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Art, avant-garde, and politics in northern Argentina in the 1960s: *Zafra* by Ariel Petrocelli, Pepe, and Gerardo Núñez

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ABSTRACT

In 1966, the Cuban Revolution reinvigorated the socialist utopia in Latin America. Inspired by that change and moved by the hardships that the sugar mill workers in the Argentinean north-west suffered, the acknowledged artists Ariel Petrocelli and Pepe and Gerardo Núñez composed a lyrical, musical, and visual piece called *Zafra. Poema musical y anunciación* (*Harvest. Musical Poem and Annunciation*). This work, conceived as an integral piece, proposes a radical change in the social consciousness of the sugar mill worker to free himself of his condition. It was aimed to generate an empathetic feeling among the audience with the protagonist, contributing to consolidate Leftist identities by the acknowledgement of the local social conditions. This article analyses *Zafra* as an outstanding piece on solidarity and the arts network, framed within the political context of Tucumán in the 1960s, characterized by the social activism and the resistance to the dictatorship in power. It also recreates the process of its reconstruction from 1966 to the present, considering that if the piece was on stage many different times (1972, 1975, 1985, 1992, 2013, and 2015), it was registered as late as in 2013.

RESUMEN

En 1966 la Revolución Cubana revivió la utopía socialista en Latinoamérica. Inspirados en ese cambio y conmovidos por las dificultades que sufrían los trabajadores de los ingenios azucareros en el noroeste argentino, los artistas salteños Ariel Petrocelli and Pepe y Gerardo Núñez compusieron una pieza lírica, musical y visual llamada *Zafra. Poema musical y anunciación*. Esta obra, concebida como pieza integral, propone un cambio radical en la conciencia social de los trabajadores azucareros a fin de concebir una liberación de esa condición. En ese sentido, la puesta en escena buscó generar empatía entre la audiencia y el protagonista de la trama, contribuyendo a consolidar la identidad de izquierda y el reconocimiento de las condiciones sociales locales. Este artículo analiza *Zafra* como una pieza notable en torno a la cuestión de la solidaridad en el arte, encuadrada en el contexto político de Tucumán de los sesenta, caracterizado por el activismo social y la resistencia a la dictadura en el poder. También recrea el proceso de reconstrucción desde 1966 hasta el presente, considerando que si bien la pieza se representó varias veces (1972, 1975, 1985, 1999, 2013 y 2015), sólo alcanzó un registro formal en el 2013.

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On 18 September 1972, a unique artistic performance took place in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán, in the heart of north-western Argentina. At the Guido Parpagnoli theater, run by the group *Independiente Nuestro Teatro*, musicians José “Pepe” Núñez and Juan Falú first staged the work known as *Zafra. Poema musical y anunciación* (*Harvest. Musical Poem and Annunciation*), which included photographs by Juan Paolini in collaboration with Julián Vallejo. This work had been completed in 1966 by Pepe along with his brother Gerardo and poet Ariel Petrocelli; artists born in the neighboring province of Salta, who enjoyed notable recognition there.

Having been created in the north of Argentina, far from the centrality of Buenos Aires, *Zafra* proposed an original intervention in the cultural and ideological sphere. If material impossibilities and political censorship impeded its transcendence when it was created, its recuperation through a chain of steps from 1985 to 2015 allows us to place it into the history of Latin American social and political art.

To understand this matter in its full dimension, it is important to consider the complexity of socio-cultural relations in northern Argentina. For much of the twentieth century, the sugar industry was the province’s economic backbone, and it gave rise to a system of powerful elites, workers’ organizations, and laborers who remained outside of any sort of government or private oversight. These segments of society co-existed in a state of conflict, generating opposing sets of feelings regarding the sugar mill: first, those of the sugar-cane harvest workers known as *zafreiros*, who were descendants of the indigenous Andean cultures and who lived outside of the enclosure fence around the sugar mill and its system of supervision; second, those of the permanent workers who enjoyed the advantages of a patriarchal and self-sustaining world; and third, those of the management class. However, the conservative, Christian, anti-Peronist, and anti-communist policies of this last group could not prevent the workers from developing Peronist sympathies or the formation of a cultural system that reflected the contradictions described above.

In 1966 there was a *coup d’état* led by Juan Carlos Onganía, who soon decreed the closure of 11 of Tucumán’s 27 sugar mills, generating an abrupt increase of unemployment and social discontent. A wave of protests and street demonstrations reached their climax in 1972, with the *tucumanazo* and *quintazo*, while armed revolutionary organizations such as *Montoneros*, *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP, Peronist Armed Forces) and *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP, People’s Revolutionary Army) were born. Even General Juan Domingo Perón (1967), then in exile, promoted Third Worldism, eulogized Che Guevara, and rallied in his speeches against the differences that separated his movement from those of the Leftists, emphasizing their common anti-colonialist positions. In 1973 the democratic regime resumed with Héctor Cámpora as President; he opened up the path to Perón’s return and called for elections that same year. In 1974, Perón became the new president, but his health was so weak that he passed away on 1 June, while the country was immersed in fights between Right and Left wings. On 24 March 1976, a new military *coup d’état* suppressed civil rights, and practiced the censorship, torture, and disappearance of opponents from a wide Leftist spectrum.¹

The social crisis caused by Onganía’s closure of the sugar mills was well-known throughout the rest of the country, to the point that in 1968 an exhibition entitled *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán Burns*) was put on by artists from Buenos Aires and Rosario (Mestman and Longoni 2008). However, while this experience has been analyzed by

researchers, the ones by local artists, deeply immersed in that process, are not very well-known. In this sense, Gerardo Vallejo's cinematographic project, centered on on *zafros*' lives and backed by the *Grupo de Cine Liberación* (Liberation Cinema Group), stands out (Orquera 2007, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Mestman 2010 [2005]; Stites-Mor 2012).

Within this context, the social landscape of the sugar plantation must be conceived in a contradictory manner: on one hand as the constitutive horizon of the local identity, and on the other as a system that needed to disappear so that a liberating societal plan could arise in accordance with the ideological formulation dominant in Latin America in the 1960s. *Zafra* thus produced a vision of this difficult step, postulating the end of the exploitative relations imposed by the sugar industry, in a cultural path divergent from the country's European heritage and linked to the footprints of folk musician Atahualpa Yupanqui.² The work sets out multiple and inter-related aspects: first, the sugarcane harvest workers taken as key elements of representation of an artistic discourse embedded in revolutionary ideals; second, the insertion of the small, inner province of Tucuman into the global socio-political flow of the 1960s and 1970s, over all the changes produced by the Cuban Revolution; third, an avant gardism linked to the ideological and esthetic changes that happened in that long decade; fourth, the appeal to the genre of comprehensive work (*obra integral*), a trend in Latin American popular music at the time.

Zafra expresses the resistance that confronts capitalism in corners of the world after the Cuban Revolution (Jameson 1984; Zolov 2014). In that context, it explores the turn to the Left that experienced sectors of the middle class, discontent with the social order, expressed in an approach to the workers made to suffer under its effects.³ This article considers a set of unpublished sources (Petrocelli 1966; Núñez 1972; Paolini 1972 1985; *Zafra* 1972, 1985; Núñez et al. 1985; Hoyos et al. 2013) to built the story of the piece and describe its esthetic innovations regarding the cultural tradition of northern Argentina.

To address these issues the analysis begins with a presentation of the genesis of the work and the Latin American musical context. Then the poem is analyzed, focusing on each of its pieces. The story shows the social transformation experienced by the *zafro* until he leaves behind his identity as mere productive force to exercise a reflexive practice and to question his exploitative conditions. The next section looks at the performances that took place in 1972, 1985, and 2013 and their links with their audiences, as immersed in the local conditions for cultural production. Finally, conclusions are summarized.

The theoretical approach is linked to subaltern studies, from the point of view of the region in which the text has been produced (Beverley 1999; Vessuri 1978), and to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialog in its ideological sense. In a way, this article also explores a breaking point of the concept of social *habitus* as presented by Bourdieu (1971; 1977), in the sense that *Zafra* proposes an end to the hereditary condition of the sugar cane peeler. In that sense, our perspective contrasts the social *habitus* that tends to perpetuate the *zafros*' submission with the criticism that questions its naturalization. Also, studies on Tucuman's folklore and documental cinema are an appropriate tool to understand the particularities of the piece. Besides the analysis of the work, the aim is to understand its contribution to the practice of art and solidarity in the intense cultural atmosphere that preceded Argentina's last dictatorship.

1. The genesis of the piece

Pepe and Gerardo Núñez and Ariel Petrocelli became friends in high school in Salta; as teenagers they already shared an ideal of overcoming situations of exploitation and suffering. Petrocelli was a “fellow traveler” of the Communist Party, which had found a new and unexpected reformulation in the Cuban Revolution: “There were always plans to create a utopia, and the Cuban Revolution seemed to fit within that notion: with the idealistic component of Che Guevara and our own youth; the desire to change everything and the dream of revolution throughout the Americas”. As he remembers, this dream of change was joined with an awareness of the social conflicts that surrounded him, which gave rise to the creation of the work we are considering: “I had all of this in my blood, because I am from a very small town and ever since I was a young boy I was surrounded by all of the things of the sugar plantations” (interview, Korstanje and Orquera 2009). Prior to the revolution in Cuba he had written *Vida, pasión y muerte de Pedro el Campesino* (*The Life, Passion, and Death of Pedro the Farmworker*). Although it was not recorded, this work already contained the seeds of *Zafra*, and surely represented progress towards the series of comprehensive works that characterized the 1960s, and which had to do with pursuing a sort of attentive, prolonged, and conscious listening on the part of the audience. Among the “*obras integrales*” some must be highlighted: *Misa Criolla* (1965), by Ariel Ramírez and Félix Luna; *El payador perseguido* (1966), by Yupanqui; *Cantata de Santa María de Iquique* (1969), by the Chilean group Quilapayún; and *El Sacrificio de Túpac Amaru* (1972), by Yupanqui, Enzo Gieco, and Raúl Maldonado (Molinero 2011).

According to Gerardo Núñez (personal communication, 12 August 2014), he and his brother Pepe had been educated within the context of a Christianity concerned with the welfare of the poor, along the same lines that would be adopted by the Second Vatican Council. However, in the early 1960s they left their religious faith behind in order to conform more closely with the thinking of the Leftists, although without affiliating themselves to any particular political party. In this vein, the word “Anunciation”, as well as the expression “*Vida, pasión y muerte de Pedro el campesino*” used by Petrocelli in his previous composition, reminds of the life of Jesus Christ as symbol of the revolution, but taken in a secular, poetic sense.

In a way, writings on subaltern subjects may be thought as “a secular version of the Liberation Theology option preferred by the poor” (Beverly 1999). In this sense, the Núñez brothers and Petrocelli were implying a manner of “building relations of solidarity” between those who produce the discourse, those towards whom it is directed, and those who are represented. Along these lines, Gerardo Núñez has stated that “the most serious form of activism is that one that ‘wears’ what it believes in”. He explains that this idea was shared by the poets of the 1960s generation in Salta, like Miguel Angel Pérez, Jacobo Regen, Walter Adet, Antonio Nella Castro, Santiago Sylvester, and Juan Carlos Dávalos, among others (Núñez, Alberto, and Valdez 2008). They wanted to remove the picturesque and traditionalist conception of the “landscape”, and redefine it within its social anchorage, intimately linked to the people who inhabited it: “they felt the poetry to be something beyond their awareness, as something externally latent. It was the soul that operated there; it was the pain, the solidarity. José Martí was a main referent” (personal communication, 29 September 2009).

Although Pepe Núñez was sympathetic towards Trotskyite ideas, the two brothers considered themselves to be rather “militants of life”. This is reflected in a song with poetic and musical language that forged a link of solidarity with the people. Having moved out to Tucumán in the 1960s, they collaborated on politicized works, such as Pepe’s musical score for *Crónica de la Pasión de un pueblo* (*Story of the Passion of a People*), a theatrical work by playwright Oscar Quiroga, and performances at the theater run by the sugar cane workers’ union (the Federation of Sugar Industry Workers, FOTIA), where works by artists such as Juan Falú and Gerardo Vallejo were also presented.

Dating the birth of the piece is possible because Gerardo has a typed copy of the songbook which has “1966” recorded as the year of completion (Petrocelli 1966). He also recalls the circumstances under which the work was created: “It started in Tucumán. We were exchanging letters with ‘The Italian’ [referring to Petrocelli] and he came to Tucumán from Buenos Aires. We started working on *Zafra*, 12 songs; later we went to Salta and we finished it in 15 days. The year was ’66”. He also notes that at those meetings they discussed the rhythms and the order in which the songs would appear (personal communication, 29 September 2009).

Besides the political context, the event that would help form the foundations of the work took place when the three friends got together to listen to a recording by Eduardo Falú, a well-known guitarist from Salta and uncle of Juan Falú. They were impressed when hearing the verses of the *zamba* entitled “*Vamos a la zafra*” (*Going to the Harvest*), which include the lyrics: “I hope you have a son /to help with your daily work /because cutting the cane /on the plantation will eat your arms” [“*Quiero que tengas un chango /para yapar el jornal /porque pelando maloja /se come los brazos el cañaveral*”]. They then decided to compose a work that would respond to and disarticulate this construction, which they felt took the work of the migrant workers and their entire families to be an unquestionable fact.

It is worth noting, however, that although when writing the lyrics to *Vamos a la Zafra*, Dávalos intended to give a voice to the *zafrero* through an emotional expression of his world, he also imposed the values of the dominant class that tried to understate the difficulties of the reality: “Let’s go my love to the harvest /it’s time to get up /all the sweetness of the land /crystallized in the cane fibers” [“*Vamos mi amor a la zafra /tenemos que levantar /todo el dulzor de la tierra /cuajada en las fibras del cañaveral*”]. The future is limited to working, and the son is condemned to the same fate: “I hope you have a son /to help with your daily work /because cutting the cane /the plantation eats my arms” [“*Quiero que tengas un chango /para yapar el jornal /porque pelando maloja /se come mis brazos el cañaveral*”].

Since its beginnings, the sugar industry has paid very low wages to the cane cutters, often in the form of “credits”. The assistance of the entire family would be needed in order to make a living, and the children remained outside the educational system and the other benefits granted by the government (Sigal 1970; Vessuri 1978; Kirchner 1980; Giarraca 2000). Therefore, in spite of the admiration they felt for the music of Dávalos, the verses of this *zamba* inspired in the Núñez brothers and Petrocelli the desire to create a contrasting discourse (Bakhtin 1984 [1929]). In this sort of dialog the voice represents an ideological position, whether it may mean corroborating the existing social order (as in the *zamba* by Dávalos) or disarticulating it.

Zafra would thus propose a change in the *habitus* of class, replacing the attitude of submission with a sensation of liberty that would allow the *zafrero* to imagine a break with the world of the sugar plantation, making his own decisions about the course of his life and his story. Of course, this is an imaginary case, since such a transformation still had not been installed in the mind of the represented worker, but rather it existed in the minds of the artists who felt a sense of solidarity with the suffering of the workers and who hoped to use their art to change the conditions that produced it. They did this, therefore, by entering into the ideological battle by means of their words, music, and images.

2. The musical path

As teenagers, the Núñez brothers and Petrocelli began to take a dissident musical perspective, expressed in the group “*Los Guajiros*”, the repertoire of which was founded in the music of the Caribbean. Gerardo Núñez remembers that although in their family environment the favorite genre was the tango, they soon began to prefer bolero, guajira, son, rumba, and cumbia, genres which were gaining popularity through the radio and the availability of some recordings (personal communication, August 2014). Artists such as Cuban Bola de Nieve and Mexican Agustín Lara began to emerge, and above all Marfil. This was the artistic name of Jorge David Monsalve, friend of Petrocelli, a Colombian writer of social poetry based in Argentina “who know how to form famous duos such as Marfil-Ebano, Marfil-Morales, Marfil-Valencia”. This broad Latin American musical perspective gave *Los Guajiros* an “agile, dynamic” rhythm, which, as Gerardo has explained, added to the Caribbean layer the work of outstanding musicians and poets from Salta, such as Juan Carlos Dávalos, Manuel J. Castilla, César Perdigüero, Eduardo Falú (Juan’s uncle), and Gustavo “Cuchi” Leguizamón. This approach generated a complex relationship, with tension developing between a critique of the telluric perspective of most of these composers and a deep admiration for their work. The appropriation of those traditions involved a reformist perspective: “In our vanity, we believed that this entire legacy belonged to us” (personal communication, August 2014).

At the same time, while the main referents of the social folklore, Yupanqui and Chilean composer Violeta Parra, searched for authenticity in ancient musical practices, the Núñez brothers created an urban folklore, attached to the present and connected to the future. Their sense of folk was quite innovative. They took the Caribbean rhythms and the music from Cuyo – tonadas and creations by the *Nuevo Cancionero* Movement – to renew the genre of chacarera, originally from the province of Santiago del Estero, the closest among north-western rhythms to the Cuban music they loved. But being from Salta, where the typical rhythm is the zamba, their chacareras were unpredictable, built against the grain.

During the 1960s the innovative approach of Pepe and Gerardo Núñez had already been established, as reflected in the interview published in *El tribuno* on 5 January 1967, in which it was announced that *Zafra*, consisting of 12 songs, would soon be staged. The short article emphasizes that these artists made folk music “within a different, new musical structure”, with the best example being “*Chacarera del 55*” (the title refers to a Tucuman’s popular meeting place), which

had already been recorded 16 times, and *Tristeza* (*Sadness*), which had just been recorded by Mercedes Sosa. She had married musician Oscar Matus in 1957 and they had immediately moved to his province, Mendoza, where they were part of an intense artistic-intellectual scene, connected to the political events taking place in the rest of Latin America.⁴ A short note in *Revista Folklore* in 1962 presenting her first LP, *La voz de la zafra*, mentions that in a return visit to Tucumán she looked for the Núñez brothers to give them a copy of the recording she and her husband had made of *Chacarera del 55*. That was the beginning of a friendship based upon the idea that songs should have principles (Braceli 2003).

In the quoted *El Tribuno's* interview, the Núñezes express their critical take on the folk music promoted by the record labels, which they characterized as “easy, likable, sensationalist, sentimental”. They instead defended a more “authentic” folk music based on concerns over social issues and interested in “all that reveals or supports the struggles of mankind to be free from the forces of oppression”. However, at the same time, they distanced themselves from the sort of protest or propaganda songs that they considered to be part of the “advertising apparatus that served to deform and distort the popular taste”, at odds with the esthetic quality. In the interview published in the newspaper *Noticias* in 1965, Pepe defines his music as “intimate, more committed”, which meant that it required a special kind of audience and atmosphere in order to be performed.⁵

The Cuban Revolution inspired militant song movements in several Latin American countries, over all Cuba, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina (García 2009; Molinero 2011; Vila 2014; Orquera 2016; González 2016; Milstein 2016). There was a difference, however, between the “protest song”, based in a straight political message against capitalism and its local expressions, and the music with a social content not explicitly political, as it was practiced by Yupanqui after his withdrawal from the Communist Party (Orquera 2013c). This poetry was not straight, because the poetic treatment of the message was never abandoned; in that vein, Pepe Núñez made clear his position against the idea of “protest songs” and, at the same time, his admiration for Violeta Parra and her compatriot Víctor Jara.

In that wave, in 1962 the *Movimiento Nuevo Cancionero* (New Songbook Movement) had been launched by means of a manifesto promoted in Mendoza and signed by Mercedes Sosa, Oscar Matus, and Armando Tejada Gómez, among others (García 2009). Although Petrocelli was not one of the founders, he nevertheless came to be considered as one of its members, as Tejada Gómez affirms in an interview in *Revista Folklore* in June 1972. Juan Falú summarized the links between the musicians from the provinces of Mendoza, Tucumán, and Salta: “They were sharing things during a very fertile period for folk music in Argentina, all of them participating in a musical and poetic movement of the *Nuevo Cancionero* with Petrocelli, Matus, etc. And Mercedes was the performer for the songs that were appearing, and in fact she recorded many of the Núñez brothers’ songs” (personal communication, October 2006).

Chacarera del 55 was recorded in 1965 in *Canciones con Fundamento* (*Songs with Principles*). The next year this song was also included on *Hermano* (*Brother*), along with *Tristeza* (*Sadness*) and *Para mañana* (*For Tomorrow*), while *Para cantarle a mi gente* (*To Sing to my People*), released the following year, contained a vibrant performance of *Los machetes* (*The Machetes*) from *Zafra*. Mercedes Sosa also recorded *Picapedrero*

(*Stonecutter*) by Ariel Petrocelli on her 1970 album *El grito de la tierra* (*The Cry of the Earth*) and *Cuando tenga la tierra* (*When the Land is Mine*) by Petrocelli and Daniel Toro and *El Manco Arana* (*Arana, the One-Armed Man*) by the Núñez brothers on *Traigo un pueblo en mi voz* (*I Carry a People in my Voice*) in 1973.

Hermano owes its title to a composition by Lima Quintana and Guastavino, which in a certain manner summarizes the ideals of the era, when the poet aspired to have his or her song embody the voice of the people: “And when in the end /your heart goes silent /your people will be heard /through a miraculous singer”.⁶ This same spirit is found in the *milonga* tune *Los hermanos* (*The Brothers*) by Yupanqui, recorded by La Negra in *Hasta la victoria siempre* (*Forever towards Victory*), which was dedicated to the memory of Che Guevara. These compositions gave life to a repertoire made up of works by Armando Tejada Gómez, Matus, Hamlet Lima Quintana, Tito Francia, Violeta Parra, Ramón Ayala, Félix Luna, and Ariel Ramírez, among others (Carrillo-Rodríguez 2010).

In 1968, Pepe Núñez included a piece from *Zafra, Luna de mayo* (*May Moon*), on *La piel del pueblo* (*The Skin of the People*), a recording that made the social nature of his work clear. There the poet declared his own conversion into a man of the people: “The skin that covers me /is the skin of the people /which is touched by love” [*La piel que me cubre /Es piel del pueblo /Que el amor conmueve*], while at the same time he questions bourgeoisie morality and the need to feel the suffering of others: “The pain of another is a pain /that does not hurt so much /because it belongs to someone else” [*La pena del otro es una pena /que no golpea tanto /porque es pena ajena*]. In *El hombre memoria* (*Memory-man*), he states “*Por eso es mentira /que el hombre es curtido*” (“That’s why it is not true /that a man can just get used to it”), discarding the ideology that the poor do not suffer because they are accustomed to hunger and cold. In *El viento de julio* (*July Wind*), which refers to the coldest month of the southern winter, he states “I know the suffering /does not come with me /it is here with the people /who have no coat” (*La pena, lo pienso /no viene conmigo /está aquí en el pueblo /que no tiene abrigo*) (Núñez 1968; Núñez, Gerardo, and Juan 2000). This last song is also one of a series of works entitled *Cuatro canciones para no sentir frío* (*Four Songs to Not Feel the Cold*), written in collaboration with Gerardo. This set of songs shows a metonymic conception of the poetry, in the sense that is considered a discourse able to recognize and console the suffering of others and generate a feeling of commiseration towards those living in conditions of poverty.

The Núñez brothers created a lyrical representation of the *zafrero* and his world not with an attitude of “interpretative arrogance”, as would be the case when speaking for a subject deprived of expressive power (Latin American Subaltern Studies Group 1996), but rather to the contrary: it is their sense of solidarity that leads them to put their words to the service of the intended end. Their construction of the character of the *zafrero* comes from getting closer to his world and from a feeling of compassion – of shared passion – in the face of hunger, cold, and the silencing to which the workers are subjected. In spite of their palliative and insufficient condition, the poetic words represent a way of building a social consciousness among the middle class regarding the subaltern subject (Spivak 1988).

3. Sinking into the poem

The dramatic cycle narrates the journey to the sugar plantation and the various points in the harvest worker's life among the cane fields, until reaching the end of that experience. The words are stylized and the poet inscribes his vision and his bonds of affection with the subject. It is also worth pointing out that the linkage with the audio-visual discourse is part of the piece's avant-garde nature and it presents a privileged route for reflection among the folk musicians, who at times demonstrate their thoughts in intimate relation with the affective sphere.

The first version of the work, subtitled *Poema musical y anunciación* (*Musical Poem and Annunciation*), alludes to the Biblical story of the Virgin Mary's maternity and implies the idea of a birth or a salvation. The road to this annunciation consists of a series of compositions of a narrative-reflexive nature. The narration, rather loose, marks specific moments in the experience of life on the sugar plantation and its impact on the feelings of the cane cutter, which also experiences an inner journey that eventually leads the *zafretero* to ask his son to flee from that world.

In this way the first-person narration, the songs, the intimate recitations of an off-stage voice, and the slides being projected combine to present the protagonist's pain, anguish, and desire for freedom. The setting in which these conditions are repeated could be called "the sugar plantation existence", with this understood to mean the cyclical period during which harvesting of the sugar cane organizes the lives of the workers and their families (Orquera 2010b). Unlike the case during the medieval European carnival, during this period social hierarchies and social exclusions become even worse. Moments of recreation, which are determined by the work regimen of the sugar mill, are scarce, and are often dedicated to taking turns singing along with a guitar (Bakhtin 1993 [1965]). Within a material context marked by poverty, the mythical dimension is embodied by *El Familiar* – a demonic, wolf-like familiar spirit – as a symbol of evil, as well as by the moon, the sky, and the sun as protective Andean deities.

The couplets by Pepe Núñez inserted into the staging are centered on the zone of contact between the rural farmworkers and the middle class. They are also focused on an effort to generate a sensibility based upon understanding of the suffering of the *zafretero* in view of an expected utopia. The first song, *Pequeña historia* (*A Little Story*), which serves as an introduction, includes a musical leitmotif composed by Juan Falú, which acts as a common thread throughout the story: "This is an endless story /with a character, with an action /since it must be told I will tell it /with a very clear voice, /just as it is" [*Esta es una historia sin final /con un personaje, con una acción /como hay que contarla la contaré /con la voz muy clara, /tal como es*]. Next the protagonist is introduced: "A *zafretero* had a different dream /his sweat was a sea without end /that burned his skin..." [*Un zafretero, tuvo un sueño distinto /su sudor, era un mar /sin final /que quemaba su piel...*]. After that the initial couplet is repeated, which functions as a chorus that condenses the meaning of the story being told. The replacement of the last two verses with different ones frames the portrayal of a larger story, conceived as a road towards the creation of a utopia: "the dream of a man and his freedom /and I could tell it a thousand times more" [*El sueño de un hombre y su libertad /y puedo contarla mil veces más*].

At that point the series of songs composed by Petrocelli begins, with others by Pepe added in. These songs are structured around a transformation: the journey, the arrival

at the sugar cane fields to be harvested, the reflections on brotherhood, loneliness, social exploitation, and the solidarity and final empowerment of the *zafrero*, who gains a voice that allows him to free his children from the need to suffer his own fate. The story is told through 12 stages.

1. The journey to the cane fields, which is narrated through two compositions, *La cuestión del pan* (*A Matter of Bread*), a carnival-style *vidala*, and *En el viaje* (*On the Journey*), a song. The first marks the time in the calendar when the cycle begins, in the winter, when the migrant worker's own land lacks crops to feed him: "...there are no deliveries or promises /under the sun" ("...no hay entregas ni promesas /bajo el sol"). Strictly out of his need to survive, he loads his family and their few possessions into a cart: "To the harvest we will march /to earn our living somehow" ("*Marcharemos a la zafra /porque de algo hay que vivir*"). The accompanying slide shows a typical cart from Santiago del Estero, showing the faces and expressions of the *zafreros* with a desire to maintain hope (Figure 1).

2. An offstage voice recites the poem *En el viaje* (*On the Journey*). This introduces an introspective dimension in which the protagonist questions the inevitability of his fate and begins to conceive of a new one: "So many dreams go with me! /And a destiny to grow" ("*¡Cuántos sueños van conmigo! /Y un destino por crecer*"). Bright images that are reminiscent of *Luna tucumana*, a famous zamba composed by Yupanqui, open up the possibility that this cycle may be broken and other possibilities may arise: "Open moon of dreams /moon and grey sky /A star should appear /that shines for me" ("*Abierta luna de sueños /luna, y cielo gris /Que salga una estrella /que alumbre por mí*").

3. With this impression of hope having been created, a lyrical detour then takes place into a verse from the song *Luna de mayo* (*May Moon*), which presents the double concept of the female harvest worker as the mother of "dead children" who for the same



Figure 1. Migrant workers' family on the way to the sugar cane harvest (Slide by Juan Paolini, late 60s). Reproduced with permission.



Figure 2. *Zafreiros* peeling sugar cane (Slide by Juan Paolini, late 60s). Reproduced with permission

reason are “children with no fear”, and with images being projected of child workers peeling sugarcane in the fields.

4. The song with the ironic title of *Tierra prometida* (*Promised Land*) is propelled by a repeating, sustained rhythm and it describes the arrival: “Now I am in the land /where the harvest is /machete in hand /sweat and espadrille” [*Ya estoy en la tierra /que vive la zafra /machete en las manos /sudor y alpargatas*] (Figure 2). The conversion of the man into a labor source and his resignation to extreme poverty demonstrates the situation of physical deprivation and humiliation that does not even offer the temporary freedom of the seasonal carnival celebrations: “Here no one forgives /neither the devil nor the wine /only exhaustion /will be your friend” [*Aquí no perdonan /ni el diablo ni el vino /tan sólo el cansancio /te tiene de amigo*].

5. In *El hombre zafra* (*The Harvest Man*), a zamba in which the lyrics are spoken, the complex and sorrowful identity of the harvest worker is laid out in all of its dimensions. An offstage voice presents him as a subject who now stands upright in the landscape, as a metaphor for his transformation into a man capable of exercising power: “With his full height in the furrow /and with blood on foot /he raises his strength in machetes, /his cane-cutter’s arm and his humanity with it” [*Con la estatura en el surco /y con la sangre de a pié /alza su fuerza en machetes /el brazo zafrero y el hombre con él*]. The voice then returns to the first person to relay a series of symbols: “I am relative of Death /I have seen her so often in my fatigue /that when she calls for my name /she will have to look for it /in the weave of the bread” [*Soy familiar de la muerte /tanto la cruzo en mi afán /que cuando quiera mi nombre /tendrá que buscarlo /en la trama del pan*].

These brief lines make reference to the myth of *El Familiar*, which in this work does not relate to a power based on the oppressed workers’ fear of some demonic creature, but rather to a much more specific power, in which death is a reality that lies in the

everyday work and hunger and in the constant fatigue of the cane cutter.⁷ Therefore, the name of the worker as revealed in the next two verses, *Fulano Cualquiera* (Mr. Nobody), in contrast to the formal double surnames of the mill owners, can only be found in his struggle for his “daily bread”, in reference to the economic-cultural structure of capitalism, which joins the sustenance of the people with their suffering.

6. The *Dance de los machetes* (*Dance of the Machetes*), which has an intensity that had already been revealed in an early version sung by Mercedes Sosa, is propelled by a chutunky rhythm created especially for this work. The machete, which is seen in multiple slides as an element representing the cane cutters, here serves as a phallic symbol capable of empowering the harvest workers.⁸ In this case it also serves as a metonym, as a part of the whole of the man who wields it, “the machete is half /of this tormentor’s arm /which is cutting without pause” [“*el machete, es mitad /de este brazo de verdugo /con que corto sin parar*”], and its power is described as if it had a life of its own: “The machetes go /skyward among the canes /to break their anxiety” [“*Los machetes, se van /por el cielo de las cañas /a quebrarles la ansiedad*”]. Its uncontrollable power should allow the workers to finish off the anxiety of their hardships, alluding to the ambitions of the sugar mill owners, which gives rise to a question that revolves around the deep desire that this social landscape creates: “What song will the sugar have? /What the plantation will want?” [“*Qué canción tendrá el azúcar /qué querrá el cañaveral*”]. This is in turn opposed by the material consequence of this type of social order, which is the exploitation of man: “The fury of the machete /becomes salt in the man” [“*que la furia del machete /en el hombre se hace sal*”]. Following the implacable rhythm of the poetic imagery and music, the miserly pay and the long workday finally give way to the “storm”, indicating that a change is on its way.

7. In the vidala entitled *El hombre solo* (*The Man Alone*), the field laborers are only conscious of their social isolation, despite the fact that work in the sugar harvest is a collective practice, because they remain outside of the government’s protection and the mill owners’ paternalistic system, focused on the permanent workers who live inside the premises of the sugar mill. This awareness is expressed through a pluralized enunciation that encapsulates loneliness as a common meaning, expressed through the slow moan of the vidala: “The harvest unites us /buddy to buddy /and here each one is /as alone as anybody [...] /Joined together in the harvest /oil and vinegar /the wine and the pay credits /beyond that who knows...” [“*La zafra nos junta /compadre a compadre /y aquí se está solo /tan solo de nadie [...] Juntarse en la zafra /Aceite y vinagre /El vino y el vale /después no se sabe...*”]. Clearly this refers to a solidarity of class, indicating the awareness of the subaltern that remains outside the universe in which the discourse is produced. Despite the worker having the companionship of his peers, his words and his suffering remain inaudible to those outside of that world.

8. At this point there is an explicit plea for solidarity in order to re-establish the link between the middle-class subject – represented by the audience members – and migrant workers. This takes place through some couplets composed by Pepe Núñez and expressed by the narrator who is guiding the story. This plea is supported by the notion of brotherhood, in the construction of a geo-cultural identity rooted in the land they inhabit in common, Tucumán, and in the recognition that the cane cutter occupies the lowest position within the agro-industrial structure. Along these lines the couplets apply a type of an affective-possessive grammatical form very common in the speech of the

region's rural population (e.g. "*pintamele*", "*hablamele*"), reflecting the hope that the link of brotherhood can embrace the subject located at the bottom of the social ladder.

At the same time, the narrator alludes to the possibility of liberation in the future, concentrating the feelings that carry through the entire poem: "When you look in his eyes /and feel such brotherhood /bring some hope /to the *zafrero* of Tucumán. // [...] //Paint a smile for me /on his peasant face /Tell about tomorrow /to the *zafrero* of Tucumán" ["*Cuando le mires los ojos /y lo sientas tan de hermano /arrimale una esperanza /al zafrero tucumano. // [...] //Pintamele una sonrisa /en su rostro de paisano /Hablamele de mañana /al zafrero tucumano*"]. An emotional representation of the workers is thus presented, in order to promote their inclusion within the affective scope of the progressive members of the middle class who are interested in this type of poetry.

9. The recitation in the zamba *Sueño Zafrero* (*The Zafrero Dream*) highlights the idea of liberation. It is structured around the image of the guitar, the local instrument that has the ritual function of channeling pleasure as well as pain, through songs sung alone as well as in a group. These lyrics begin *in media res* with dreamlike images of the narrative voice: "a guitar made of sugar /with which I wanted to sing" ["*una guitarra de azúcar /con la que quise cantar*"] to sweeten the pain. Sweetness and pain are contrasted with another pair of concepts, life as suffering and the dream as liberation, contrasted as well with the harvesting work as deprivation and the carnival as a time for enjoyment: "and I held it in my arms /tender waist of lime /and you were a resounding guitar /festive and growing with the carnival light" ["*y la apreté entre mis brazos /tierna cintura de cal /y eras guitarra sonora /festiva y creciente con luz carnaval*"].

The inner tension generated by these contrasts becomes slowly defined in the direction of the change, through a dynamic image that joins the guitar to the sugar and to the *duendes* – mythical elf-like figures from north-western Argentina – who dance to the sound of machetes and a "thunder-song", suggesting the rebellion contained within the subaltern.

10. *Diálogo del zafrero y la muerte* (*Dialog between the Zafrero and Death*) is an *aire de milonga* that returns to the subject of death as an element that haunts the plantations. Although the pampeano rhythm and the structure of the dialog link this piece to the *payada* style, the more obvious intertext is that of the *Romance del enamorado y la muerte* (*Romance of the Lover and Death*), a medieval Spanish poem in which man struggles with the impossibility of prolonging his existence beyond the limit defined by his fate.

In this case death is referred to as *Señora Guadaña* (Lady Reaper), described with medieval attributes and located in the realm of *El Familiar*. In this way these two legends are readapted in accordance with local history. The conflict set up by the *Romance del enamorado y la muerte* produces a philosophical dialog that ends up deconstructing the power of fate to highlight instead the responsibility of human actions. It shows that death, rather than arriving suddenly at some particular moment, is disseminated in the everyday actions that take place under a relationship of exploitation: "I know the knife that kills in silence /with no crime to be seen, with nobody dying /I've seen the brutal death that comes day after day /stalking the houses with no midday bread" ["*Conozco el cuchillo que mata en silencio /sin crimen a vista, sin nadie muriendo. /Conozco la muerte brutal de los días /Que arriman las cosas sin pan mediodía*"]. After confronting the mythical, the poem then reverts to the real:

"Although your business /Lady Reaper /is somebody's death /ours is the sugarcane"
["*Así que lo suyo, Señora Guadaña /Es muerte cualquiera, la cosa es la caña*"].

11. Now with the end of the work approaching, the feelings of solidarity are affirmed as the axis of communication in *Pregón del vino* (*The Wine Speech*), a chacarera with lyrics written by Pepe Núñez. In this case the voice heard is that of the poet himself: over the Biblical image of the transubstantiation of wine into blood, he presents its condition as another product with its origins in the work of a harvester. The idea of communion passes from the regional sphere to the material, while the idea of "love thy neighbor" raises the more secular concept of solidarity. The poet wants to dissolve all social distance, remembering that such distance hides an essential humanity: "With this wine I drink /I drink the sweat of another brother /I don't want cups or glasses /I want to drink from his hands" ["*Con este vino que bebo /Bebo el sudor de otro hermano /No quiero copas ni vasos, /Quiero beber de sus manos*"].

It is clear that the grape harvest worker described in the speech is a dark-skinned countryman who yearns for, and even catches a glimpse of, social change: "...his large brown hand /that grasps a hope" ["...*su gran mano morena /que se aferra a una esperanza*"]. In the chorus the poet expresses his compassion for the exploitation to which the grape harvester is subjected: "I know the misery /that parallels that of my people /contained in the wine /like the bluest sky" ["*Yo conozco la miseria /paralela de mi gente /abrazados en el vino /como el cielo más celeste*"]. From there he chooses to transform himself into this other, walking the path of those who live at the limits of survival, "...of those who exhaust their soul /[...] /for bread that is not quite enough" ["...*de los que dejan el alma /[...] /con un pan que ya no alcanza*"].

At the end of the speech the poet and the *zafrero*, whose voices have become united and which are now indistinguishable, defy *El Familiar*, because the structure of domination it represents has become unacceptable: "Let the *zafrero* devil come /if he wants to drink my blood /let him come and wrestle with me /we'll see if he can finish me off" ["*Que venga el diablo zafrero /si quiere beber mi sangre /que venga y cinchemos juntos a ver si puede acabarme*"]. In this way the voice of the poet takes the wine as a substance of transmutation that allows him to feel the same way as the man to whom he dedicates his song, while at the same time transferring to this man a hopeful conception of his story.

The climax of the work comes with the protagonist breaking away from his destiny, as expressed in *Diálogo del zafrero* (*With his Son*) and *Canción para no volver* (*Song of No Returning*). The first one can be understood on two levels: on one hand as a lament and a plea to his son not to follow in his footsteps, which implies a breakage with the existing *habitus* of class; on the other hand, it represents the emergence of a voice that enters into open conflict with the voice of the obedient cane worker as heard in *Vamos a la zafra*.

The visual dimension of the sugarcane fields takes on the aspect of a living being that can literally and figuratively "swallow up" the workers. The idea of the son as his father's co-worker/helper is therefore exchanged for one of sacrifice and liberating separation: "I want him to have a tomorrow /with renewed blood /that's what I want for him" ["*Yo lo quiero con mañana /con la sangre renovada /lo quiero así*"]. The chorus reaffirms this definition of enlightened redemption, proclaiming the desire for a final break with the system: "Run away from here", "Leave me behind" ["*Huya de aquí, /Déjeme a mí*"].

12. In the final composition, *Canción para no volver*, the *zafrero* himself abandons the sugar plantation existence: “I have to reunite my family /so I am saying goodbye /to the sugarcane god” [“*He de juntar mi familia /y al Dios de la caña /le dejo mi adiós*”]. Since the socio-economic structures cannot continue to be the same – what happens in the narration is a change in the subjectivity of the migrant worker – the protagonist successfully looks for another way of life that agrees with the new consciousness he has acquired. This is the light is in his eyes, which “carry the torch” that at some point will be lit.

His existence, now liberated from the sugar mill’s exploitation, moves into the future as if the past was already a memory, and we see that his dream was necessary in order to create a new man, capable of taking charge of his own story: “Although I may be gone /when the settlement sees cracks of light /I will rise up in the memory /when one day they have blue sky” [“*Aunque no esté cuando el rancho /tenga mirillas de luz /yo subiré en el recuerdo /cuando ellos un día /tengan cielo azul*”].

The work closes with a first verse, at the end of which the voices come together to connect the story just told to that of a more generalized utopia: “The dream of man and his freedom /and I can tell it a thousand times more” [“*El sueño del hombre y su libertad /y puedo contarla, mil veces más*”]. Some new couplets by Pepe are then added in, which reintroduce and reinforce the elements consecrated by Yupanqui: the moon, the sun, light, hope, and mankind: “The sugar harvest moon /is a moon that passes /but the sun of mankind /is the light of hope” [“*La luna zafra /es luna que pasa /el sol de los hombres /la luz de esperanza*”]. Finally, all of the artists face the audience to add members to this drive for change as well: “We will maintain our courage /just in case we find the need /to open up a dream for our own steps forward” [“*Guardemos las fuerzas /por un por si acaso /abramos los sueños para nuestros pasos*”].

Like Yupanqui in the story *¿Pueblos dormidos? (Sleeping Peoples?)*, in which the Kollas are in a state of attentive waiting, the final couplet compares the headscarves of the *zafreiros* to “sleeping doves”. It is clear to us that the dimension of the dream will be deeply effective and motivating, because it represents a change in the perception of the subjectivity itself, and it announces a powerful awakening.

4. A provincial avant-garde

It is important as well to look at the local conditions of cultural production and the process of recreation of the work. Until the development of the CD format and the appearance of relatively accessible recording companies and music publishers, artists from Tucumán had to record their creative works in Buenos Aires. Most local musicians, unable to afford the trip or not eager to go to the metropolis, would compose and perform their works in the local setting, which favored a situation in which songs would be learned and reproduced in an atmosphere of familiarity, whether at a backyard party or a local social club, both of which were abundant in that era. The compositions that could transcend the provincial setting were those that were recorded by composers or performers whose notoriety allowed them access to the radio or recording market, such as Yupanqui and Sosa.

This means that the poetic-musical practice of local artists mostly revolved around oral performances and interpersonal transmission. *Zafra* is a good example of this, as it was presented without the existence of a musical score, without registration in the

SADAIC system (The Society of Argentinean Authors and Composers), and without any prior audio recording or publishing. Not even Petrocelli knew in his day of the staging in Tucumán: “So I worked on the lyrics but after that I don’t know... I know there were some musical developments” (Korstanje and Orquera 2009). However, far from seeming bothered by the fact that all of this had happened without his knowledge, he was happy, because what mattered to him was the contact of the composition with the audience. Furthermore, the absence of a recording of the complete work allowed small modifications to be inserted during the various stages that reflected the particularities of each situation.

The work’s first performance draft, saved by Juan Falú and never showed as such (Núñez 1972), proposed a soloist singer, a female voice, a male off-stage voice, and an accompanying guitar. The first scene in this initial version introduces the fundamental elements of the cane cutter and the symbol of hope: “...a first slide appears with a machete, a headscarf, and the sky”. Next the regional context is defined using maps that show the provinces of Salta, Santiago del Estero, and Catamarca, before focusing in on an outline of the province of Tucumán. Then a series of smokestacks appear, symbolizing the sugar mills, laid out in a row “as if they were marching”. Next, over this same background a row of people appear “in a marching arrangement (as if going off to the harvest)”. The script then states: “The voice offstage says ‘off we march to the harvest / with machetes of hope’”.

Here the point of arrival is emphasized: “A series of slides show routes or maps of the roads that lead to Tucumán. The roads coming from Santiago, Catamarca, Salta, etc. can be shown on a map of Argentina”. These images are conceived as a sort of anchoring for the poem, “very basic, so the audience is not distracted and can pay attention to the content of the song”. In other words, these slides have a documentary-illustrative function, although this does not mean they are any less important, as for each song it is emphasized “Always with slides in the background”. At some point a sort of dialog or counterpoint between the poem and the images occurs. For example, in the conversation between the *zafrero* and death, the script suggests: “A slide of a man sitting in a resting position, looking into the distance. Sounds of far-away music and clamor. This same man standing, still looking into the distance with a posture of powerlessness. This same man in a small store (always looking at nothing)”. Surely this worker is not caught up in an existential attitude per se, but rather his attitude shelters the formation of a new awareness, a capacity to transform passivity and impotence into positivity. For this reason the next image, planned to go along with the *Wine speech*, which is a song of communion with others, consists of “a clear morning. Children. Flowers [...] A worker’s family dinner table. To give the sensation that these are the dreams of a *zafrero* father”. Finally, the closing scene is described with a new series of images featuring the maps, this time in reverse, with the outline of Tucumán becoming smaller.

This script was never used because a series of slides focused on migrant workers, already produced by Juan Paolini, were used instead. As the two projects overlapped, the idea of the smokestacks, the marching workers, and the maps of north-western Argentina was put aside. The rest of the symbology, however, was more or less retained: the machete and the headscarf, to which the cart/home of the *zafrero* were added along with the brimmed hat that protected him from the sun; the smokestacks and maps were

replaced by the sugar cane; and the interiors by the faces showing loneliness and hope as presented in the foreground.

The first draft definitely makes it clear that the protagonist's transformation does not represent some sort of purely lyrical dreaming, but rather that it is a dialogic, polemic response to an established economic system, while the images projected in the theater in which the show is performed fulfill the function of bringing the audience closer to a reality that contrasts with that of the city dweller. This is not meant to suggest that there is a radical opposition between the countryside and the city, as in those years all of Tucumán was accustomed to the landscapes of the sugar mills, the cane carts, the cane cutters, and the smell of molasses.

Last, but not least, the poem's revolutionary position confronted hardships to be presented. In 1972 and 1975 the performances were few and sporadic; then, the repression was so intense that it shut down any chance of replay, forcing the authors to an interior exile and forbidding their compositions from broadcasting. Most of the attendees being militants, many of them were hit by the repression after the *coup d'état* in 1976, forced to exile if not disappeared (Crenzel 2010; Falú 2010; Orquera 2010a). For this reason, when the dictatorship was over, in 10 December 1983, *Zafra* was known only to those involved in its production and those that happened to be part of the audiences.

The announcement of the premiere of *Zafra*, to be sponsored by the *Teatro Universitario*, appeared under the title "*Zafra, poema musical, se estrena el viernes*", on 4 August 1972 in *La Gaceta* newspaper. However, on 8 August a note signed by Falú claimed that, as the show had not been publicized, and it had been thought for a wide audience, not for "an elite or a circle of friends", the performance would be postponed. The premiere of *Zafra* finally took place at *Nuestro Teatro*, which would become a focal point for independent theater and music in the province (Figure 3).⁹ The audiences came largely from the city's middle class – university students, professionals, journalists, and artists – in many cases figures recognized on the local cultural scene. According to Falú (2010 and personal communication held in 2006), the debut performance was well received by the public, and a few days later the show was presented again at the Agronomy complex of the National University in Tucumán, attracting an audience made up of highly politicized students.

The closure of sugar mills in 1966 was mentioned in the program, although there was no reference to this occurrence in the "initial content". Considering the strong social effect that this event had in the community, the authors took great care to ensure that their production would be properly received, as well as to introduce the background to the work and to show their capacity for self-critique:

Zafra is a work that was conceived and almost completed eight years ago. Today we are giving it aesthetic form but with the initial content given to it by its authors being respected. This limitation, in other words, the failure to synthesize the form and content within the present-day socio-political context, is assumed as such, but at the same time it implies an attempt to recover a work that could have become well known since its time of first conception. This assessment, in addition to recognition of what was done, serves as a self-critique because of a lack of knowledge of how to confront this issue. (*Zafra. Poema musical y anunciación brochure* 1972)¹⁰

Here it may be noticed that capitalist exploitation fueled by the Cuban Revolution was in 1972 surpassed by the claims for return of the sources of employment, destroyed by the closing of the sugar cane industries. Given this dichotomy, *Zafra* again highlights

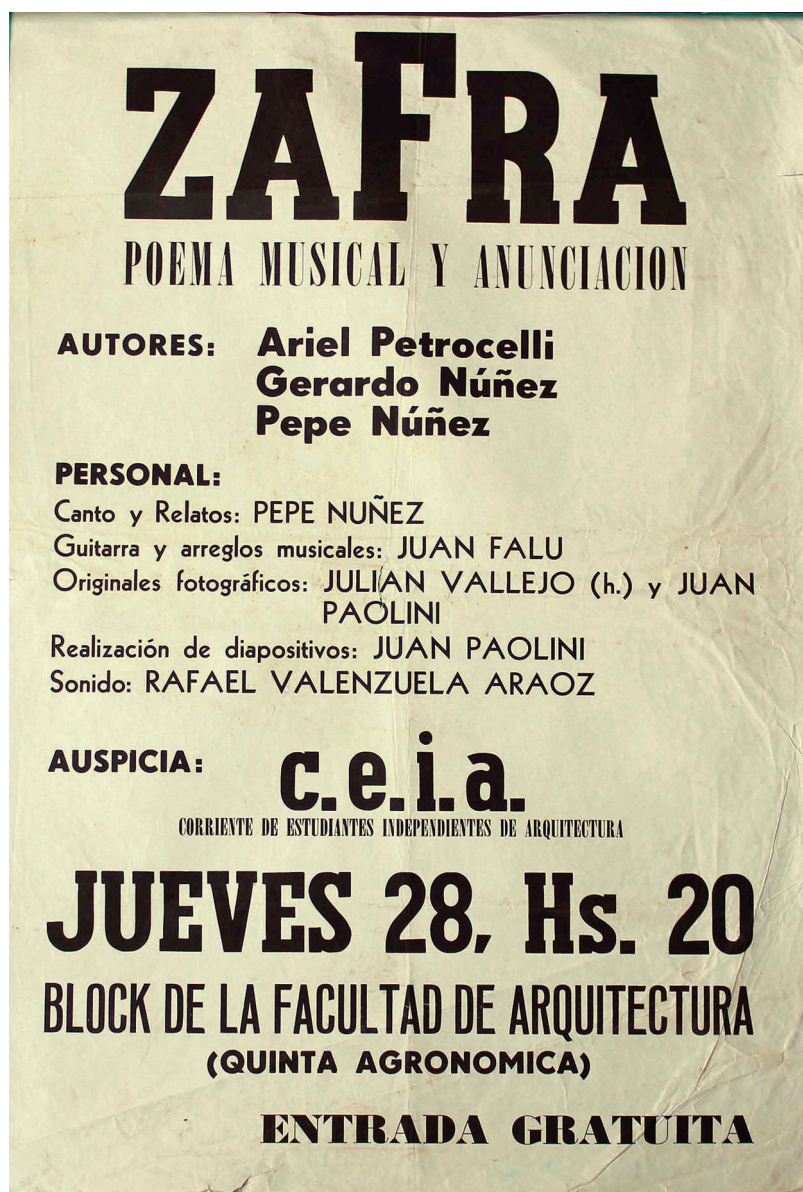


Figure 3. *Zafra. Musical Poem and Annunciation's* first performance poster (1972).

the persistence of exploitative relationships and brings up a case that is considered to be fundamental: the liberation of the internal migrant worker.

In the first presentation there was a guitarist (Juan Falú), a singer (Pepe Núñez), a voice off-stage and slide projections on the back. Alba López, Pepe's widow (personal communication, September 2006), remembers that the strong reception given to the work contributed to an offer being made by promoter Angel Merellano and banking union representative Dardo Zelarayán to stage a performance in 1975 at *Teatro Payró* in Buenos Aires. Soon afterwards the guitarist "Lalo" Aybar from the province of Salta – who accompanied Pepe Núñez on the 1968

release *La piel del pueblo* (*The Skin of the People*) – staged *Zafra* at the *Teatro de La Fábula* in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Abasto. According to Aybar (personal communication, October 2010), he exchanged some correspondence with Pepe, seeking advice regarding the manner of staging the work, and he took charge of the singing, recitation, and guitar playing, while also adding projection of some images.

In 1985, two years after the last military dictatorship was lifted, the work re-debuted at the *Teatro San Martín* in Tucumán – the main hall of the city, with about 800 seats – with small changes made to the title and to the order of the songs. On this occasion the instrumental piece for the guitar, *De la raíz a la copa*, was included, which was composed and performed by Falú, who had recently returned from exile in Brazil. There were two new participants, actor “Rolo” Andrada in the recitation and singer “Lelo” González. The sound was by Pichuco Valenzuela Aráoz, who recorded this new show on an audio cassette. Then, in 1992 the work debuted in Mexico in a performance by Aybar, as part of a bill shared with the group “LU Música de Bolsillo” formed by Mexican musicians Myrna Vargas and Jesús Cuevas Cardona. This version consisted of an ensemble of guitar, keyboards, electric saxophone, and various percussion instruments, with Aybar also being accompanied by backing vocals from Myrna Vargas.¹¹

After the death of Pepe Núñez in 1999, Fernando Korstanje (2004) recorded a documentary in his honor, entitled *Hermano Núñez*, in which Alba López shows the audio cassette from the 1985 performance. In 2009, the original slides and script came to light while doing the research that supports this study, which had been saved by the photographer Juan Paolini. When combined with a program from 1972, these materials made it possible to produce an initial reconstruction of the work. This reconstruction, led by Korstanje, Paolini, and the author, was presented in a tribute held at the National University of Tucumán’s museum in honor of the musician, entitled *A diez años de su no-partida*. The next year this documentary was shown at Argentina’s National Library.

This new dissemination of the work inspired a first studio recording by a group of notable artists from Tucumán, as part of an effort to reinstall the work in the memory of the people.¹² This version was presented at *Teatro San Martín* on 10 September 2013, with musical direction by Lucho Hoyos, who created a contemporary arrangement with two guitar players and two singers: Carlos Carrizo (guitar), Ariel Alberto (guitar), “Mono” Villafañe (voice), and Nancy Pedro (voice); poet “Poli” Soria and “Grillo” Córdoba were in charge of the recitation. The show was a main local event, and it received a strong praise by *La Gaceta* on 10 September 2013 under the title “*Zafra*. Una obra que los tucumanos debemos escuchar”:

The performance of “Zafra” provoked so much emotion that the night can be summed up by the seemingly endless applause heard in the Teatro San Martín. It was a standing ovation, as is appropriate on such occasions. More than a tribute, an act of love [...] “Zafra” is as beautiful as it is arresting. The story of the worker and his dream make one’s hair stand on end. It speaks of his reality, of his life day after day in the province. Its continuing validity adds to its richness. Sad and profound, magnetic, delicious at times, this work merits new performances [...] It deserves packed houses and a one-way trip into the heart of each resident of Tucumán. (Monti 2013)

Besides the high quality of the interpreters and the work itself, the new release was so welcomed because it was still present in the hard core of Tucumán’s artistic and intellectual community, deeply involved with the sugar cane industry. The

audiences of the performances held in 1985 and 2013 belonged to an enlightened and progressive middle class interested in keeping the memory of the works produced before the last dictatorship. If the *habitus* of listening to integral pieces that demanded an extended concentration had declined during this period, the new audiences succeeded in filling out that requirement, hearing attentively each stretch of the piece. Many of them belonged to the 1960s and 1970s generation, but others grew up in the neo-liberal period, which advocated individual values. It occurs that with the return of the democracy, young musicians searched traditions interrupted by the dictatorship, and then spread that legacy in their songs (Orquera 2015). The singer Nancy Pedro, who belongs to this last generation, is a good example.

The strong reception of *Zafra*'s 2013 performance was notable to such a degree that it was another appearance in Casa de Tucuman in Buenos Aires on 23 May 2014. With scarce advertising, the hall was full and counted on the presence of outstanding musicians like Juan Falú. The last performance was held on 3 October 2015 in Centro Cultural Kirchner.¹³

5. Conclusions

The fact that Pepe Núñez affiliated himself with Leftist thinking but Juan Falú with Peronism not only reflects the 10 years of age difference between them but also the fact that in the northern poetic-musical imagination the representation of the *zafretero* as a victim of exploitation was common to both ideological universes, without this inserting a conflict into the representational order.¹⁴ *Zafra* therefore does not contain a direct materialist discourse or scenes of social confrontation or even mention the owner except through his phantasmal dimension as reflected in the mythological character of *El Familiar*. This is perhaps because the poetic language takes refuge inside the subject that it wants to empower, concentrating all of its energy on the gaze searching for that crack of light, to lift up the body that has been beaten down, to raise the machete, and finally to enter into history.

The future is imagined as a time of resolution that lacks a specific name or form, being defined instead as "morning" and "blue sky", a sort of reaching out and grasping for utopia. In this sense it is part of the trend that is concerned with, in the expression used by Franz Fanon, those "wretched of earth" (1986 [1961]), specifically examining the issue of the decolonization of subjectivity. *Zafra* therefore resorts to the use of a type of poetry that is highly politicized and dares to think of a time when political subjugation can be modified through emotion.

As a poetic-philosophical reflection, it seeks to contribute to the revolution conceived as attainable within the liberation movement of the 1960s. However, this intention does not try to modify the *zafretero* himself, but instead targets the middle-class audience members, who, by understanding the profound injustice that underlies the subjugation expressed in the poetry, would be able to join the continent-wide struggle taking place in that era.

Notes

1. The word "disappeared" refers to the people kidnapped, tortured, killed, and hidden by the last dictatorship. In 1983, the elected president was then Raúl Alfonsín, from the

Radical Party; in the 1990s he was followed by Carlos Saúl Menem, who, in spite of having been elected for *peronismo*, implemented a neo-liberal reform that led to a dramatic economic crisis in 2001. In 2003, Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency; being his successor, his wife Cristina Fernández, in power until 10 December 2015. Both belonged to the Left-wing of *peronismo*.

2. He resided in Tucumán with his family for four months in 1918 and again from 1933 until 1946, when he traveled throughout the region to learn the old repertoire of the peasants. He recreated this in songs nourished by the lives of the workers in the Andes and at the mills, which would become the substratum of Argentina's folk music (Orquera 2008, 2010b; Chamosa 2010).
3. Carlos Altamirano (2001) takes as interchangeable the expressions "middle class" and "petit bourgeoisie". In the 1960s it was usual in Argentina to use the term "*pequebus*" to refer to the last concept (more on this topic in Adamovsky 2009).
4. Thanks to Oscar Chamosa for sharing this note with me.
5. I thank Alba López for letting me consult Pepe's journalistic clippings collection.
6. "*Y cuando quede al final / tu corazón silencioso / serás un pueblo sintiendo / por un cantor milagroso*".
7. This myth arose around the 1930s and was motivated by the spectacular wealth generated by the sugar mills. The legend claimed that a deal had been made with the devil and that therefore a beast known as *El Familiar* must devour a worker each year in order to ensure the prosperity of the company. The victim would be one of the poorest workers, usually a temporary laborer from the province of Santiago del Estero.
8. The machete, as symbol of strength, is also present in other writers that portray the life of *zafreiros*, like Lucho Díaz, who was resident in Ingenio Bella Vista (Orquera 2010a).
9. This space, owned by actress Rosa Avila, was previously a local candy factory, and during performances the aromas of molasses, sugar cane liqueur, and citrus fruits still lingered in the air (Tossi 2010).
10. "Eight years ago" means two years prior to the date that appears in the songbook saved by Gerardo Núñez, which probably marks the completion of a composition process initiated then towards 1964.
11. Lalo Aybar gave me information and memorabilia about this staging, for which records have not otherwise survived.
12. With this purpose Alba López de Núñez organized a team formed by Korstanje, Paolini, photographer Magui Ponce, Lucho Hoyos, and the author.
13. This magnificent center, built on the structure of the old Buenos Aires post office, was inaugurated in May 2015, in the final stretch of the Kirchnerista period; until 10 December its cultural activity was intense, especially for musicians from the provinces who could play in the center's prestigious halls.
14. This is a characteristic of the socially oriented folk music initiated by Yupanqui (Orquera 2008).

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Fabiola Orquera (PhD, Duke University) is researcher at CONICET (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research, Argentina). She has obtained national prizes as an essayist and has published articles on the culture of the Argentinean north-west in distinguished academic journals. Among her latest publications, "From the Andes to Paris: Atahualpa Yupanqui, the Communist Party and the Latin American political folk song movement", in

Red Strains: Music and Communism Outside the Communist Bloc After 1945 (The British Academy and Oxford University Press, 2013) and “Paisaje social, trayectoria artística e identidad política: el caso de Ramón Ayala”, en EIAL (Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe), Tel Aviv University, (27:1, 2016 dossier on Music in Latin America during the Cold War) should be highlighted. Dr Orquera has also edited *Ese ardiente jardín de la República. Formación y desarticulación de un “campo” cultural: Tucumán, 1880-1975* (2010), a reference book on non-central cultures of Argentina. Currently she works on the widening of the cultural map of this country.

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