set of warm-up exercises that focuses on training the body, because we always tell [participants] that physical training should be just as important as instrumental training. We include *dinámicas* to relax the body. Most of these *dinámicas* are derived from acting techniques. For example, we walk while maintaining the eyes looking at a fixed spot [so we can develop concentration and balance]. We also use an exercise called ‘zip, zap, boing,’ which is a very interesting exercise for working out our *energía*. We love this *dinámica* in particular because it is so much fun.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>Pattern A</i>	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X
<i>Pattern B</i>	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O
<i>Pattern C</i>	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
<i>Pattern D</i>	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O
<i>Pattern E</i>	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	O

**Figure 5.** Excerpt transcribed from a La Retumba’s street rehearsal at Avenida El Sol, Villa El Salvador (June 2013).

Everyone spreads out forming a circle. The game begins by having one person create an imaginary ball of *energía* with her hands. She then passes the ball to the next person in the circle while shouting the word ‘zip.’ If, instead, you want to pass the ball to someone who’s in front of you, then you’d need to throw the ball shouting ‘zap.’ People need to be very alert during this game. In order to return the ball to the person who sent it to you, you must make a quick movement with your arms and hands and shout ‘boing!’ as if the *energía* was bouncing off your body and going back to the person who launched it. People must be attentive to all the sudden changes in the [collective] rhythms. When we perform *tambores*, this is the kind of attentive focus we need to have in order to fix any coordination problems. (interview with Leonardo Chacón, 16 August 2013)

Leonardo indicated that *dinámicas* are good for developing the capacity to react swiftly to other people’s actions. The exercises build psychomotor stamina to interact according to the ensemble’s momentum. *Kilombo*’s *dinámicas* require that people’s somatic rhythms are constantly readjusted to match a shared pulse. The ball of *energía* Leonardo described may change its bouncing rate as bodily movements react to the physical intent cued by others. In this way, participants learned to be responsive. Empathy awakened and further translated into shared joy and excitement. ‘What I like the most about practicing *batucada* is the *familiarity* we all share, the way in which we relate to each other,’ said one participant (anonymous questionnaire, 15 June 2013, my emphasis). Another participant added that the most enjoyable aspect of group practice is ‘the emotion, the group energy we all share’ (*ibid.*). In this fashion, *dinámicas* build relationships and provide a relational framework for the exchange of communicative action.

Carlos Olivares’ *Kataplum* organisation employed *dinámicas* to enhance group coordination and focus. Carlos explained that rehearsals train the body to be responsive leading to a ‘complete transformation of the kids’ (interview, 10 November 2017). *Kataplum* used drills to develop an internal *compás* (sense of pulse), which Carlos deemed as fundamental for the ensemble’s groove. He described the following *dinámicas* to strengthen the *compás*:

All musicians are separated into two groups. Group A begins with ‘the train’ exercise. They keep a clapping pattern at a very slow tempo. Gradually, they accelerate the clapping until playing very very fast. They need to be able to play fast and without losing [group] coordination. This is important because *tambores* involves both slow and fast rhythms. Musicians must be flexible; you know. Group B uses another routine. They form a circle and each person claps once at a given moment. The clapping must go around the circle uninterruptedly, moving from person to person, while everyone sings in unison. The key point here is that kids should not lose the beat. In that way they start to develop a sense of beat. They need to have a strong *compás*! Another area of training is body percussion. For example, they practice by producing a pattern of clap, finger snap, clap, finger snap [that is, four attacks]. They do these four movements while dancing a waltz comprising three footsteps. (10 November 2017)

The last drill required teaching the body to maintain two separate rhythmic feels; a pattern of four beats over a pattern of three beats carried out during the same length of time. The challenge is that practitioners are supposed to *feel* the superimposition of rhythms, rather than *think* them. Carlos wanted members to maintain a state of sharp responsiveness to perform complex interrelated actions without framing these movements with descriptive explanations about how to do them. This sort of intuitive attitude is also supposed to be deployed when performing. Players seek to avoid personal judgments

about each other's technical rendering of the music and instead focus on *feeling* the groups' entrainment.

In addition, Kataplum spent a great deal of time singing patterns. Carlos affirmed that reciting rhythms is an effective way to internalise their cadence. He believed that singing is a more efficient way to teach the body how to play the drums than playing the actual instruments. For example, he asked his musicians to produce onomatopoeic vocables to mimic striking tambores. This procedure leads to achieving smooth transitions during *cortes*, which are coordinated breaks in which the ensemble stops at once after playing a complex interlocking phrase. *Cortes* add drama, and when performed tightly, provide a sense of achievement. For this purpose, Carlos asked his musicians to sing vocables slowly. He created sectional groups to have them singing patterns until they felt comfortable reproducing them. Once this was achieved, Carlos reunited the sectionals and integrated their sung parts into the complete texture.

In general, leaders perceive *dinámicas* as belonging to the realm of 'musical' activity. These drills are not intended to be sonic statements per se but to create awareness of the acting other. Therefore, the exercises have a bearing on the moral achievement of group synchronisation. When shared emotion and mutual focus accompany practitioners' actions, they experience a heightened aesthetic experience. Such enactment of *comunitas*, a pre-linguistic but nonetheless culturally and morally ground-breaking event, carries strong political implications having to do with the local moral identity that emerges (and is embodied) through practicing. The strengthening of mutuality is believed to maximise the role of tambores youth grassroots organisations within the VES ongoing process of socioeconomic development.

Building upon these ideas, the knowledge participants experience and produce through embodiment could be articulated as follows: *working on this activity, learning tambores, while being together in time, is beautiful in its own right; the feel of synchronizing our bodies is musical and enjoyable because it reinforces our family ties. We become stronger as we practice.* Through these experiences, participants share emotions and make alliances that fortify the synergy of the tambores movement.

Tambores artists take their sessions to the parks, streets, and empty grounds of the district. Their sound captures the attention of neighbours, causing both disapproval and admiration. Children and teenagers not familiar with the practice find it fascinating and eventually may decide to join an organisation. In this way, *batucada* has provided a small but nonetheless important level of political influence to the youth in VES. For instance, whenever the locality is immersed in district election season, tambores organisations are summoned by candidates to perform at their rallies. Additionally, when the VES municipality organises parades and civic celebrations, the authorities ensure that they invite at least one *batucada* group to perform for the young crowd.

While working out during rehearsals, the adolescents cultivated the self-confidence to act promptly and follow the group's intent. Like the practice routines used by Georgian weightlifting athletes, *dinámicas* involved iteration of drills seeking to 'ingrain proper movement patterns, elicit embodied states, and emphasise physical positions or proper muscular recruitment' (Sherouse 2016: 107). Such view of proper movement patterns, as an expression of moral identity, helps to illustrate

Gerson's statement regarding the centrality of the body in the tambores movement. The body is the masterpiece; both a conduit and the living outcome of praxes that ignite social change.

### On becoming social beings

Leonardo is known in VES as one of the young masters of tambores. At the age of twenty-one, he had become an accomplished percussionist and the music director of Kilombo, a group considered by many to be the most successful of its kind in VES. According to local musicians, the rigorous training and the organisation's emphasis on providing a fresh choreographic display of sonic intensity and movement makes Kilombo unique. Furthermore, Kilombo was the first VES organisation to focus exclusively on disseminating tambores.

Leonardo began training when he was a child. His first encounter with batucada music occurred when meeting Pamela, Erick, and the musicians of La Malandra. He was nine. Together with Pamela, Erick and other teenagers they used to rehearse in the *pampa* (barren land) next to Leonardo's home. He recounted how they 'used to play batucada with *bombo andino* [Andean bass drum], and held their sessions almost every day in the evening, far from the neighbourhood because they didn't want neighbours to be upset by the noise' (interview, 16 August 2013). Stirred by curiosity, Leonardo began to hang out with these musicians after school. It was not long before he started learning tambores. That was the beginning of a long-lasting relationship that strengthened through numerous rehearsals carried out over the years (2003—present). According to Leonardo, these events immersed him in a process that yielded a 'radical change, which entirely transforms the sense of self' (ibid. 2013). Eventually, such a transformation shaped his teenage years and led to his emergence as one of the most successful tambores musicians in Lima.

He has trained many young percussionists who have become leaders themselves in other organisations. According to Leonardo, the artists he trained, including his sisters, cousins, and close friends, have undergone the same process of self-transformation that he experienced as a child. As he puts it, this transformation refers to an openness of the self, a kind of movement from introversion to extroversion:

All new members entering Kilombo are very shy. That's a real fact. These teenagers are timid because they don't know anyone in the group. This is very common, and I also had the same experience. This happens because we [the VES adolescents] are not used to being sociable. And that's even worse today because people shut themselves away, you know, they spend their days watching TV at home, using their cell phones, they don't talk to anyone, they lock themselves up. They can't even express what is on their minds or show their true selves. They just can't. They feel ashamed, they are full of fear. But once they enter an artistic [learning] process, everything changes, because they start to develop confidence. They begin to have fun. That's the moment when the other [hidden] personality reveals itself. [When learning tambores] you really change completely! Your whole self is transformed. (interview, 16 August 2013)

He explains that the transformation unfolds as a movement from closure to openness in the realm of sociality. Tambores musicians reach this turning point by working diligently on rehearsals. When the 'hidden personality' discloses itself during group activities that

encourage self-confidence, peak physical performance, and creative flow, it becomes easier for members to spontaneously pursue sincere camaraderie.

Kilombo deploys a rehearsal programme based on *dinámicas* that seeks to reveal member's hidden personalities. According to Leonardo, the condition of closure (i.e. shyness, fearfulness, stiffness, lack of self-assurance) defines the neophyte state, which is not morally proper according to his organisation's standards. For that purpose, prior to playing the drums, students must loosen their bodies and let their *energía* emerge free. As Leonardo implied, the three stages in a *tambores* coming-of-age rite of passage are joining a cultural organisation, learning about its grassroots values regarding participation and communal action, and getting acquainted with rehearsal techniques that involve empathy and cooperation. This process is ignited by a rewarding experience of *energía* (e.g. pleasure and fun). Leonardo pointed out that gaining confidence and having fun (while practicing with others) are the first steps to redirect the self toward proactive social participation. Thus, to subvert individualistic isolation and its material expression in bodily stiffness, *dinámicas* maximise modes of effective participation by playfully engaging musicians in modes of intersubjective counterpoint.

Leonardo posited that *dinámicas* are not only games—they are an organic part of the *batucada*. In fact, they are also 'music' because these exercises 'are tied to that which we want to achieve musically speaking' and because *batucada* is not only about 'performing rhythms on the drums but about transmitting rhythm *with* the body' (interview, Leonardo Chacón, 11 September 2018).

### Teaching the body to feel the presence of others

*Dinámicas* build upon the premise that learning to interact with others through bodily movement enables ensembles to enhance their musicality. Learning interconnects people and reinforces familial ties. From an IRT perspective, *tambores* 'musicality' is an aural descriptor of the pleasurable momentum that arises when a clear and intense intersubjective focus of attention between players leads to emotional entrainment. Thus, 'musicality' equals *energía*: a gratifying experience of being together in time.

In his *dinámicas*, Omar used a step-by-step progressive method involving patterned movements and the singing of vocables to ensure that participants can recognise the regularity of the beat and sync with others. He believed that drummers need to first know the pulse with the body individually while learning how to listen to others, before attempting group synchronisation. Omar considered these *dinámicas* to be an introductory and intrinsic component of the *batucada*. Since, as he puts it, *batucada* is not only a medium to produce sounds, but it is also synonymous with 'union, teamwork, and joy,' *dinámicas* are important because they teach participants a 'way to interact' (interview, 22 September 2018). In this manner, participants learn that developing a stable sense of pulse is one of the foundations for fluid social interaction. Once Omar's musicians discover how the pulse is manifest in their bodies and the regularity of their own corporeal actions, they become capable of playing robustly and in time. Interiorising the *compás* becomes a pillar of group membership; by honing their ability to follow the pulse and sync with others, Omar's students acquire somatic knowledge to realise La Retumba's *compromiso* (mandate), which is the certainty of belonging to their organisation on the basis of respecting and practicing diligently as a family.

Omar teaches his musicians to feel more at ease while letting their individual rhythms align and overlap with their peers'. These alignments of individual somatic pulses constitute intercorporeal forms of intimacy (Maclaren 2014) involving both bodily and affective transgression and differentiation of selves, a sensorially *real* communication. For instance, a member of La Retumba affirmed that 'what I like the most about batucada is the familiarity we all share, the way in which we relate to each other' (anonymous questionnaire, 15 July 2013). Corporeal intimacy, which oftentimes is described as 'familiarity,' is at the core of VES entrainment processes. Members of organisations promote familiarity to incentivize socially proactive individuals and to make more viable the 'development of true intersubjectivity' (Maclaren 2014: 96). For example, *dinámicas* such as 'zip, zap, boing,' which centre in passing around an imaginary but certainly sensorially real ball of *energía* serve the purpose of teaching how to adapt to other people's movements in order to embody and instil familiarity.

Simultaneously, even though the social knowledge and cultural capital introduced by the learning experience is to some extent framed by a pedagogy that favours a slightly vertical instructor-student relationship, such knowledge is not structurally imposed by normative assumptions coming from, for example, a hierarchical institution expressing *criollo* lifestyles. *Criollo* thought governs the dictates of Lima's artistic landscape by economically sponsoring certain models of indigenous performance believed to be 'authentic,' that is, from an *etic*, and oftentimes condescending point of view. Now, because of its rootedness within the acting body, VES *tambores'* cultural capital is defined by its immediacy and transitory nature, which makes it unsuitable for *criollo's* perceptions of indigenous authenticity as material culture subject to heritagization. Nonetheless, as Collins (2004) explains, when a growing number of these strong but fleeting micro-ritual experiences become part of an interlinked module of intersubjective ground-breaking events, embodied cultural capital acquires a much more influential and lasting status. Thus, in VES somatic knowledge is not necessarily transitory and subjective.

Moreover, even though fostering solidarity is a moral priority among participants, the situated encounters that occur during sessions do not translate into a bodily inscription of moral rules. Social knowledge and cultural capital are made evident as a modality of change, as a symbol and realisation of agency and strategic flexibility, what Carlos and Leonardo refer to as the 'transformation of the self.' *Tambores* learning is precisely a process seeking to shift detrimental social attitudes by promoting resilience. A new member is expected to enter the rehearsal domain in order to challenge individualism and psychosomatic stiffness. By means of combining drills and *dinámicas*, rehearsals fortify the adolescents' political presence within their communities as well as their willingness to nurture solidarity to face the material and psychological consequences of Lima's unequal socioeconomic organisation. This definition and experience of being in sync as a joyful experience having to do more with personal and shared feelings than with sound or anything else connects Omar's music pedagogy with important sociomoral concepts. Considering that *communitas* emerges from a situated encounter defined by a shared sense of *compás* and the organisation's moral guidelines, being in sync is also political.

In his ethnography of panpipe ensembles in Peru's Andean town of Conima, Turino discusses a similar type of connection between entrainment and sociomoral principles

that is worth quoting here. In a passage that is key to understanding the moral meaning of ‘being in sync’, he writes:

Music and dance bring the state of being in sync—of being together—to a heightened level of explicitness. Within each repetition of a piece in Conima, the possibility of ‘being in sync’ is extended and the social union is intensified, contributing to an affective intensity. In such contexts, extended repetition does not lead to boredom; it is the basis of aesthetic power ... Not unlike making love, music and dance open the possibilities for deeper physical and spiritual connections between community members. (1993: 111)

While Turino deals with a cultural context distinct from tambores, it is possible to identify similar orientations in both cases. In both the Conima panpipe cohort and the VES tambores, the forceful repetition of drills is conducive to aesthetic pleasurable power, entrainment, and ‘muscular solidarity’ (McNeill 1995). Omar wanted his peers to learn how to experience this same driving and enjoyable force of being in sync for sociomoral reasons as well. As he put it, when joining the organisation ‘there is a *compromiso* [“commitment”] we all need to fulfil.’ Pursuing this mandate leads members to try and reach intersubjective intimacy. Even though tambores artists did not suggest a correlation between their interlocking practices and the Conima panpipe tradition, the clear parallels between both case studies can be used as a vantage point to consider the use of communal approaches to bodily activity, especially when this bodily activity becomes a priority that supersedes (or even determines) the mechanics of sound production. In both cases, synchronised muscular activity substantiates forms of cultural capital and social knowledge that are important for the well-being of the community. In both Conima and in VES, to play ‘well’ means to play ‘together.’ Specifically, in VES, creating solidarity by means of an organically focused activity translates into political achievement, because togetherness is experienced as a concrete realisation of sociomoral values that concern the well-being of the community. The proactive engagement of participants with one another at a direct, face-to-face level, is a strategy historically connected with the self-sustaining efforts that made possible the rise of VES. As such, playing music together symbolises and re-enacts foundational forms of civic organisation dealing with the efficient administration of human and scarce material capital within a poverty-stricken area.

As seen, the rehearsal domain is a space for the performance of micro-rituals where corporeal and cognitive skills are cultivated communally. Its fundamental mechanism lies in the fine-tuning of interlocking activity between performers/learners who disclose their emotions and personalities to each other. This willingness to be authentic or, as Intinya Batu’s leader Jota put it, ‘to be true to one’s self without wearing masks,’ (interview 4 August 2013) is a step towards transformation.

### **Working out solidarity**

During a rehearsal by the group Son Batuke, I observed how this organisation carries out its training programme. According to its leaders, Wil Castillo and Leonardo Palacios, their practices begin by considerations regarding sociomoral guidelines, which are infused with aesthetic notions about idealised performance behaviour. Leonardo explained that through its training the group seeks to achieve a cohesive demeanour that has become a staple of the group’s identity. The interrelation between sociomoral and aesthetic



**Figure 6.** Son Batuke's logo (courtesy of Son Batuke Percusión).

contents is expressed in the organisation's logo: a stylised lion's head nested within two flowering branches [Figure 6](#).

Son Batuke's performance codes seek to express the ideals contained in its logo: strength, stamina, and purpose are cued by the imposing although serene semblance of the lion while the blossoming branches invoke sensual and graceful movement. Building on this concept, the organisation has a stage configuration that locates female musicians at the front line and male performers behind them. Female performers display choreographic movements defined by controlled but smooth and sensual designs. They rotate their waists slowly while holding their mallets with their open arms moving upwards with expansive intent. These unconstrained movements were said to outline the shape of blooming flowers depicted in the organisation's logo. Thus, female players' musical vocabulary is usually limited to accents and ornament-like figures. At the back, male musicians posit a more restrained bodily demeanour, flexing their legs, rocking, balancing, and moving the body up and down with purposeful affirmation. This demeanour also has a visual/rhythmic function as it employs the entire body to cue clear downbeats and syncopations that propel a sense of groove forward. Male performers perform these moves matching the shared pulse and, together with their female counterparts, they intertwine altogether a stage organisation that acts as a visual depiction of determination, beauty, and stability within their collective actions.

In Son Batuke's performativity, female and male movements integrate into a harmonic kinetic structure. Leonardo Palacios believed that his group's identity is precisely defined by such an intersection of approaches. The strength and determination of the lion provides 'raw energy' that needs to be beautified, polished, expanded, and complemented by the graceful presence of blooming-like female choreographic displays (interview, 22 October 2018). Thus, in this case entrainment not only pertained to the synchronisation of drum patterns but also to the blending of dissimilar (male and female) conceptual demeanours.

Son Batuke achieves this organic effect through *dinámicas* and non-instrumental drills. For example, the group begins sessions with an extended section devoted to stretching, in which members undertake floor exercises using mattresses. Wil explained that musicians go through a series of yoga-like positions and movements that help to relax and tone up the muscles. Then, they move on to recite tongue twisters. When reciting tongue twisters, members focus on matching each other's vocal articulations, intonations and pace, seeking to create monophonic lines. Participants form a circle and stand up facing each other so that the sonic integration of their individual tongue twisters is reinforced by mirroring other participants' facial movements.

In this same rehearsal, Son Batuke performed a *dinámica* called 'cats and geese.' Wil asked musicians to divide into two rival groups, the cats and the geese. Both groups faced each other and stood in proximity. Then, Wil would shout the words 'cats!' or 'geese!' interchangeably in order to commence a tag game in which either the cats or geese had to run and touch the opposing group's members before they could reach the base, a nearby wall. When explaining the game's rules, Wil asked participants to remain very close to each other and insisted that they should always 'be fearless' while playing the game. He repeated that phrase several times, 'be fearless.' He also indicated that participants had to keep a sharp focus on Wil's voice so that they could either run from or capture rival members quickly.

As this description shows, Son Batuke uses *dinámicas* to substantiate sociomoral guidelines and aesthetic concepts that are concomitant to the group's identity. The embodiment of aesthetic concepts during performance is made possible based on bodily and cognitive skills that have been previously worked out through drills. By means of these exercises, participants learn to integrate spontaneity, determination, and concentration into the choreography of their performances by understanding that these are behaviours that are also important in everyday life, outside the rehearsal domain. Through cultivating spontaneous and focused behaviour, one can maintain a healthy social life and purposeful movement may be executed without fear or shame.

On this regard, Omar affirmed that *tambores* are a medium that enables musicians 'to exchange many things through music' and therefore help to create emotional intimacy between members (personal communication, 5 August 2013). Through fostering a kind of musicalised conversation—where the 'things' exchanged are not necessarily discernible or discursive statements but a type of somatic intuitive knowing—musicians 'grow as artists, citizens with values,' and 'as relaxed and generous individuals who are always committed to avoiding selfishness' (ibid.) These words resonate with the CUAVES values of solidarity and democratic participation, in which generosity and selfishness are conceived as the basis for efficacious team work. I have heard participants speak out about these values, associated with CUAVES, especially during *compartir* (sharing) events, which are semi-formal group meetings that take place after *pasacalles*. *Compartir* events are lunches or dinners held in the streets or in a participant's house where members of one or more organisations get together to share a meal while assessing the recent performance [Figure 7](#).

However, these conversations about the values of CUAVES are infrequent. Musicians spend much more time 'working out' their values somatically rather than discursively. Attending rehearsals and trying to accomplish the task at hand are already considered morally proper duties and a way to exemplify through action and embodiment an



**Figure 7.** Members of batucada organisations gathering for a *compartir* after a *pasacalle* (VES, July 2013).

organisation's principles. For instance, when asked about the most significant aspect of belonging to a *tambores* organisation, Jota indicated that 'rehearsing with purpose' is the foundation of his group's membership (personal communication, 8 August 2014). He also pointed out that learning constitutes the chief source of *energía* and a way to strengthen the family's bonds, because *energía* appears when members interact responsively. A reciprocal or 'affiliative intent' (Dissanayake 2009) holds together individual movements into a synchronised field of activity. Through this means, practice leads members to interconnect and constitute a musicalised body politic:

All of us are learning things that we really care about and enjoy doing. And the most important thing is that we do it together, because we don't like to play music alone, by ourselves. To be honest, we all needed to get together [and create this group] in order to start making real music and feel *energía*. And the guys tell me all the time that this [training with *Intinya-Batu*] has helped them improve their lives in so many ways. [Practicing *tambores*] has changed them for good. Here they have learned to keep the groove. Their lives are more musical and more proactive now. For example, if you see them listening to some music in the street, you'd see them keeping the pulse with their feet and their hands would be moving around, relentlessly, wanting to perform.

Following Jota's thoughts, experiencing *tambores* rhythms somatically and as part of everyday life leads to a positive shift of perspective upon reality. Along these lines, Erick, a co-leader of *Son Batuke*, argued that *dinámicas* have a direct positive impact on the quality of the group's sound precisely because of its emphasis on resilience.

When we started the kids' formation process, I asked my team to allow me to oversee a *dinámicas* section in every rehearsal. I wanted to talk to the kids, to explain to them that when someone plays the drums, that person is never alone. We must work in teams always. This is very important; there must be communication. We must trust our partners, right? My job is having them ready to work in that manner. They will learn values that define the space where we see each other every session. That's the way Son Batuke forms the kids.

For Erick, learning *tambores* is part of a formation process that shapes identity in a positive and creative fashion. He stated that in order to play music confidently one needs to be physically and emotionally at home while working with others. Thus, the ability to maintain non-verbal communication through visual cues must be mastered. In that fashion, musicians learn to read other performers' corporeal gestures and to accept them more easily as vital and meaningful extension of each person's essence. Pragmatically, by knowing how to read others' corporeal activity musicians are also able to collaborate and reach a tighter ensemble sound while positioning their own individual musical role within a non-hierarchical (i.e. solidary) chain of events. The adolescents need to learn 'how to perform teamwork before playing instruments,' said Erick (interview, 7 May 2018). Furthermore, in addition to this characterisation of *dinámicas* as choreographies that shape social attitudes, Erick also describes *dinámicas* as 'games.' Their playful component is worked out by means of kinetic routines that explore the feeling of the body moving throughout the rehearsal domain and in relation to the personal and interpersonal spaces spontaneously formed among participants. However, Erick's *dinámicas* should not be seen simplistically as 'kid's games.' Even though the exercises invoke a ludic mindset, Son Batuke's goals are dignified. The group's leaders affirmed that *dinámicas* 'add colour, *energía*, and glamour' to their musical performances while offering a medium for members to 'learn ways to relate with others and discover their true selves' (written communication, 12 January 2018). *Dinámicas* construct familial ties based on processes of personal discovery. Effort and commitment are tied to the acceptance of one's true essence, which in turn opens the doors to social synergy.

The way in which Son Batuke leaders frame their pedagogy resembles IRT model's view on membership and identity formation. Their statements show that participants do not inform their curricula by explaining or discussing CUAVES' values orally. Instead, feelings of enfranchising affiliation, collective agency, and assumptions about the existence of a shared cultural identity and common history acquire substance through the process of learning itself, where physical action precedes cognitive discernment. Participants' bodies experience an array of galvanising emotions that, as Collins writes, 'are attached to cognitive symbols' (2004: 8). The correlation between broader CUAVES values and *tambores*' search for social synergy could not materialise without the bodywork that leads to the discovery of members' true selves and the subsequent construction of familial ties. The coordinated physical actions participants carry out during training are themselves visual symbols of the sociomoral achievement.

When emotional energy is produced, it becomes the foundation of the organisation's kinship and identity. A fleeting but sensorially real event, experiencing *energía* translates into what is perceived as a successful performance. Erick said:

Why are *dinámicas* important? Well, personally, I know that I play better when I am performing with someone who I know, my friend, my buddy, with this person I can have more rapport, I feel much more comfortable and therefore I play better, with more ease.

When I play with friends, I feel much more connected and in sync with them. Therefore, I want my students to know each other well [*compenetrarse*] so that they can get along and work together. That's the way they get to enjoy what they do, right? They have fun playing with their buddies and they also are much more attentive to other people's actions. (written communication, 12 January 2018)

Son Batuke's rehearsals generate solidarity through a process of members *discovering* each other as musicians and social beings. Erick describes the process using the word *compenetrarse*. 'Compenetrarse' is a reflexive verb that in Spanish refers to an action that intrinsically must be carried out between two people, or groups of people, and therefore is reciprocal in nature. As such, the verb may be initially translated as 'getting along' or 'understanding each other.' However, in Eric's sense, the reciprocal nature of the action involves players seeking more than mere understanding, and instead transcending their subjective individualities in order to merge with the partner by means of collective action. Thus, *compenetrarse* is a channel towards discovering the partner and transcending one's subjectivity.

### Total experience of energy

Perhaps the most explicit point regarding the need to foster a behavioural shift in members' social attitudes was raised by Pamela—a leader of Kilombo. As already noted, Pamela is also one of the founders of the VES tambores movement. Her role in the dissemination of the practice had an important pragmatic component. Through at least fifteen years of grassroots activism educating adolescents, Pamela's vision of the Afro-Brazilian ensemble as a vehicle for social transformation has not changed. She mentors young leaders and through tambores instils in them the ability to change a subaltern condition into enfranchised social consciousness. She told me that Kilombo was founded with the specific goal of introducing batucada drums for social change in VES. Choosing tambores was a choice not necessarily related to her aesthetic preferences. Even though her team enjoyed Afro-Brazilian drum music, they also believed that tambores constituted the best practical platform to motivate the adolescents:

[Practicing tambores] started with a real desire to improve our [artistic] space in VES. Since the first time I got to hear batucada, I always thought that Brazilian batucada could very easily mobilize people and things. And yes, the batucada could mobilize many things! I know that nowadays you can listen to batucada everywhere in Villa, but years ago, people in the streets would hear tambores and would be like 'What on earth is this?!' These kinds of things are crucial in a social reality and a nation such as ours. Our people tend to be repressed and closed. When deciding to introduce batucada ensembles we reflected deeply upon this. We wanted our reality to change. We wanted people to get excited and to move around. Encountering tambores was for us not only to discover a kind of folklore or ritual, it was a matter of getting acquainted with a set of codes that could be used to modify or to enrich our [stagnating] local codes.

Pamela affirmed that embodiments of *energía* arise during heightened moments of entrainment. Like Jota, she believed that once musicians have learned to deploy *energía*, they can bring it back outside the session. Nonetheless, Pamela also pays attention to issues that, according to her view, may be tackled by learning how to redirect personal *energía* to effect somatic modification. Specifically, she thinks that artists must get rid



**Figure 8.** Pamela Otoyá speaking to batucada musicians prior to a large rehearsal involving several VES cultural organisations (Parque Huascar, August 2013).

of learned modes of submission that are by-products of Lima's pervasive discriminatory practices [Figure 8](#).

Notably, Pamela defines tambores as a 'total experience of energía' and as an 'urban technique.' She sees it as a holistic method involving more than sounds. Her rehearsals centre on teaching how to direct somatic comportment at will. Participants usually perform a walk-run-freeze routine in which they move spontaneously and then must abruptly stand still at Pamela's call, no matter what their body posture is. Pamela uses these drills to reverse what she perceives as 'rigid personalities and bodies.' After I attended a rehearsal, she described the group's goals as follows:

We want to teach our kids how to loosen themselves up. You saw our kids that day [when you attended the rehearsal]. They moved and danced. You could see them smiling all the time. That's real entertainment! You could see the guys smiling and having lots of fun, but they didn't enter the group like that.

Kilombo members undertake a training that helps them regain self-confidence to loosen themselves up and be proactive individuals. Like the Yoruba drum music performed during the Yemoja ritual, tambores is also a practice that produces somatic/sensorial transformation of the self through a 'critical transfer of energy' between participants (Apter 1991: 217). According to Pamela, the goal of her group's rehearsals is to modify negative learned behaviours that prevent musicians from experiencing communal entrainment.

Rehearsals mediate processes of integral self-transformation based on intercorporeal mirroring and dialogue. As seen, leaders affirm that learning to 'play as one' requires a

shift in the individual attitude. That shift or ‘transformation of the self’ implies a series of behavioural modifications seeking to cultivate sociomoral knowledge and to create awareness of one’s own potential and shortcomings. For example, the loosening of the rigid body; the opening of a reclusive self to proactive social life; the development of sensibility to value and gauge participants’ actions and feelings; the sharpening of the attentional focus on musicians’ bodily movements. All these are activities calling for effort, purpose, and moral commitment. Following Collins’ understanding of humans’ most basic social formations, VES moral commitment sustains and drives the physical momentum that gives rise to ritual entrainment. Therefore, tambores pedagogy confers primacy to CUAVES ideological concerns and their articulation through modalities of performance that crystallize into moral identity. The excitement of acquiring or discovering a moral self as a rite of passage is believed to also suffuse corporeal expression and symbolic behaviour. In this fashion, the learning of the technical, aesthetic, and sonic requirements of tambores music comprises mechanical procedures that, when exercised with moral consciousness, may become the channel for sociomoral transformation.

### **Conclusion: the body is our masterpiece**

In Villa El Salvador social apathy has a negative moral connotation. Apathy lessens the adolescents’ efforts to strengthen their familial ties. The physical action involved in playing forcefully, loudly, and in a synchronised fashion has become a cognitive/sonic symbol of a morally proper path to follow. In part, such pursuit of togetherness responds to the CUAVES teachings and the influence of urban/migrant Andean-derived institutions. In VES, an ethos of solidarity has nurtured the efforts of a diverse immigrant population in their path to establish a liveable space in which to prosper. Understandably, calling for solidarity and social synergy has been an important civic strategy, while inactivity and social unresponsiveness are believed to posit moral transgression.

For tambores participants, moral transgression tends to be visualised, experienced, and symbolised in the perceived rigidity of the neophyte’s body or in the player’s inability to synchronise with others. As Leonardo Chacón expressed this, beginner students find it difficult to sway their bodies and organise their movements. Leonardo described this condition as a blockage of the true self, an area of being that is intrinsically relational in nature. The true self seeks transcendence of its own individuality by means of communicative interactions with others, interactions that do not impose subjective commands but that tend to adapt to the group’s momentum.

Leonardo and others assume with confidence that every VES adolescent—even those who have deviated from proper civic behaviour through the destructive influence of gang-related violence, delinquency, and the effects of a stratified society, or those who for personal reasons feel incapable of articulating their ideas or feelings clearly—have a true need for self-discovery. That self is a living source of empathy ready to be brought to the realm of social life through a body-centred learning process.

In addition, the educational aspect of tambores activism must be contextualised within the larger cultural framework of VES socioeconomic institutions and the way in which these innovative formations have faced Lima’s discriminatory policies. Starting with the use of Andean pasacalles, social theatre, and clown shows in the 1980s—all these genres that the CUAVES organism employed to foster civic consciousness and

teach the importance of sustainability—the performing arts have been used as educational and pragmatic tools with political purposes. Pamela mentioned in several conversations that the arts in VES have always promoted a positive view of CUAVES solidarity and, due to this ideological preoccupation, the arts in general are fundamentally political and pedagogical. They are conducive means for achieving broader ideals. Pamela explained that the arts should not be centred in developing aesthetic sensibility necessarily but primarily should teach social values, not merely because solidarity and communalism are cultural elements inherited from the Andean pioneers but, perhaps more crucially within this case study, because solidarity enabled VES settlers to survive in an adverse environment.

The introduction of the Brazilian batucada in the early 2000s was the outcome of the pragmatic and political stance that guided Pamela, Leonardo, and others through their grassroots efforts. The switch in the orchestral conceptualisation of the Andean pasacalle aimed at precise purposes; tambores music intended to cultivate the adolescents into socially proactive individuals. At that time, leaders believed that the district's teenagers, that is, those who according to CUAVES were assigned the civic duty of maintaining the drive for progress, were suffering the effects of criollos' racist policies. Furthermore, leaders believed that the initial pledge that led to the 'invention' of the pasacalle in the 1990s seemed to be losing momentum in the battle against the unequal system.

During my fieldwork in the area, organisations had aligned their efforts to advance a systematic programme that interconnected physical and moral pedagogies. As discussed in this paper, participants conceptualised rehearsals as emotion-laden spaces where sound production was but an outer layer of the moral concepts and social life carried out within family/organisations. Interlocking activity emerged as a symbol of unity and solidarity among members but also as a platform by which these same ideals were brought to their full realisation in a creative and aesthetically fulfilling fashion. Under this light, learning to be in sync with the partner was the most immediate and fundamental step for the student's understanding of the moral implications brought about in tambores pedagogy. At its core, this pedagogy stated that 'to be in sync' is a skill that presupposes the advance of empathy, openness, and resilience; learning emphasises the processual and relational aspects that transform individuals into receptive actors who can experience empathy with their fellow members of the community and who can also feel at home performing solidarity in a variety of contexts.

The rapid moments of joyful communion and pre-linguistic communication that unfold during micro-rituals produce powerful embodiments of solidarity. These micro-rituals ignite aesthetic pleasure that results from coordinated actions coupled with sentiments of moral achievement. The adolescents produced and embodied modalities of agency that, at a later stage, can be interpreted in terms of the CUAVES legacy, inserting in this way the participants' work within the larger configuration of identity politics and the history of migrant formations in VES. In such manner, tambores practice not only helped to deliver a symbolic discourse on the importance of social synergy but also provided an experiential space for putting abstract sociomoral ideals into creative practice.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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