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Listening to the Internet: Cultural Discourses, Vicente Fernández, and Hearing YouTube Comments

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The following pages are my attempt at making sense of my identity, my musical thinking, and the joys and struggles of doing a research project during a global pandemic. This project is as personal as it is theoretical. *Pero, ya tú sabes.*

Introduction: Internet Listening

Here's a story: It's well after midnight. I sit there, at my laptop, tequila in hand. Like a good *machista* (if I could ever become one), I don't drink my tequila with much in it: a single ice cube, a squirt of lime, and a dash of *tajín.* I can feel my cheeks warming up as the alcohol kicks in. I remember what my mom told me about tequila once, "you feel it in your chest." *Ranchera* music isn't for sober listening—for sober ears—*you feel it in your chest*. No *charro* (Mexican cowboy) would sing "Por Tu Maldito Amor" sober. Like any good Mexican, I too contemplate with *mi Chente*[1] in the cantina, thinking of all the woes and lovers who have wronged me. Chente and I have a pretty big difference, though, since I am a *maricón*, a faggot, and thus a juxtaposition to the strength of the machista and the charro, the two iconic figures of who a "real" Mexican man is. But I have another indulgent secret: not only am I a maricón and a *puto*,[2] I'm a *niño-niña,* a boy-girl. My own betrayal of the Mexican man I am "supposed" to be, my trans-femme queerness (which is a word as foreign to many Mexicans as maricón might be to you, the reader), is surprisingly not at conflict with the music video[3] I am watching.

Because of your damn love. I might let a tear fall down my cheek if I think about him enough. I might also get choked up on my own thoughts, my own feelings, and my inability to let out what I want to say—what I need to say. For a moment, I am transported to the *rancho*[4]. I don't know who I am in this scene, though. Am I Chente, the man who lost the woman he loves, or Patsy, the one who got away, only to be remembered? The part of me that knows Judith

[1] Others also think Chente is theirs. See Figure 13.
[2] Puto is translated to a man-whore and comes to be used as another pejorative for a homosexual person.
[3] If you find yourself wondering what music video I am talking about reader, do not fret. Like all good stories, there is a time and place for knowing certain things. Listen to the *chisme* (gossip) as you read and find yourself committing to the Michel Foucault's (1976) incitement to discourse.
[4] I've never been to one, of course, but I assume they are pleasant.

Butler's (1988) concept of gender performance, who wants to consider how gender is invested in by institutions and individuals and is historically contingent on power and material conditions inevitably falls mute to the affected self that I have become when listening to (watching? experiencing? YouTube-ing?) this music video. How can it be that a queer trans-femme maricón can have as much empathy for a machista as I do when I unsoberly listen to Vicente Fernández's voice?

I am also listening *on* and *to* the internet in this moment. How can it be that someone listens to the internet? Are the practices of listening, the embodied experience of wearing headphones (or perhaps singing in the shower), different from the concert hall, the dance floor, or church pew? Navigating the internet is an intimate experience; as interlocutors, observers, listeners, and consumers we engage with sites (both in the literal sense of websites and in the theoretical definition that a site is a particular space) within the realm of our own screens in front of us. Yet, we are not merely acted upon by the algorithms that "the Web" has imposed on us, formulating the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) by which we engage with digital and social media, thus confining our tastes. We, too, imprint ourselves onto the reality of the internet, forming social chains by means of sharing, referencing[5], and in some cases, combining[6].

Listening to the internet, as an action and a practice, means we make the digital realm part of our own realities. Social media becomes an aspect of everyday life through use, consumption, and engagement. The quotidian and interactive nature of social media is what allows us to listen

[5] Figure 36 demonstrates an interesting reference to the somewhat recent "for me challenge," that started on TikTok where the commenter makes fun of the acting in the music video through the rhetoric of the TikTok challenge.
[6] In this latter formulation I consider the aspects of social media by which people can merge two (or more) existing entities together, forcing a relationship between what may have been unrelated internet "objects". For example, the Quote Retweet function of Twitter allows for a forced contiguity between the "original" and the "quote" tweet, allowing for a single object, the Quote Retweet (as a combination of the original "quoted" Tweet and its commentary), to be understood and interpreted to have meaning in its own right.

to it both individually and collectively. When I tune in to a Netflix show, scroll through TikTok, or turn on a Spotify playlist, I know I am not listening, watching, or *doing* the internet alone. People, across time and space, are there with me. That is the beauty of internet listening.

Interactions on the internet—with intimacy forming an in-group identity and the seemingly overwhelming totality of The Internet (as a socially constructed concept)—are mediated through language. Gretchen McCulloch brings up the concept of the Internet Person to describe how community is made on the internet since "the population of the internet is larger than any one country, and its denizens aren't just technology *users*," (2019: 64, my emphasis). She later states that "your experience of the internet…is shaped by who you were and who else was around at the time you joined," as a way to designation the multiple categories of persons within the history of internet use and create generations of Internet People (McCulloch 2019: 67). For my project, I simply draw on the concept of the Internet Person to formulate, by extension, the concept of the Internet Listener. As we have shifted from concentrating written interaction from literal mail to email, instant messaging, texting, and now messaging apps, so too have we shifted where and how we listen to the world around us. Music listening apps now dominate and supplant the position that radio has for this new wave of Internet Listeners[7]. And while linguists like McCulloch reimagine the function of written language and the act of listening in the internet age, we too, as music scholars, must make shifts in how we view Internet Listening as another aspect of social life (to borrow from Thomas Turino 2008).

[7] I think that societally, too, we have become more acclimated to internet listening. My mother used to tell me stories of boyfriends who would make her a mixtape, or a CD that they would burn to make a playlist for a road trip. Now, my roommate talks about how her best friend sends Spotify playlists as gifts, or for special occasions. Before a party on campus, organizers will make a playlist just for the event to curate the listening experiences and overall vibes of the event. While writing this paper during the COVID-19 pandemic, I have "been" at countless recitals, concerts, and listening parties when music-making was required to go virtual.

In this essay, I argue that internet listening is an affective, communal process that, in the semiotic site that is the internet, constructs new senses of space and relationships through the forms of interaction afforded by social media. The main argument of this paper is that by listening to the internet, we are able to not only see discourses unfold, but are able to *hear* them collectively. Listening to the internet challenges our understanding of listening in the first place, by dis-locating the site of listening. I posit listening to the internet within a broader theory of music, sound, and performance, alongside the cultural discourses that I apply to my case study, such as masculinity and nationalism.

Just as internet speak helps Internet People on the internet communicate easier because of its nature, we also must understand that the Internet Listener will most likely not be listening under the same parameters that we prescribe to concertgoers. Written English, the form of English that I am using in this paper, is not superior to the form of English that I use when I text someone (or other forms of English that I use). When there were character and text limits, it would have been impractical to write out "Hello, mother. How are you doing today? Expect me home around 6 pm," where instead I would text "hi mom how r u? I'll b there @ 6". I bring up the differences in grammar and syntax in internet speak to showcase that in internet listening, we cannot imagine that listeners will be doing so the same way that they would at a concert hall (or even at a pop music concert); I personally, (and I imagine most others do not), find myself not clapping after a performance, or cheering on a performer as I would if it were live. I might even find myself dancing differently, or in a lot of cases, eating while listening. I surely do not bring my laptop and write when I am at a concert, even though I am listening to one right in this moment. This is not to suggest that every listener on the internet will be particularly distracted, especially on a multi-sensory platform such as YouTube, simply I suggest that we consider the

social life of internet musicking to be a part of commutes, dinner-making, shower routines, and generally, the quotidian. The Internet Listener, then, uses music as one of the many ways to log in and touch base with the rich world around them.

So, for the sake of configuring a theory of the Internet Listener (and their/our practice of listening to the internet), what then is the internet? One of the first things to consider is that it is a resource, something that one may (or may not) have access to. Like other resources, unfortunately, such as water, electricity, and food, people facing abject material conditions will be lacking in this resource as well. In the US and other wealthier countries, the internet is viewed as a commodity, a product, and a service; since so much of our life takes the internet as a given ("of course you would apply for a job online"), we remove the value of not/having and instead value it as other products in the market (where we ask, "what is the best?"). This slightly different lens is important to note because it focuses on the relationship that people in the US have with the internet. In a society that claims to be in "the digital age," as it is colloquially referred to, the internet is a given; it is something that one could not fathom being without. Semiotically, then, the internet signifies as a space, a site[8]. The internet becomes an arena in which other aspects of daily life—conversation, commerce, and as I have now brought to light, listening—occur.

In my project, I am dealing specifically with a music video posted to the video-sharing website, YouTube, so I would like to pivot towards a more focused discussion of internet listening vis-à-vis YouTube in this last part of the section. Carol Vernallis states that "YouTube

[8] Interestingly, with the internet being a site, and visualized as a sort of space, we can also see how the internet has borders. While they are hard to distinguish, since so much of our daily lives are on the internet, and especially with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing academic and social life to exist online, it is worthy to note that we now make distinctions between "live" or "in-person" events versus online ones.

is a polysemic, heterogenous phenomenon. It speaks differently depending on how and with whom you experience it," (2013:149). In some senses, we create community by the site's ability to share clips to virtually anyone, and to anyone virtually. My mom sends me a Facebook message with a link to a recipe video to try out; my mother's coworker sends her a Weird Al Yankovic parody video in an email chain; I look up video tours of potential graduate schools in the middle of a pandemic that restricts my ability to travel. Simultaneously, YouTube-ing can be a private, isolated event. "But as a solitary viewer, apart from friends and colleagues, my experiences differ," Vernallis writes, where "YouTube offers me the experience of the *flaneur* wandering through low-rent districts, shadowy drug dens, and public urinals. How can it be that 1,257,000 have seen this clip, but now, while I'm with it, I feel I'm engaged in my own private peepshow? I assume no one else is here" (2013: 150). YouTube challenges the taxonomical split between the self and the other, the individual and the collective. Not only is this a site of accumulated individual experiences, viewings, and YouTubian instantiation, it can be shared, distributed, and displayed to form a community of viewers. Later, Vernallis states that "we can't see the edges of YouTube; the site is in a continual state of flux," which highlights the lack of centrality and grounding in the aesthetics, discourses, and overall function of YouTube as a whole (2013: 154).

Vernallis defines YouTube music videos in a rather broad sense:

> we used to define music video as a product of the record company in which images are put to a recorded pop song in order to sell the song. None of this definition holds any more. On YouTube, individuals as much as record companies post music video clips, and many prosumers have no hope of selling anything…we might thus define music video, simply and perhaps too broadly, as a relation of sound and image that we recognize as such. YouTube especially makes it hard to draw a line between what is a music video and what is not. (2013: 208)

Thinking about music videos in their broadest sense, even if Vernallis's definition could be deemed too inclusive or expansive, better supports our understanding of the Internet Listener. Music videos are then defined by the combination of two senses' semiosis—hearing and seeing. A third sense, the kinesthetic, is affected (because of the fleeting nature of object), by the process of experience. Additionally, anthropologists and cultural studies scholars view music videos as cultural texts with rich significance. By cultural texts I mean that they can be understood as practices that are in dialogue with other discourses and texts. They are simultaneously historical sites; memory and affect mark the relationship of these sites (as digital and corporeal space) to their users, producers, interlocutors, and distributors.

I seek to complicate this definition further. A YouTube video not only is a recognizable presentation or performance of sound and image, but it is also a literal site of cultural production, public discourse, and memory. One of the elements of YouTube music videos that I am interested in is the discursive and historicizing quality of the comment section. As this project demonstrates, the comment section of a music video is a space of rich cultural knowledge sharing and, at other times, tension among fellow Internet Listeners. YouTube comments problematize the definition of a YouTube video because they broaden the scope of the object of study. To me, they show how people make sense of YouTube videos, their role in everyday listening practices, and how people connect with one another as Internet Listeners.

As a way of showing the practice of listening to the internet, I make an in-depth discourse analysis of YouTube comments under the YouTube music video for Vicente Fernández's song "Por Tu Maldito Amor". My discourse analysis will further explain how although these comments are not sonic in nature, they are to be listened for (and to), as a way of interacting with the music video under the parameters of internet listening. This project incorporates gender

studies, postnationalist studies, and performance studies to situate all of the discourses that listening to this specific video can highlight. I will also analyze this music video and Fernández's performance within the contexts of *mexicanidad* and *machismo*[9] to interpret it more deeply, and the discourse markers within the comments themselves.

When you're scrolling on the internet, browsing social media, you tend not to stay in one spot too long. For a project that deals with material related to social media, it seems fitting to not stay on one scholarly "page" for too long as well. In this project I am not particularly interested in being able to articulate new knowledge about a given object, method, or discipline. Instead, I am interested in developing a deeper and more complex theory and analysis of internet listening practices and all of the tensions, frictions, and hypocrisies that they come with. It is for that reason that I am able to shift between musicological interpretations of nationalist studies, queer theoretical readings of masculinity in performance, and semiotic analyses of YouTube comments throughout the project. With listening as the focus of my argument, I am able to maneuver around any specific disciplinary home in this project because, as I will demonstrate throughout the project, listening involves much more than sound or music.

Gossip is an important way of passing down generational and local knowledge in a community. Earlier I evoke a rhetoric of chisme (gossip) that is woven into the project. Chisme is the exchange of knowledge framed with the shared understanding that it is a private, intimate exchange, even if chismes do not stay that way. At many Latinx parties, women and girls will be in the kitchen preparing food and chismeando, where they learn what is happening in their families, recipes are shared (for they are never written down), their hometowns (if they are

[9] Both of these terms will be explicated in later sections.

immigrants) are discussed, and girls become a Latina. Among putos and jotos, chisme keeps people alive and creates a sense of community for those who may be excommunicated from their blood families.

Chisme is foundational to this project, but because it is chisme, the reader will not always know when it is applied. Chismes can reveal our anxieties around gender, culture, and music because it is *by thinking we are in private* that we engage in discourses that speak to our feelings about our relationships to those around us. Gossip is not something that is simply told, in the sense that it is not created because of a unidirectional movement of ideas from a speaker to a listener. You are a *chismosa*[10] (a person who gossips) if you are telling chismes or listening to them, or even if you are overhearing them from somewhere else. *Well, I heard Sonja tell Lavanya that Brigetta was…*Chisme extends past the private sphere in this way and is deeply seeded into interaction, experience, and knowledge. My chismosa epistemology sets up a distinct relationship with my interlocutors in this study where I am listening to them, around them, and through them by overhearing, oversharing, and queering the process of producing knowledge in this project. Part of how chisme works is that there is a process of implying *what is between what is said* as a way of filling in the gaps. This relates to internet listening in that gossiping requires us to listen to what is *not* there and nurture an intimate relationship to not only what is being heard (which in my case study includes YouTube comments) but how that process unfolds as discourse.

Performance-Politics and the Nation

[10] You may notice that *chismosa* has a feminine ending, which like other nouns to describe people (e.g., doctor, teacher, etc.) in Spanish could be given the *-o* ending for a masculine subject. However, I have never encountered a man be referred to as a *chismoso*, instead a man would still be called a chismosa. This is an important distinction to make to understand that *chisme* is a feminized form of knowledge production and the subversive potential that this epistemology can present.

While I explore more than sound and music in the project, it is situated around a music video by the Mexican artist Vicente Fernández. Fernández's music video, and especially its circulation through YouTube, raises many questions about Mexican nationalism, globalization, and their performances.[11] Since one of the cultural discourses I am looking at is postnationalism within the comments and in relation to the music video, I would like to include a discussion of music's (and its study) relationship to nationalism. Within music studies, Arved Ashby points out that "musicology is the systematic, institutionalized study of music and its history, and the discipline has explicitly and implicitly turned musical discussions to political ends during processes of nation building," where the creation of musical canons creates a certain hierarchy of (national) musical traditions (2008:24). Ashby continues, stating that "postcolonial thought contributed to the expanding ethnomusicological initiatives in American academia over the past fifteen years to twenty years," where ethnomusicologists' focus on oral transmissions points to how "music [is] a cultural rather than textual process" (2008:31). In this process of taking postcolonial and postnational perspectives in music studies, we see the discipline of musicology (along with ethnomusicology) engaging in a reflexive identity crisis of its own. He writes that "musicology finds itself torn between the text-oriented scientism that originally defined it and the subaltern perspectives that promise to redeem it and make it socially useful" (Ashby 2008:35). Since a postnational framework and the discipline of musicology may not be perfectly aligned, it may become more fruitful to think of this project within the more general term, "music studies," to allow us to refine our nexus of study (music) while allowing for a multiplicity in scholarly foci.

[11] A more thorough discussion of these relationships is done in the section that analyzes the music video.

To clarify, I use the term performance-politics jointly in order to demonstrate that these YouTube interactions are not only performative utterances[12] (to borrow from Austin (1962)), where these interactions do not just announce but are themselves actions, but to distinguish that they create the political structure within the cultural politics of a YouTube video. I use performance-politics to signify that my analysis is distinct from an analysis of the performance *of* politics or performances that comment on existing political structures; I acknowledge that political issues, such as Black Lives Matter, Indigenous land issues, reproductive rights, and many more are not just performative, but are real experiences that affect peoples' livelihoods. Performance-politics, then, is a lens that balances the reality of late-stage global capitalism with the subjective experience of the scholar and discourse at large. I employ performance-politics to demonstrate how in the discursive and digital interactions of social media that there is a unique structure of cultural politics in action.

In this section, I discuss the discourse surrounding conceptualizations of the nation-state and its relation to music studies, with special attention to the US and Mexico in order to provide context for how Internet Listeners are hearing Chente in this video and interacting with each other. The nation-state acts in real ways that affect its inhabitants. In this sense, the nation-state exists as an object and subject of analysis (e.g. American Studies), as it can act and be acted upon by people and institutions. However, as a theoretical way of analyzing culture, the concept of the nation-state fails to provide a sufficient, comprehensive model. Instead, people interact with cultural products and each other on a quotidian level in a way that disrupts our common associations of the nation. These interactions, as I will highlight in my project, use the language

[12] J.L. Austin states that "to say something is to do something," whereby the performative utterance, the statement, alters reality for its subjects. John L. Austin, "How to do things with words, lecture II" from *How to do things with Words*, edited by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, pp. 12-24, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press (1962 [1975]).

of the nation-state in order to negotiate a musico-political structure that deconstructs its conceptual realness. These interactions are examples of performance-politics.

Jesus Ramos-Kittrell, in the introduction to *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, asserts that "the nation became decentered because the global traffic of symbols, meanings, practices, people, and capital produces transnational sites of identification, which made nationalists' cultural narrative and symbols less important," (2020: xxiv). Similarly, Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid argue that "current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences recognizes the limitations of attempting to understand the history and practice of cultural manifestations within the boundaries of the nation-States," (2008: 3). They continue, stating that "a postnational condition refers to its crisis and shortcomings as reflected in a wide variety of social and cultural events," (Corona and Madrid 2008: 4). Ramos-Kittrell asserts that "the feeling of dislocation caused by the prevalent crisis of representation affecting the nation-state has led some scholars to inquire about a postnational condition…Postnationalism became particularly pertinent in gaining insights into the globalizing and local elements that influence culture formation, and that challenge nationalist narratives of culture promoted by the state" (2020: xxiv). The violence that nation-states have committed, both epistemic and physical, signal that scholars need to recognize the affects that theorizing the nation-state implicates.

Corona and Madrid write that "music is always in constant flux, music is the perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork" (2008: 5). They urge scholars to embrace the flexibility that a postnational music studies framework provides, stating "a postnational study of music can only be possible from an inter or

multidisciplinary angle, given that the incorporation of aesthetic values, performatic[13] and performative aspects, and social reception and meaning are integral parts of the musical experience—and they change in every context that the music is experienced" (Ibid.). As music scholars—from (ethno)musicology and music theory to adjacent fields such as performance studies, popular media studies, and gender studies—we have the ability, through a postnational study of music, to be able to critically engage with music and understand its impact beyond aesthetic meaning. The authors assert that "musical meaning is found at the intersection of production, distribution, performance, and consumption," which "allows us to understand music as a medium for the representation and negotiation of identities within specific social contexts" (Corona and Madrid 2008:7). That is precisely where this project stands; it will start with one aspect, consumption, to investigate how people navigate identificatory and disidentificatory processes within the performance-politics of YouTube comments on Fernandez's music video. Corona and Madrid explain, "recognizing the contingency of the essentialist discourses about nationalist meaning would allow us to better understand the continuous processes of identity negotiation that permit citizens of a given nation-State to establish effective transregional and transnational relations" (Ibid.).

Vicente Fernández, "Por Tu Maldito Amor," and Mexicanidad

Vicente (affectionally called "Chente" by his fans) Fernández is one of Mexico's most recognized singers, as a ranchera singer and popular artist, with a performing career lasting over fifty years. A real-life charro, Fernández owns his own ranch and horse arena in Guadalajara, Mexico. Additionally, he has starred in multiple movies, like other great and earlier singers from

[13] Corona and Madrid use Diana Taylor's term performatic (borrowed from the Spanish term *performatico* used in the Americas) to reiterate the theatricality of performances, as opposed to the adjective performative. Taylor writes that "the performative becomes less a quality (or adjective) of performance than of discourse," so a shift to the performatic informs us about the theatrical nature of performances. "Translating Performance" in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by Henry Bial and Sara Brady (New York and London: Routledge 2016), 371.

el época de oro[14]. The biography on his website states that the singer "has maintained his standing as *Mexico's greatest living singer*, coupling an operatic range with a deep understanding of ranchera music's rural roots. Through the years he inspired hundreds of imitators, but *none could ever match his operatic power and range*," (Vicente Fernandez Official Website, emphasis mine). While a greatly admired singer by Mexicans and listeners of many ages, Fernández has not escaped public controversy. Notably, in 2019, the singer refused to receive a liver transplant because he stated that he did not want to "sleep with my wife with the liver of some other guy [in me] … I don't even know if he is a homosexual or a drug addict," (Remezcla 2019).

As a short aside, I find that there is a lot of potential from learning about Chente through his own "official" biography. This biography is a mediated form of knowing the singer, in the literal sense, which informs me about how Fernández presents himself. It should come as no surprise that there is an almost fantastical relationship that a public figure would have with the public itself; if we consider this vis-à-vis Goffman's concept of the social actor, Fernández asserts and constructs himself in his biography as a public history and discourse. Since the scope of this project does not necessitate a more in-depth analysis of Fernández's performing career, I cannot expand further on his biography, but I encourage the reader to read through it all to understand Chente's relationship to the public.

Musically, Fernández describes himself as an interpreter (*intérprete*) as opposed to a song writer (which in Spanish are called *compositores*, or composers), since many of his songs, including "Por Tu Maldito Amor," are written by someone else. I think it is important to

[14] El *época de oro*, or "the golden age" refers to the period between roughly 1930-1950, when the Mexican cinema industry was at its peak. For more see Jacqueline Avila, *Cinesonidos: Film Music and National Identity During Mexico's Época de Oro,* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

highlight this vocational difference in this project because the way that we, as listeners, encounter Chente is through his voice and performance; we do not seek out Chente to find out new poetic information, but instead listen to what his voice tells us what the lyrics mean. This internalizing process in *ranchera* music is an interesting affect in the genre and is part of the reason that I am drawn to his music for this project. Additionally, it should be noted that most of Fernández's recordings are of him singing alone. When we listen to Chente, we sing with him, we embody the lyrics that he is interpreting, and feeling those feelings *with* him.

Since this project focuses on interactions with a cultural product of Mexican origin (the music video), it is important to understand scholars' theorizations regarding Mexican identity, and specifically how it interacts with music. Jesus Ramos-Kittrell's definition of mexicanidad is particularly useful in demonstrating the decentering process when analyzing "Mexican" cultural products; he writes that mexicanidad "is a construct historically steeped in difference, which nation-states (Mexico and the U.S.) have used to promote ideas of cultural legitimacy in relation to modern national political projects of social and economic development that are now under strain," (2020: xxvi). Mexican, and thus by extension mexicanidad, is a problematic in this case—a point of departure—more than the paradigm by which culture and its agents operate. Ramos-Kittrell "uses mexicanidad as a critical lens to shed light on the *trans*actional and *trans*gressive aspects of human imagination and behavior through which people negotiate difference in order to situate themselves, and that problematize mexicanidad as an identitarian construct," that was formed after the 1910 Mexican Revolution (2020: xxvi, emphasis in original). In regard to music, Alex E. Chávez notes how the *canción ranchera* (country song) has specific ties to Mexican nationalism, writing that:

> in the Mexican case, there is a long-established project of musical nationalism that has relied on the relationship between music and a specific geographic landscape—*el rancho*, or the idealized countryside. Indeed, ranching and agriculture, as important modes of organizing regional economies existed for most of colonial New Spain and Mexico's history up through the twentieth century. (2020: 131)

Chávez continues, asserting that the nostalgic focus on the rancho in canción ranchera is an extension of the colonial project; the period of the rancho is where the hacienda system flourished, directly correlating to the subjugation of indigenous and mestizo people at the hands of the land-owning Spaniards (or castizas). In this sense ranchera is more than problematic in the way that mexicanidad acts, but also in the colloquial sense, where ranchera represents oppressive and violent forces.

A prime example of mexicanidad within the YouTube comments is one user commenting, "admit it, if you are MEXICAN you need to by law know a song by Vicente Fernandez," (Figure 12)[15]. While it is easy to dismiss that this comment essentializes a specific notion of Mexican subjectivity, understanding this comment through the lens of performance-politics gives us more to consider. We can see how while there is no law written by the Mexican government about citizens being familiar with the discography of this particular artist, we do see that in the cultural politics of this video there is indeed a set of cultural laws that this user prescribes upon those who claim to be Mexican. In the performance-politics of this music video, through my analysis of these YouTube comments, we see that we can have a postnational understanding of mexicanidad that accounts for these articulations of cultural and national rhetoric while also decentering the hegemonic status of the nation-state in our thinking. I am able

[15] See also Figure 34.

to understand the users' discursive commenting as a way of further informing my theorization of postnationalism and mexicanidad.

"Por Tu Maldito Amor," the name of both the song and music video, comes album of the same name released in 1989. The song is written by Federico Mendez (lyrics[16] are below) but sung exclusively by Fernández. The music video was published to YouTube in 2009, on Fernández's official YouTube channel. At the time of writing, the video has over 236 million views, with 616 thousand "likes". The music video takes place in some sort of *hacienda* (a ranch owner's house). At first, this scene appears quite tranquil, with a beautiful plaza and fountain, birds chirping and a rooster crowing. In walks Fernández, dressed in full charro gear. He calls for his lover Patsy, racializing her as a is fair-skinned and blonde woman (*güereja*)[17]. When he realizes that his lover has left him, he crumbles up her note, and proceeds to throw a bottle (possibly of tequila) at a portrait of her.

The next scene (roughly at 0:45) begins with the start of the song. The setting is shifted to a cantina. Fernández is seated at a table with a bottle of tequila in front of him. While he is singing, we can take looks into his memories with his lover. Overall, there are pastoral themes that overarch this section which include the pair riding horses and dancing in a meadow. By the chorus, we return to Fernández singing contemplatively, the lens zoomed in to his face as we hear (and watch) him sing "por tu maldito amor"[18]. We do not only hear his pain through the music, but through the music video, we see his pain, we get access to the suffering that he is experiencing in the remembering of the woman who betrayed him. In the final section of the

[16] All translations are done by the author unless otherwise stated.
[17] Besides this short calling out to Patsy in the opening scene, listeners also seem to racialize her as white. See Figure 40.
[18] Simply writing out the chorus does not show how much emotion is put into the chorus. I think Figure 19's syntax is more evocative of the style.

video, Fernández returns to the portrait and wipes away part of the broken glass so he can see her face one last time. This final part lines up with him singing a twist on the song title, switching from *maldito* to *bendito,* offering a more melancholic ending than the title suggests.

I focus on the music video because it allows entry for a critical intersection of what is sung, what is lyrical, and what is discursive. I highlight these three aspects (the sung, the lyrical, and the discursive) not to separate them as distinct entities that culminate in the video, but as perspectives by which we, as listeners, viewers, and interlocutors, can engage with it. By participating in all three as both a participant and scholar, I can interpret as I experience. In this way, I cannot claim that my "readings" of the video are entirely objective—and yet, since my project is overall concerned with something as subjective as the comment section of a YouTube video, it feels entirely appropriate to maintain a similar positionality throughout.

Spanish Lyrics	**English Translation**
(*speaking*)	
Patsy, por donde andas?	Patsy, where have you gone?
Güereja![19]	Güereja!
(Reading letter)	
Perdóname por dejarte	Forgive me for leaving you
Pero no te quiero	Put I don't love you
Como yo pensaba.	Like I thought.
adiós, Patsy	goodbye, Patsy
(*singing*)	
El día que te encontré me enamoré	The day I found you I fell in love
Tú sabes que yo nunca lo he negado	You know that I've never negated it
Con saña me lograste enloquecer	Viciously you managed to drive me crazy
yo caí en tu trampa ilusionado	And illusioned I fell into your trap
De pronto todo aquello se acabó	Soon all of that was over
Faltaste a la promesa de adorarnos	You failed on the promise of adoring each other
Me hundiste en el olvido por creer	You drowned me in oblivion for believing
Que a ti no llegarían jamás los años	That to you the years would never come

[19] *Güereja* is Mexican slang for a light-skinned, blonde woman.

Por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
No puedo terminar con tantas penas	I can’t stop with all these pains
Quisiera reventarme hasta las venas	I'd like to reinvent myself up to the veins
Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
Por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
No logro acomodar mis sentimientos	I can’t manage to comfort my feelings
Y el alma se me sigue consumiendo	And my soul continues to consume me
Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor	For your damn love, for your damn love
No quiero que regreses nunca no	I don't want you ever to come back
Prefiero la derrota entre mis manos	I prefer destruction in between my hands
Si ayer tu nombre tanto pronuncié	If yesterday I pronounced your name too much
Hoy mírame rompiéndome los labios	Look at me today breaking my lips
Por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
No puedo terminar con tantas penas	I can’t stop all these pains
Quisiera reventarme hasta las venas	I'd like to reinvent myself up to the vains
Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
Por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
No logro acomodar mis sentimientos	For your damn love I don't manage to comfort my feelings
Y el alma se me sigue consumiendo	And my soul continues to consume me
Por tu maldito amor,	For your damn love
Por tu maldito amor	For your damn love
Por tu bendito amor	For your blessed love

What is interesting about this song, and what I think draws so much affect for its listeners, is that since it written in the first-person, it is a formally gender-neutral song. The only indication that this song is about a woman is actually through the music video, where we see images of Chente and Patsy together and when Chente calls her a *Güereja*. While I may not go so far as to say that there is queer potential in the song since it seems that it is more of a stylistic choice by the compositor that it is written that way, I would argue that alluding to the possibility of such, and the general e/affect of queer potentiality, points towards understanding the song/video’s use of gender. First, I will explicate the affect/effect of queer potentiality. Queer theorists generally considering *queering* as the discursive act of queer lens work, to signal the

displacement of norms. On queerness, Martha Humphrey states that it "is about making the given seem strange," which makes queering that process (1995: 23). These "queer readings" are an effect of queer potentiality in given works, histories, and discourses (although, when the queer theorist tries hard enough, they/we can see everything in such light). Now, queer affect is also an effect of queering by which affect becomes a symptom of understanding the hetero-world in friction with queer reality. *We know that the heteronorm is constructed because we find ourselves in a forced opposition to it*. Returning to the lyrics, I argue that since they can point in multiple (potentially queer) directions, that their "neutrality" is what drives Fernández's hyper-masculine performance, which inversely demonstrates a fragility (and as I will later describe as a *tragedy*) of masculinity. Only through Fernández's performance of gender and sexuality, and explicitly so in the Mexican notion of the charro (by which we encounter the machista) are we able to understand that he projects the lyrical affect of the song onto a woman and heterosexual relationship. This is in line with Judith Butler's assertion that gender "is only real to the extent that it is performed," and in this particular performance, we see that it portrays itself under the parameters of mexicanidad, portrayals of the charro, and machista sexuality (1988: 527).

Fernández's investment in masculinity in his performance is rooted in an anxiety over the expressivity and emotional vulnerability that his performance lends. He embodies the charro aesthetic and identity as a way of demonstrating his allegiance to Mexico[20] (and specifically the state of Jalisco where both he and mariachi were born) as well as the post-revolution embrace of this iconic masculine figure in popular culture, particularly in the 1930s culture industry which is marked by the "Golden Age of Mexican Cinema". Mary-Lee Mulholland writes that "the

[20] His fans seem to pick up on his Mexicanness in his performance. In Figure 18, for example, the commenter describes his interpretation of the genre to be "like a Mexican."

Fernández family is able to generate a great deal of pride and support in their hometown[21], due largely to their performance of traditional and conservative notions of Mexican identity and Mexican masculinity," (2012: 249). Guadalajara is also known as Mexico's gayest city and this creates a tension among the popular discourses of masculinity and the status of manhood among its prominent figures. Even Fernández is criticized by local mariachis for his intense emotions during performances where they are considered excessive and a sign of weakness, insinuating that he might actually be gay himself.[22] This to me, shows why he has to keep the façade going, regardless of if the rumors are true. The fact that there is a *what if* is enough to make Fernández perform his masculinity in such ways.

Why is there so much feeling and affect connected to the song? Looking at the comments we see that one commenter writes "I hear the sadness *in* his voice ☹" (Figure 24, my emphasis)[23]. This comment leads us to look *in*to Chente's voice, not just materially but also emotionally. In a music video setting, we cannot separate the man from the voice, we hear the strong, operatic[24] voice and the see the charro outfit, the cantina, and the pain on his face. We see a body that is literally moved by something else, almost compelled to sing his lamentation. In this way there is a double materiality to Chente's voice, where the voice becomes a vessel for his emotions, for an affective discourse.

[21] The Fernández family resides in the city of Guadalajara which is located in the state of Jalisco, Mexico.
[22] When asked about Chente, a mariachi musician in Guadalajara "began to fake cry and then waved his hand as if to dismiss Vicente Fernández, stating that his crying is faked and that by doing so he 'fails to show proper respect for the music,'" (Mulholland 2012:255).
[23] Figure 25 is similar and in English. See also Figures 20, 21, and 26.
[24] Figures 22 and 23 show comments where he is compared to Andrea Bocelli and Luciano Pavarotti, two famous operatic tenors. Of particular interest is Figure 23, which includes a reply that places him as the *Mexican* Pavarotti. Interestingly, Figure 17 compares Chente's singing to Louis Armstrong. See also Figure 25.

Queer theory's use of affect is that it puts us into relation to the worlds, discourses, and contexts that we come into contact (metaphorically and physically) with. On the subject of affect theory, Lauren Berlant writes that "it can provide a way to access the disciplines of normativity in relation to the disorganized processes of labor, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation," (2011:53). To make Berlant's point shorter, affect theory puts us in (a) place. As a queer theorist, I can use, manipulate, and dance with affect to accept and embrace what I do not (and must not) know.

An affective discourse, then, is a discourse that is guided by the indeterminacy in affect and emotion; by thinking about such a discourse is to invest in the uneasiness that something so indulgently subjective presents. In a way, this type of discourse channeled through (and with*in*) Chente's voice escapes any objective claims of "knowing" what the voice "does". The lyrics of "Por Tu Maldito Amor," combined with Fernández's performance, point toward a specific, machista emotional condition that is explored in the video. This condition, which I will now elaborate on, is specifically machista in nature because of the performance of Mexican masculinity, heteronormativity, and ranchera singing itself. The charro outfit, the setting, and the tequila point us towards reading him as a Mexican man in the strictest sense. This Mexican man though, succumbs to emotion only through singing, and thus his voice literally holds his emotive potential.

The main focus that the song and the music video portray, aside from its setting within nationalist Mexican and patriarchal machista culture, is on Fernández's own grief as he mourns the woman who left him. In the video, we see a weakened Fernández, a man who is the owner of

this extensive property, now alone in a cantina and only able to remember the woman he loves. He does not even have the power to spite her, to hate her; instead, he returns back to a shattered portrait and thinks of her love as blessed. We see the tragic breakdown of a stoic, powerful man. I make this specific interpretation clear because the notion and performance of gender in this instance is still connected to power, race, and nationality; the juxtaposition of power and Chente's tragic masculinity reminds us that there is a delicate balance that the machista must uphold in order to keep his strength—whose masculinity can easily be broken by a woman.

I also want to clarify that in this analysis of the tragedy of masculinity that I describe, we still feel empathy towards Fernández. Of course, we can criticize him through anti-nationalist and feminist lenses, but affectively, we (as listeners) bear the burden with him. The emotive burden that I highlight is that of masculinity, which creates a closet (to borrow from queer theory again) in its own right, where the masculine subject is denied emotional acknowledgement except in song. I return to thinking about and with affect in this instance because its indeterminacy, the secrecy of knowing it, is what allows the façade to push forward; we can think that we are having a private, experiential moment of emotional release when listening to "Por Tu Maldito Amor," but in reality it is a performance of the self that we have always known, and have been afraid of.

The (Post)Nation

Moving forward, I will relate the comments on this video to discussions of nationalism vis-à-vis a postnationalist framework (among other cultural discourses I have talked about earlier) as a part of internet listening. First, though, I would like to elaborate more on postnationalist theories and why they work with my project if the comments may not always relate to postnationalism specifically. My interest in postnationalism is equally a personal as it is intellectual investment in

disempowering the nation-state's role as an identificatory signifier in our daily lives. As a Chicanx person and scholar, I still get confused when people would ask me "Where are you from?" which always means that my home was never my *real* one. In Chicanx circles, we say that "*no soy de aqui, ni de alla*" ("I am not from here nor from there") to signal that displaced people, we neither exist as members of United States nor as extracted, diasporic Mexicans. Our self-conceptualizations of the nation-state are complicated ones—relationships that are founded on the economic disparity brought by the signing of NAFTA and the ensuing violence that occurs at the border to this day. When Donald Trump vowed to "Build a Wall," I see the painful scars that nationalism creates for marginalized and minoritarian subjects. Although this project does not directly address issues and discourses of Chicanidad, as one of the ways that I walk through and see with the world, it becomes important to me to acknowledge my Chicanx engagement with this project. When I make claims that Vicente Fernández's performance signifies mexicanidad in ways that resonate with people outside of strict Mexican nationalist senses, I say so from my own person relationship with what it means to "be" Mexican.

Similarly, as someone who is conscientious and affected by the United States' legacy of settler-colonialism, and recognizes the limitations of settler's positionality, a postnationalist perspective in this project seeks to restructure the epistemological framework around my analysis to factor the impact of (neo)colonialism and late-stage capitalism. Christopher Aplan notes that from Indigenous perspectives, conceptualizations of modernity are linked to their adherences to nation-states:

> A general assumption of modernity is individual and local sublimation under the broader and more abstract social and organizational needs of a nation-state. And if one were to posit an Indigenous modernity, they might note Native peoples' incorporation into modern nation-states through long-term, powerful acts of colonial violence. This is a valid starting point. But the symptoms of modernity

> are as a result sometimes described like an external contagion—something imposed from the outside without content, complicity, or opposition. As a sociological term, modernity-as-concept can be as indeterminate and mysterious as the alienating bureaucracy, industry, and technology it critiques. (2019: 116-117)

It therefore becomes imperative that this project be grounded in a postnational framework in order to see how my interlocutors use their positions within nation-states as reference points for the cultural exchanges that take place in the comment section. I do not employ their public discourses as a way of representing how various cultures intersect in harmonious ways, but instead find myself in agreement with Homi Bhabha's notion of the Third Space. He posits that "cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative to the construction of systems of cultural identification," (1994: 49-50). Third Space, the in-between, is where the 'problem' of cultural intersection lies. Performance-politics, as a theoretical framework, is crucial for performance and music scholars who invest in Third Space and diverts attention away from a nationalist conception of 'pure' cultures. My analysis of performance-politics theoretically displaces the (epistemological) hegemony of the nation-state in order to acknowledge the framework that Third Space necessitates.

The nation-state acts in ways that affect its inhabitants, materially, physically, and in other more "real" and "tangible" ways (as opposed to the more theoretical ways I will soon mention). In this sense, the nation-state exists as an object and subject of analysis (in disciplines such as American Studies, or of a scholar being known as a "Latin-Americanist"), that can act and be acted upon by people and institutions. However, as a theoretical way of analyzing culture, the concept of the nation-state fails to provide a sufficient, comprehensive model. Instead, people interact with cultural products (and as cultural producers!) along with each other on a quotidian

level in a way that disrupts our common associations of the nation. These interactions, as I will highlight in my project, use the language of the nation-state in order to negotiate a musico-political structure that deconstructs its conceptual realness. These interactions are examples of performance-politics.

Hearing YouTube Comments in Action: Discourse Analysis and Semiotics

Earlier in this project I have referred to the comment section on this YouTube video in order to talk about and engage with the interactions that happen around and through the video. While I could make assertions and claims from just an analysis of the music video, or by situating Vicente Fernández's performing career within the broader milieu of Mexican regional music (both of which I have done in previous sections), throughout the research process I found myself repeatedly drawn back to the comment section for insight (and complications!) about the theories I was working with and how they informed my analysis. In some senses, *they spoke to me*. It is only fitting, then, for the final section of this project to pay tribute to and focus on the comments that so deeply influenced the rest of my work. I can only hope that the countless people who made these products—who are the cultural producers of the material I work with here—know that they have made considerable impact on our understanding of culture, listening, and public discourse. Without trying to generalize too much, I also hope that this project can show us how by listening to the internet, the deep complexities of culture are always at our fingertips.

Before getting into the analysis, I want to briefly explain my process for selecting comments and what methods I used to approach their analysis. At the time of writing, there are over fifteen thousand comments on the video. It would take a significant amount of time to go through the whole data set and look at trends in comments, both when there are surges in

comment production, but also, with the use of scraping, key words that come up in the comments across time. Besides this amount of effort being out of my personal time constraint for completing the project and my unfamiliarity with quantitative analysis, I have found that taking this more subjective, observation-based scope to be sufficiently productive for the work that I am doing in the project. I find that in the nature of thinking about myself as a scholar-user, and the relationship that I have to social media, this type of comment selection is not only appropriate for my theoretical understanding of the internet but is analogous to the practice of listening to the internet. With my comment analysis being used as an example of my own internet listening practice, I invite the reader to listen to these comments with me.

One of the methods that I will be applying in this section is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a method used in linguistics that looks at the "bigger picture" of discourse, as opposed to individual words, sentences, or phonemes; simply put, discourse affects the meaning of individual sentences. Zellig Harris writes that "language does not occur in stray words or sentences, but in connected *discourse*" (1952:3, my emphasis). In the context of YouTube comments, they must to be framed and recognized as a comment in order to make sense. For example, figures 1-8 demonstrate a comment thread, where each of the replies are all in relation to an original comment. So, seeing "lmfao" (Figure 2) on its own provides little more information than the acronym itself (laughing my fucking ass off), but knowing that it is framed as a reply to the original comment in Figure 1, that it a user reaffirming that the original comment's joke "lands" for other users and is thereby an effective one. By looking at YouTube comments through discourse analysis, and in relation to performance-politics, we can see how internet listening involves more than just the sonic elements of Fernández's music (including the video).

However, the goal of this project is not to merely point out content in YouTube comments and make claims of "comment X brings forward issue Y with reference to Z" but instead to understand what the process of comment-making and listening *means*. To understand meaning we must turn to semiotics. Suzanne Langer writes that "all genuine thinking *is* symbolic, and the limits of the expressive medium are, therefore, really the limits of our conceptual powers," (1985 [1942]: 95). Simply put, we exist in symbols, and our entire reality is caught up in it. Eduardo Kohn takes this idea further to claim that "all life is semiotic and all semiosis is alive. In important ways, then, life and thought are one and the same: life thinks; thoughts are alive," (2013:16). To use semiotics, then, is to try and understand the lives of these commenters by listening to and for their semiosis. Through semiotics, we can listen to the ways that we make meaning and connect ourselves to the internet, the world, and each other.

To return to the discourse analysis, we can see that it is in time and therefore relational to events that frame what commenters refer to. Let us look at Figure 27. The commenters in Figure 27 situate themselves (within the comment itself) as being "there" on New Year's Day of this year. During my research I saw trends like these happen at other times, most of which were holidays of some sort. At first, I found these to be a nuisance, as merely superfluous comments where users "proved" that they still listened to older music in modern times. Upon further review, though, I now see that these comments mark and focus listeners to listen together. They incite more discourse by encouraging other listeners to announce that they too are listening.[25] Figure 10 has a comment that asks: "who is listening in quarantine?" which requires the situational framing that they are referring the two-week quarantine period that medical professionals take during the COVID-19 pandemic (which is still occurring at the time of writing

[25] Commenters also greet one another, such as Figure 15's greeting from Guatemala.

this paper). Commenters know this structure and framing too, since one commenter jokingly adds that "I'm from the future the year is 2082 this still lit" (Figure 28) which further shows that it is not just in analysis that we are aware of how comments are situated but that the discourse itself understands itself to be situated by its structure.

This is what I was alluding to earlier in the project when I define performance-politics within the purview of a structure of cultural politics. There are parameters for making a comment that are necessary for them to be engaged with properly on a video, even if the parameters themselves are highly contested. We cannot just see them as speech acts, or even in J.L. Austin's case of the performative utterance, even though they do in fact *do* something; these comment-acts engage with one another simultaneously within opposition but also agreement with one another. For example, Figure 32 shows a comment that addresses how they are seeing a lot of comments in English and from users outside of Mexico, which shows that not all listeners are particularly comfortable with the notion that this song is being interpreted by non-Mexicans. Even though this comment is somewhat oppositional to my postnationalist framework[26] that I have discussed earlier in the paper, I think that this tension is something important to listen for because it shows how discourse is not a harmonious, unifying process. The messiness that comes in dialogic processes mean that cultural discourses, as symbolic action (Geertz 1973), represent conflicts and the limitations of postnationalist studies, for example. Similarly, there are commenters, such as Figure 14, who leave a comment to "prove" that they are real fans of

[26] Figure 30, however, supports my framework where a commenter describes how even from Venus, they like this song, which suggests that the commenter knows that nationalist ties are not necessary to be a Chente fan. Interestingly, too, is Figure 33, where a commenter asks "am I the only Arab who listens to vicente fernandez??" This suggests that the commenter feels anxiety about their experience in the YouTube comment discourse, but also is a reflection of their taste (Bourdieu 1984) as an Arab.

Fernández's music, and "know" his music better than other listeners[27]. With a fan needed to prove that they are a real fan of Mexican music demonstrates that there are enough tensions and frictions among fellow internet listeners whose own listening practices (in a postnationalist rupture of the mexicanidad of the music video) threaten this commenter's Mexican ownership over this cultural text.

An interesting trend that I saw come up during my research were comments that referred to a comedy bit[28] by Gabriel Iglesias (whose nickname is Fluffy). For this part I will be referencing Figures 29, 31, and 41-44. In some cases, like in Figures 29 and 31, users come to the video because of the comedian's bit. It is unclear in this comment whether they mean the Netflix special (which was released in 2019), or the YouTube video that was released later that year. Since the comment has forty "likes," we can also assume that many people come to access the video by Iglesias's reference to Fernández in the bit. As a part of my own internet listening, I was actually unfamiliar with the bit even though I have watched Fluffy's work before. To go on a journey with these internet listeners, as their references led me to a different corner of the internet, was significant to the research process because I was being taken out of the music video (and shown how people go into it) from a perspective and influence that I had yet to consider. As Clifford Geertz says, "culture is public because meaning is," (1973:12). I now have a cultural bond with these interlocutors because even though I had to reverse maneuver the link between cultural texts, *I am able to relate to them by the practice of listening* I have shown throughout this project. In Figure 42, we again see that someone finds the video because of Iglesias, but also that more "loyal" fans find this annoying, where one commenter says: "Apparently everybody

[27] Or, similarly, Figure 34 describes how when Chente dies "*all* of 'MEXÍCO' will grieve eternally," (Figure 34, my emphasis).
[28] A link to the bit can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3pdLtOoR5A&ab_channel=GabrielIglesias (accessed 4 March 2021).

here from that new Gabriel Iglesias, but real G's knew this even waaaay before that." Other comments, like Figure 44, bring in references to the bit, like the almost verbatim quote from it ("Looking like a big Ol bottle of Tapatio") as another signal that they are an Iglesian-turned-Chente fan[29].

In the music video, when the music starts, the drinking starts, and Chente is sitting at the cantina, ready to sing. I have talked about this drunk ontology earlier in the paper as it relates to my own listening practices, but I want to highlight how tequila is symbolized in Mexican society and comes to be represented in the comments. On tequila, Mulholland writes that:

> Despite the consumption of tequila at a variety of events and places in Mexico, tequila, and drinking in general, is still considered very much part of the masculine domain. For example, cantinas and plazas are male spaces that few 'decent' women frequent, and the ability to 'handle' liquor is a positive male attribute. As one friend reminded [her], tequila is a masculine noun (*el tequila*) after all. This link between tequila and masculinity or, perhaps more aptly, between tequila and machismo is situated in the mythic and historical representation of tequila as the drink of the men who fought the [1910] Revolution. (2012: 239)

References to tequila and drinking (especially being *borracho*/drunk) are in figures 9, 11, 16, 24, 25, 32, 37, and 38. Alcohol becomes a symbol of melancholy and ranchera music; the tragedy of masculinity (as I have discussed earlier) can only come to light when we are under the influence of a drunk ontology. By referring to alcohol, it points to the willingness to confront gender under the specific discourses and contexts of mexicanidad. It becomes apparent that there is a certain taste that Mexican music and Fernández evoke, where to listen to ranchera music and Chente's somber voice means to drink. One commenter so succinctly puts it where they say their "burger

[29] For those who may not know, Tapatio is a brand of Mexican hot sauce. The Tapatio bottle features a man with a moustache and sombrero, which are key markers of the charro. In the skit mentioned, Iglesias describes seeing Fernández as "looking like a big old bottle of Tapatio," which is what this commenter makes reference to.

turned into a taco after watching this," which shows how sensorially, this music video metaphysically transforms food into something essentially Mexican (Figure 35).

There is a specific ontological condition, a particular lens at which to understand the present, when you know you've had too much, when it's too late and you're still thinking about them. The formation of a drunk reality, a drunk ontology, is a crucial framework for understanding how people think, feel, and do Vicente Fernández's musicking. While his music is listened to at all times of day, in different spaces, and with his wide-ranging fans (myself included), I feel as if there is a special kind of contiguity that occurs when you hear, see, and ultimately, *feel* Chente when you've had a little bit too much. As one of my fellow internet listeners states, "dis hits different at 3:11am" (Figure 39).

The semiotic shift from reading to listening to YouTube comments is an important distinction to make. Reading comes from a code that I have learned, a code that was taught to me. The signs that I needed to know in order to read are contextual and arbitrary (Saussure 1985 [1959]), although deeply telling for my ability to communicate the symbolized world to others. However, when I encounter these YouTube comments, I come to live with them (Kohn 2013), and as living semiosis, I need to listen to them for their interaction within cultural discourses. I do not read them for their coded meaning but instead listen to them for musico-cultural extra-sonic semiosis. In more plain terms, the comments help me understand sound, performance, and culture in the context of this video by telling me the stories of what people think about these discourses.

Conclusion: Listening to the Internet

In the beginning of this project, I introduce my writing as a form of chisme. Now that we are reaching the concluding section of this paper, it is fitting that I can officially present you the title,

as my reader, of being a chismosa. The process of intellectual chismeando, as part of my scholarly nonchalance surrounding academic discipline, is what drives the analyses, theories, and stories that I write about. As a scholar-chismosa I see this project, and by extension listening to the internet, not with a goal of truth-seeking or knowledge-making, but more in line with storytelling: chismeando. By using theory and analysis to explore intersections of culture, music, sound, and the internet, I have been able to construct the meanings, connections, and interpretations that this project has unfolded.

For me, listening to the internet requires a reimagination of sound and meaning in a way that allows for non-sonic and non-musical meaning making to be a fundamental part of our listening practices. This is how I can say that the YouTube comments I analyze *speak to me* because I truly do listen to them as I do to "Por Tu Maldito Amor". Although I do not listen to them in the same way that I listen to music, nor in the same way that I experience this music video, I engage with the internet as a listener because it is by listening that I bring these comments into my musical understanding. In conversation with Christopher Small's work (1998), this further expands his concept of musicking because *by listening to, for, and in the internet we come into contact with musicking* in ways that might make us question the musical "integrity" of this study. But, by investing in this type of listening practice I have been able to show how cultural discourses and perceptions of Vicente Fernández are shaped and negotiated by fellow internet listeners.

Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that by listening to the internet, as I have shown through my YouTube comment analysis, we are able to *hear* the discourses (tensions included) surrounding machismo, mexicanidad, and Vicente Fernández in relation to music and performance. By listening we immerse ourselves into such discourses. By hearing discourse,

instead of seeing or reading it as an object, we come into contact with it in a way that we do not need to seek truth or create new knowledge around machismo, mexicanidad and even Fernández. By using listening as a theoretical practice, I can use and interrogate discourses that are relevant to my work (postnationalism and gender, mainly), while also not needing to make claims about the overall study of nation or gender. As listeners, we are trained to understand dissonances and tensions as a necessary aspect of the heard world. Inherent tensions in nationalism, masculinity, and the status of music in the project are now a fundamental aspect of listening to the internet where this friction points us in the direction of what is occurring and unfolding in the discourse itself. Like a good chisme, we ought not know exactly what is being said, but we know we must listen anyway. So too, do I listen to the internet.

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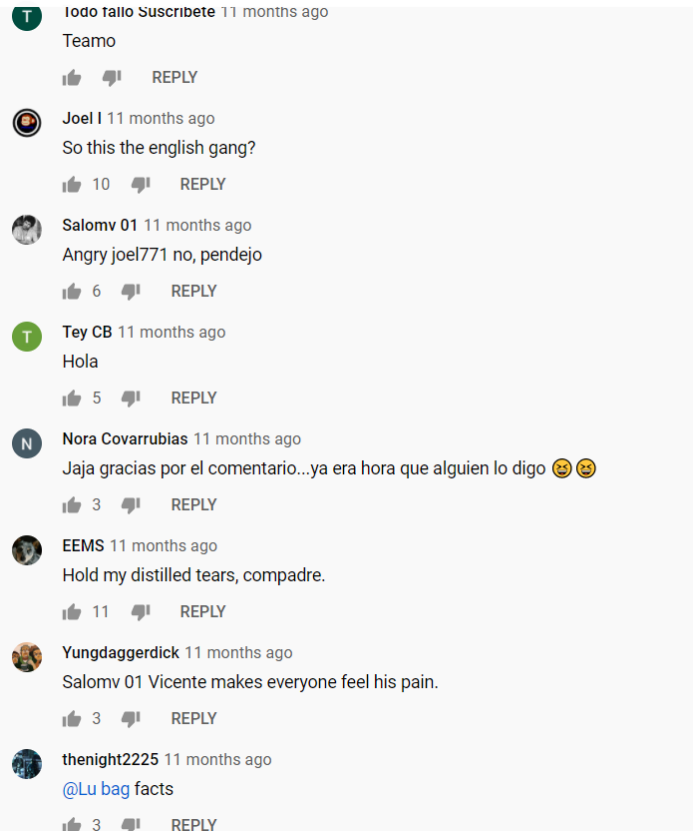
VEVO

Index A: YouTube Comment Screenshots

Figure 1. Accessed November 4, 2020

Figure 2. Accessed November 4, 2020



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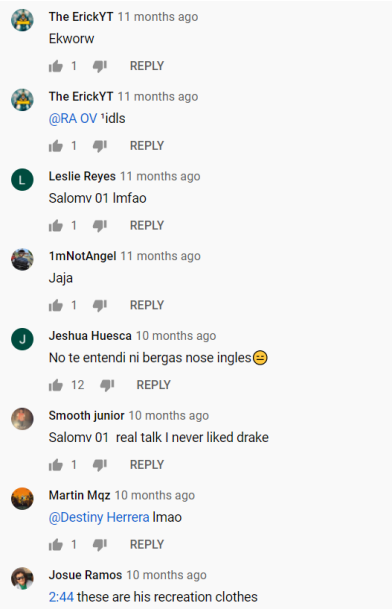

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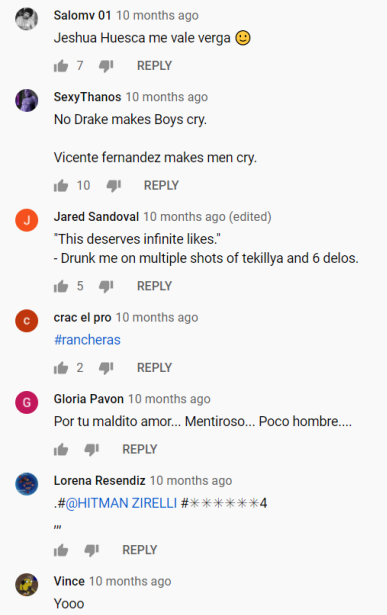

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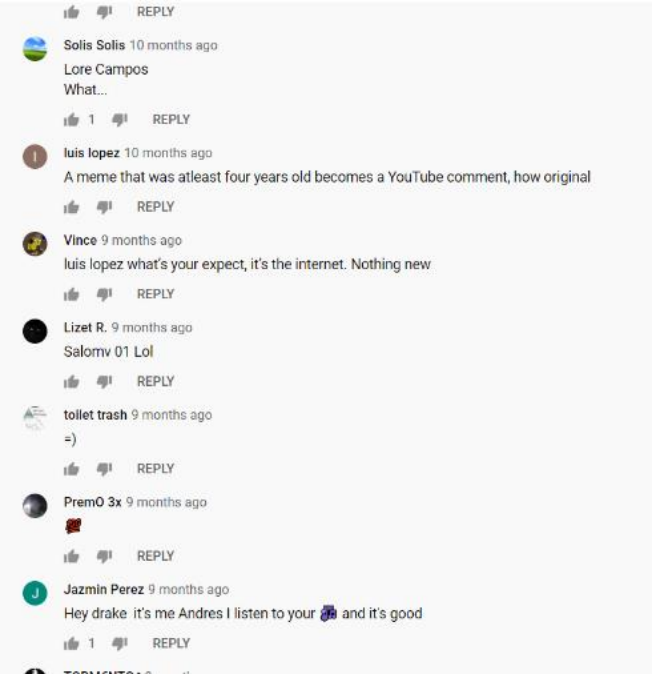

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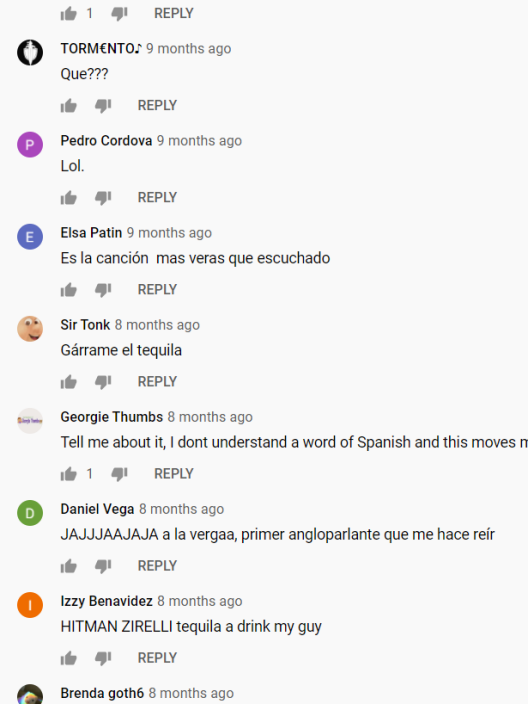

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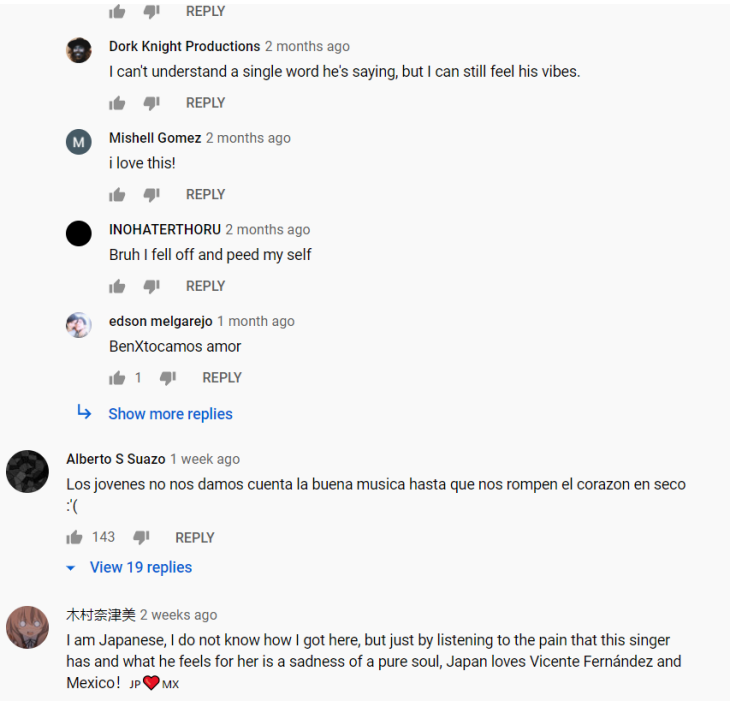

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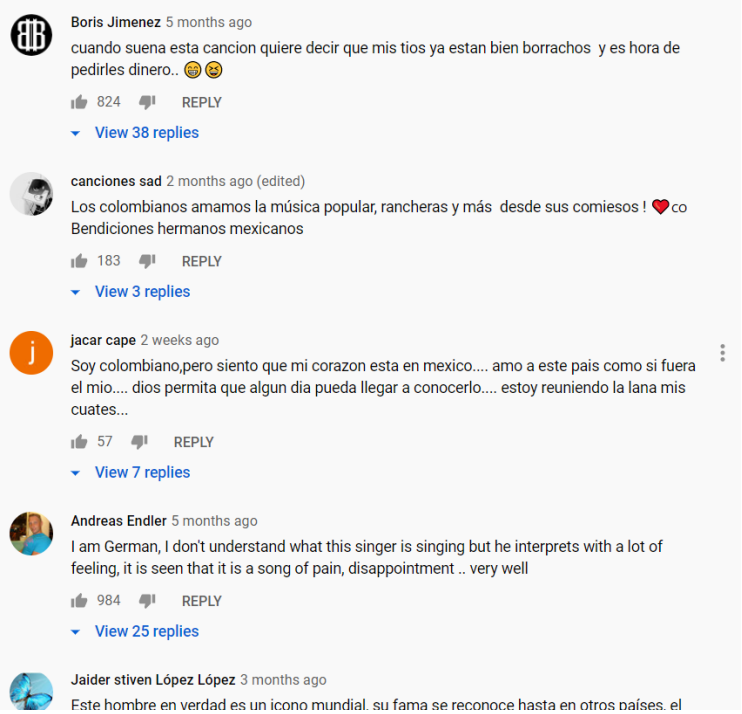

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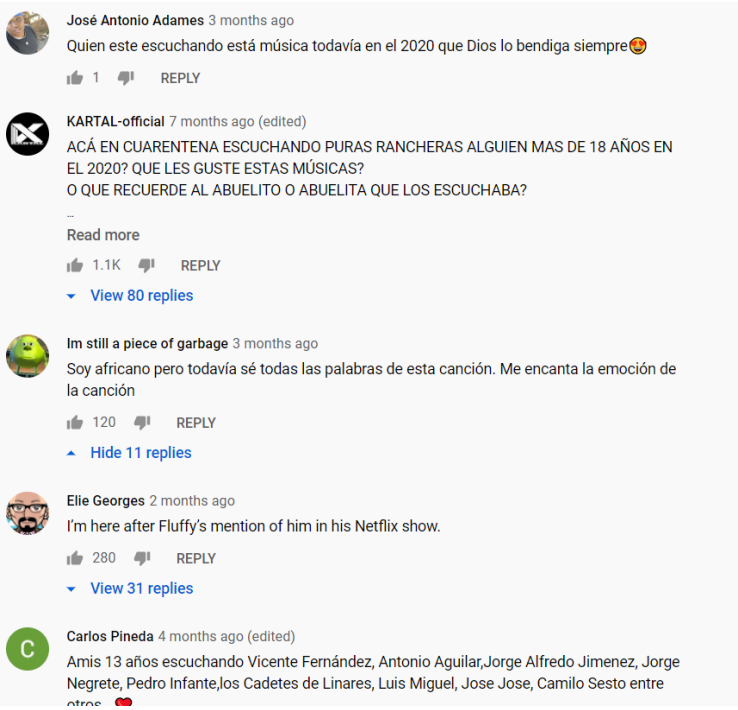

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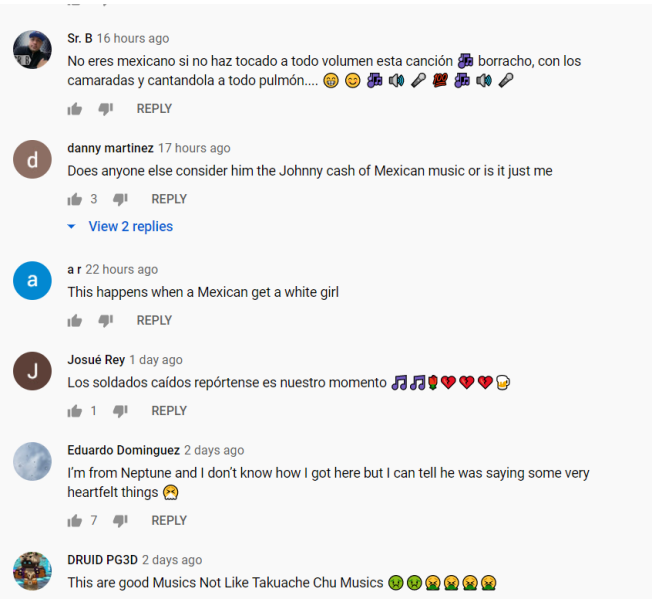

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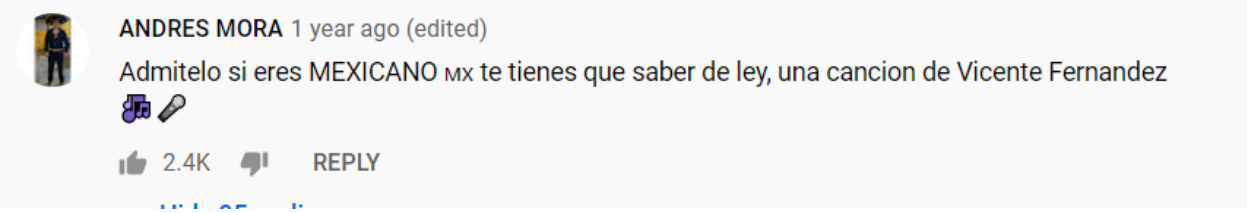

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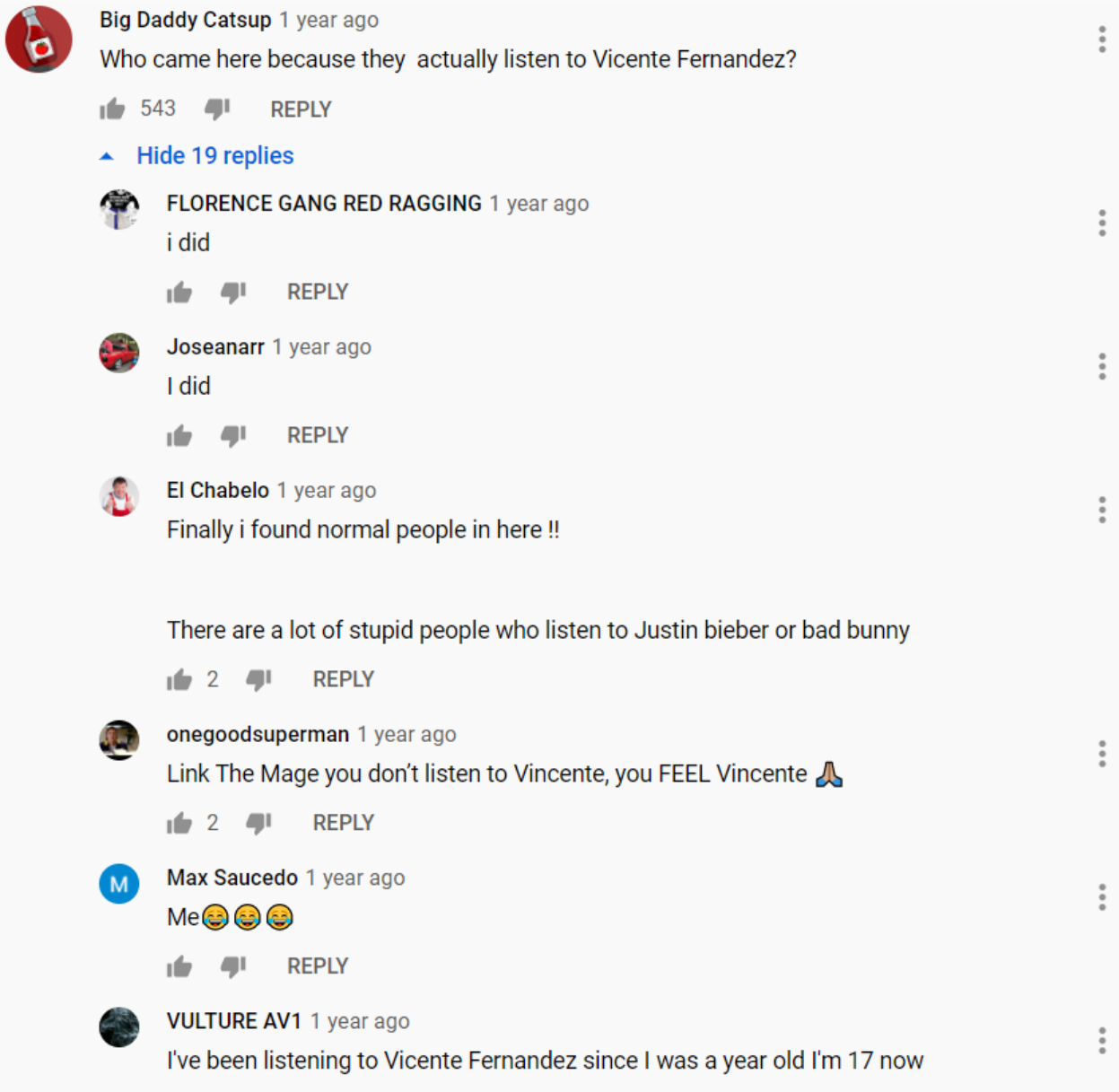
Figure 13. Accessed January 19, 2021.



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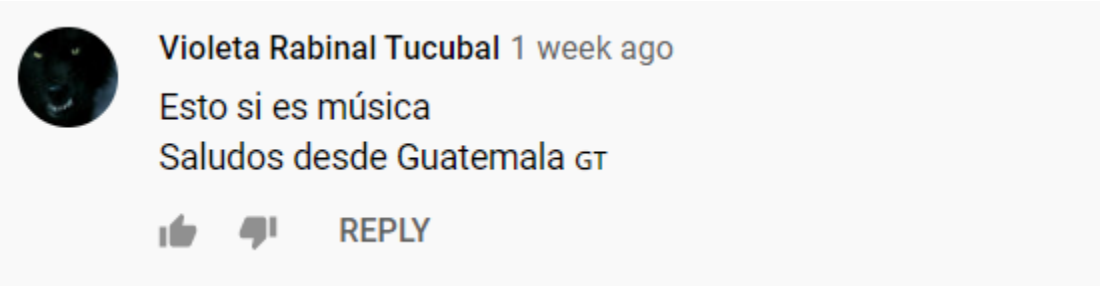

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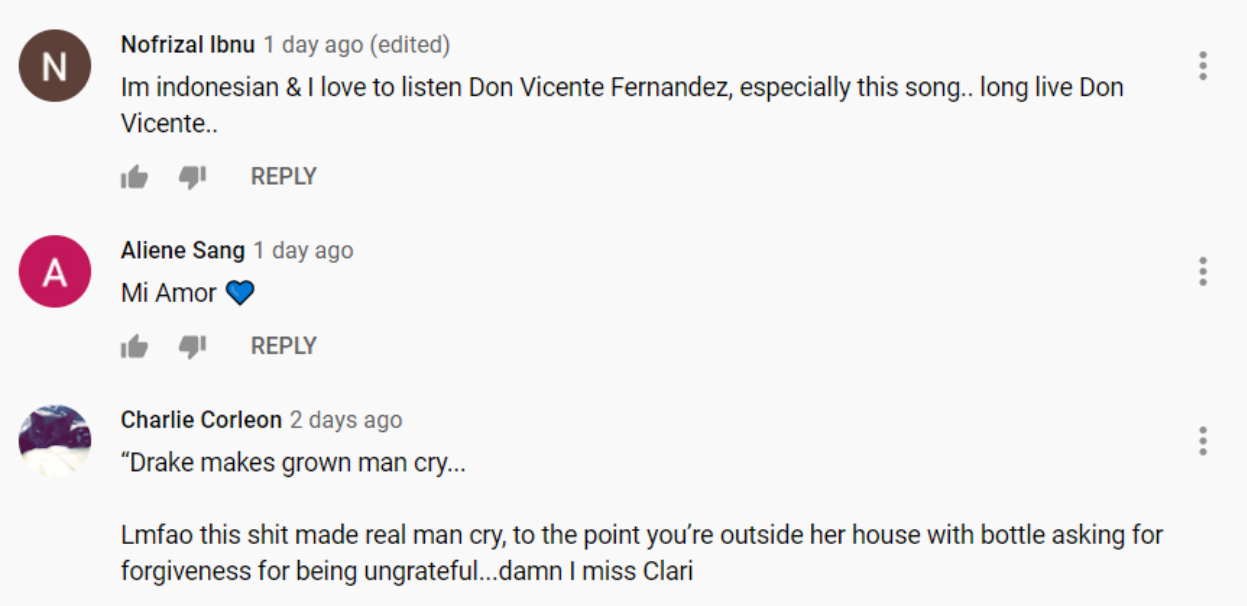

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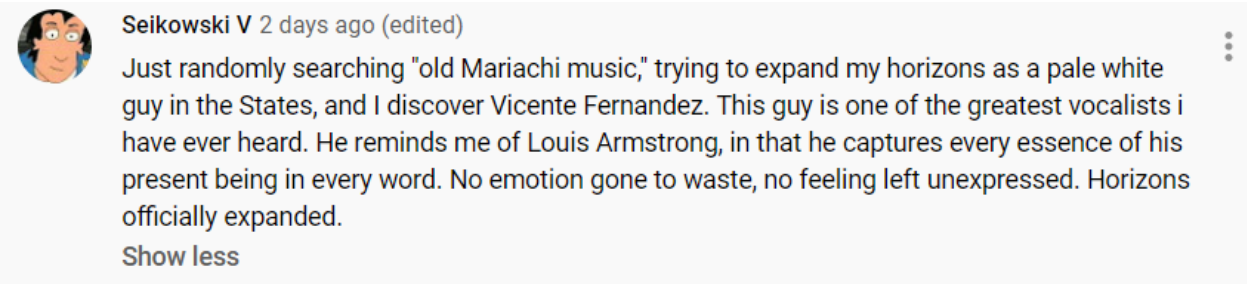

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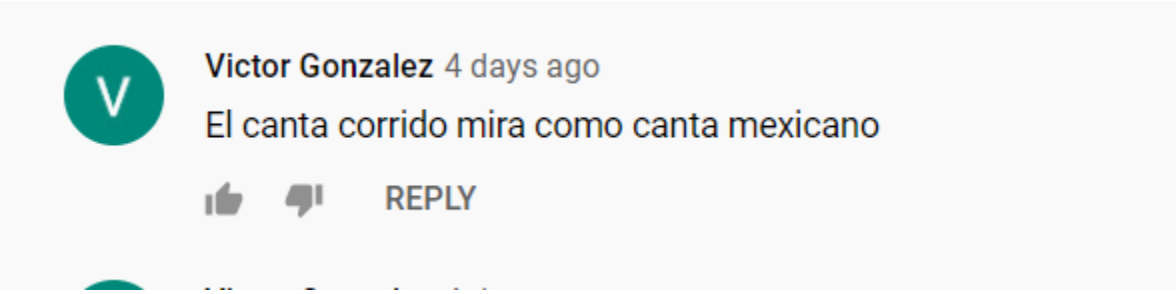

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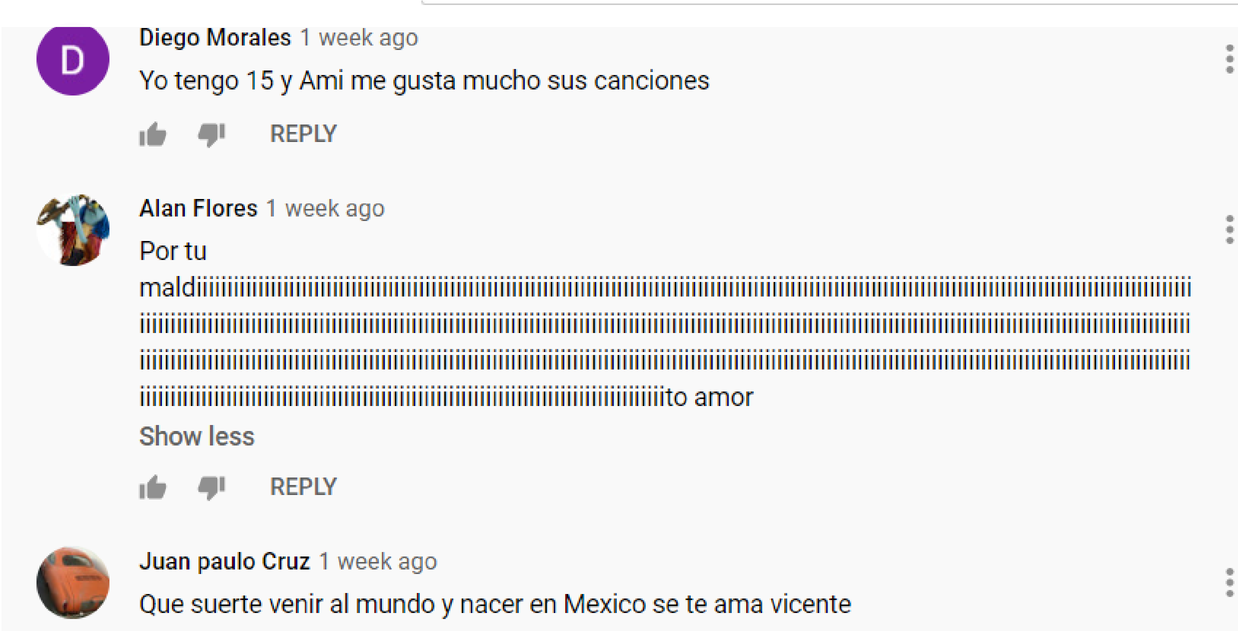

Diego Morales 1 week ago
Yo tengo 15 y Ami me gusta mucho sus canciones
REPLY
Alan Flores 1 week ago
Por tu
maldiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiito amor
Show less
REPLY
Juan paulo Cruz 1 week ago
Que suerte venir al mundo y nacer en Mexico se te ama vicente

Figure 19. Accessed January 19, 2021.

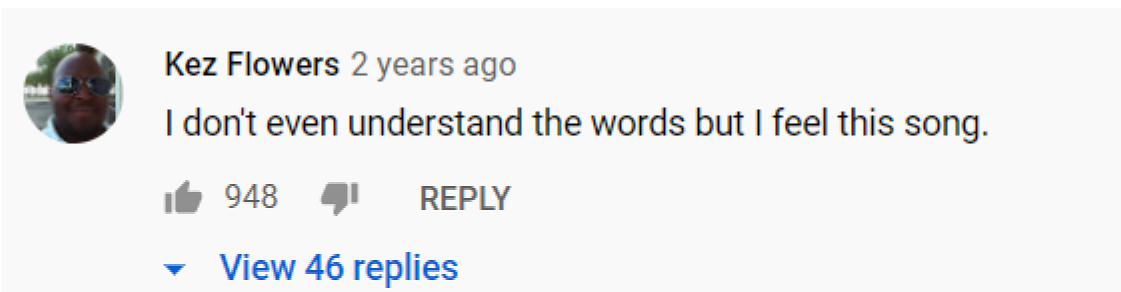
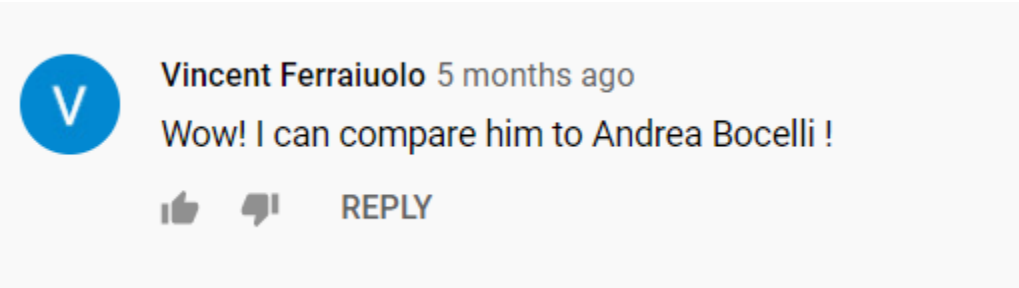

Kez Flowers 2 years ago
I don't even understand the words but I feel this song.
948 REPLY
View 46 replies

Figure 20. Accessed January 19, 2021.

Figure 21. Accessed January 19, 2021.



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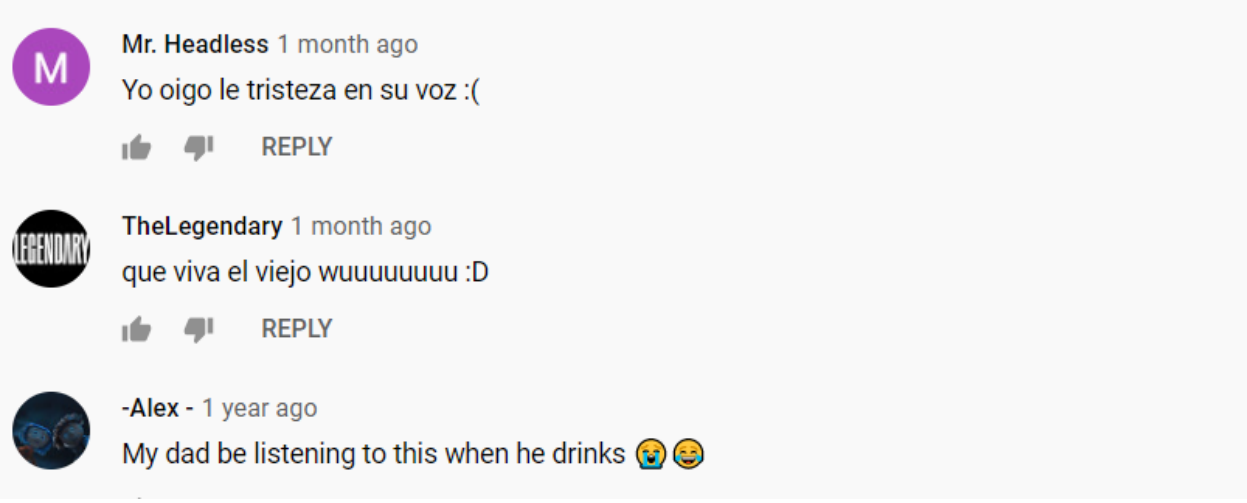

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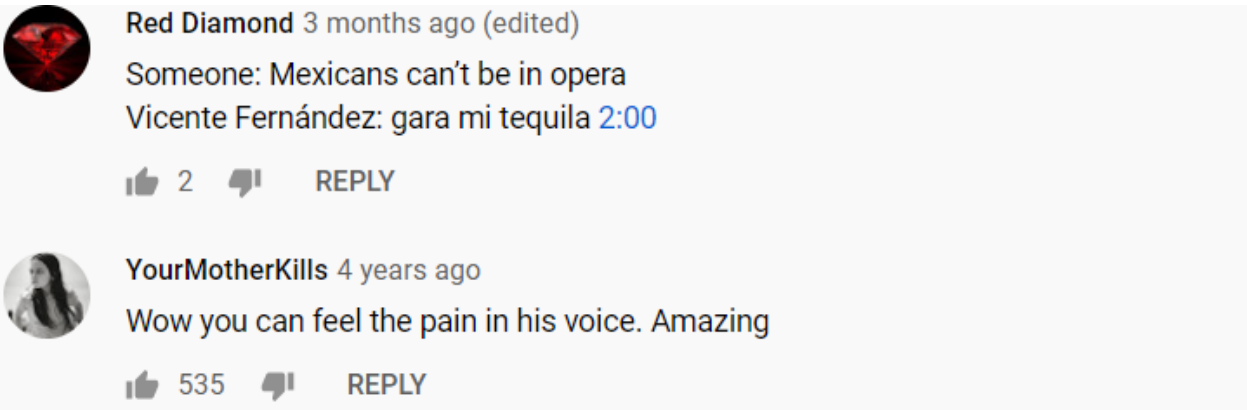

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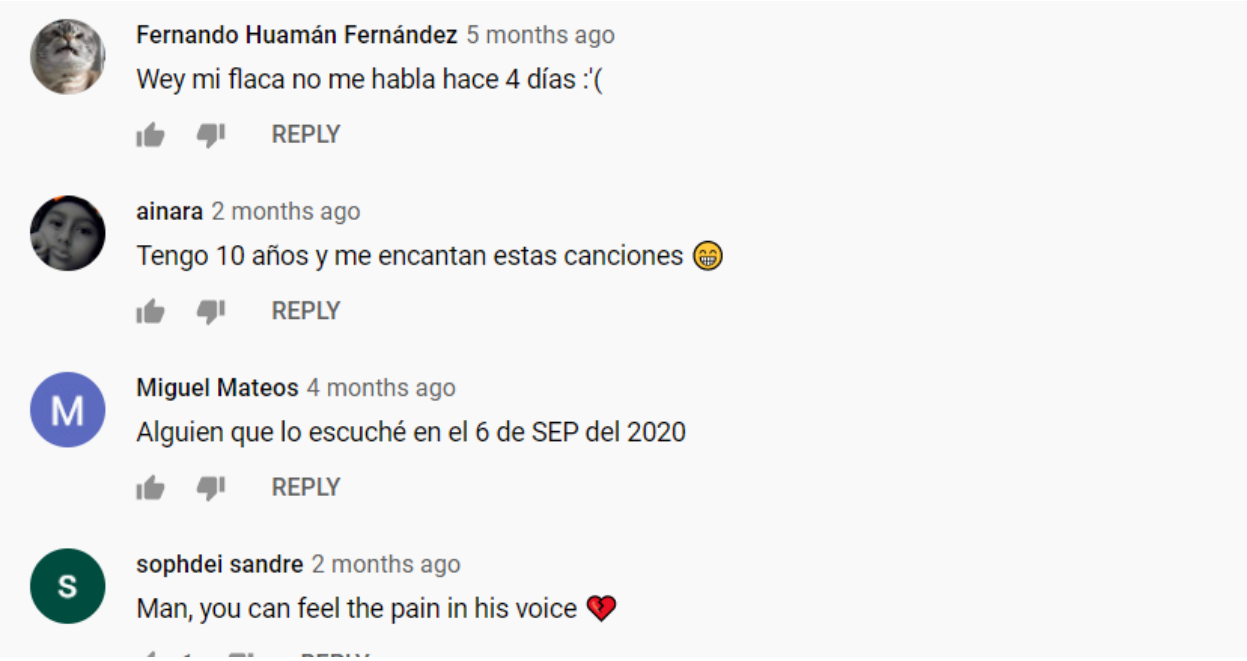

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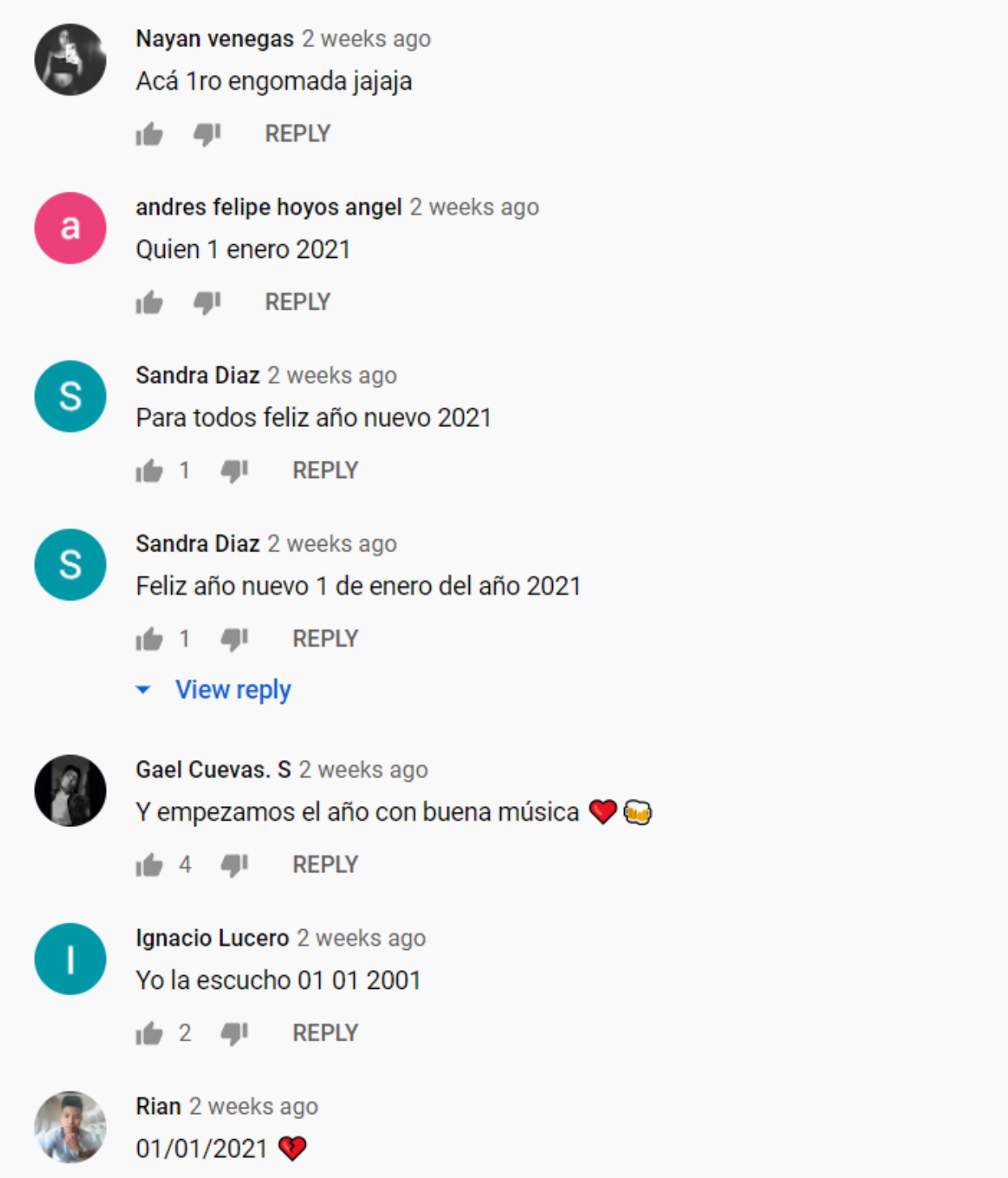

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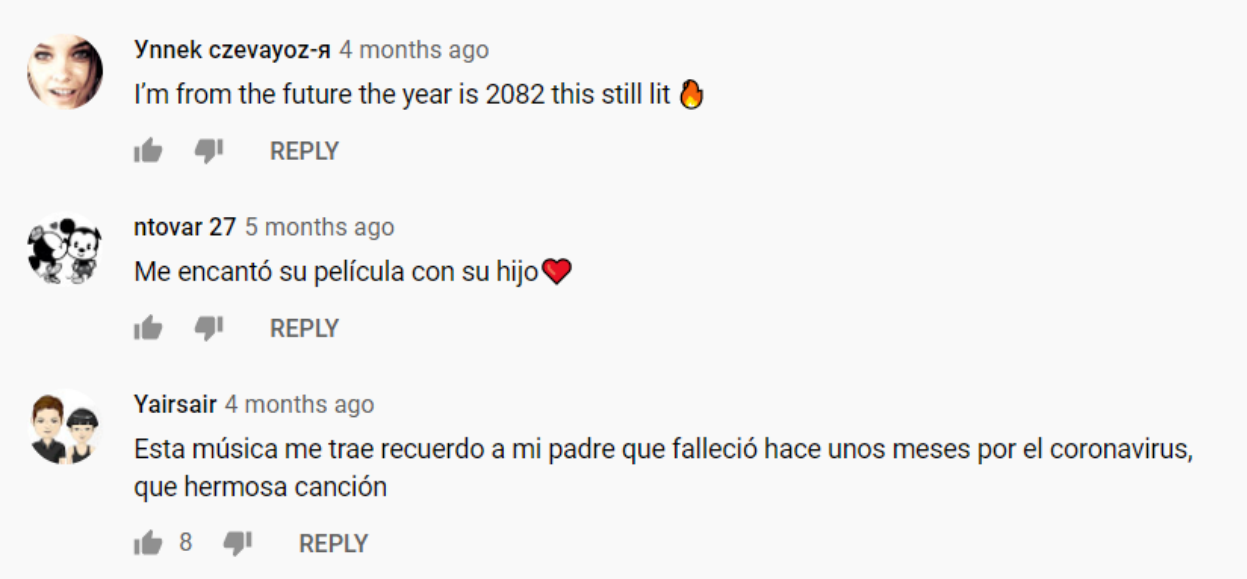

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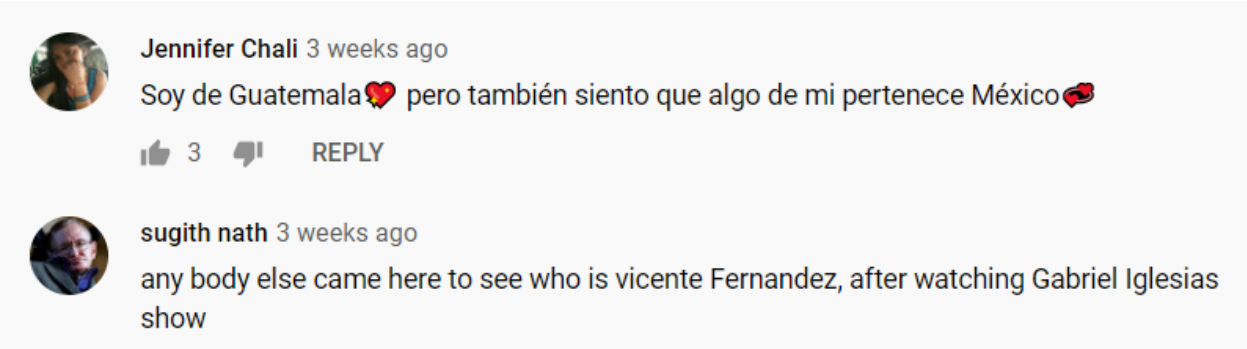
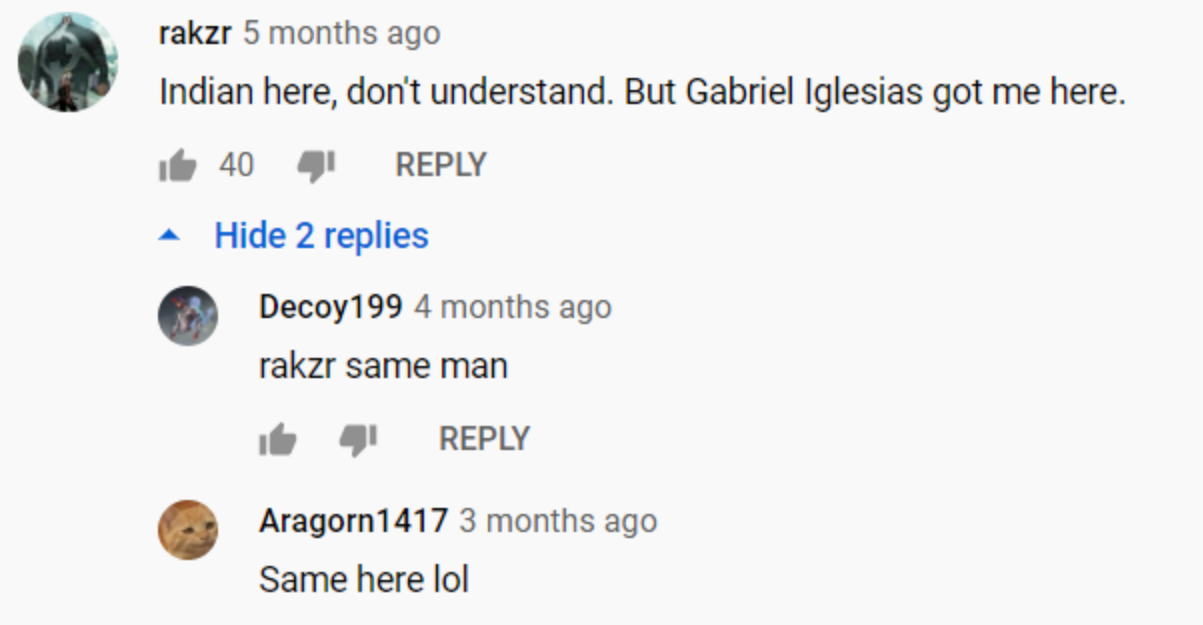


Figure 29. Accessed January 19, 2021.

Figure 30. Accessed January 19, 2021.



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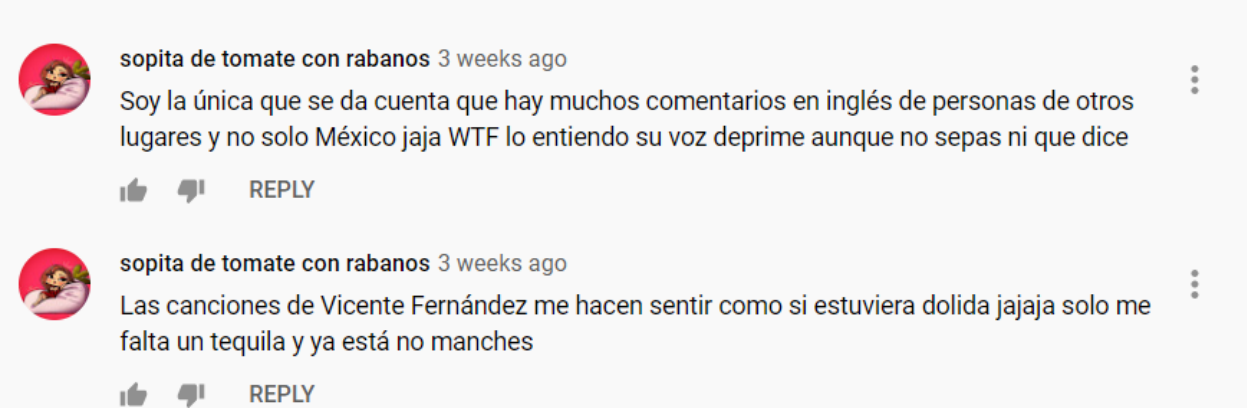


Figure 32. Accessed January 19, 2021.

Figure 33. Accessed January 19, 2021.

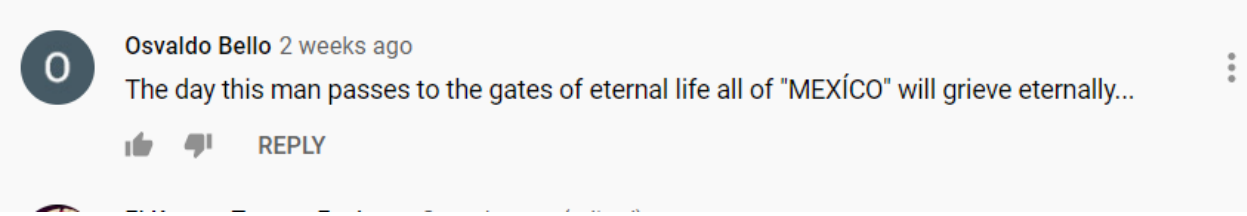
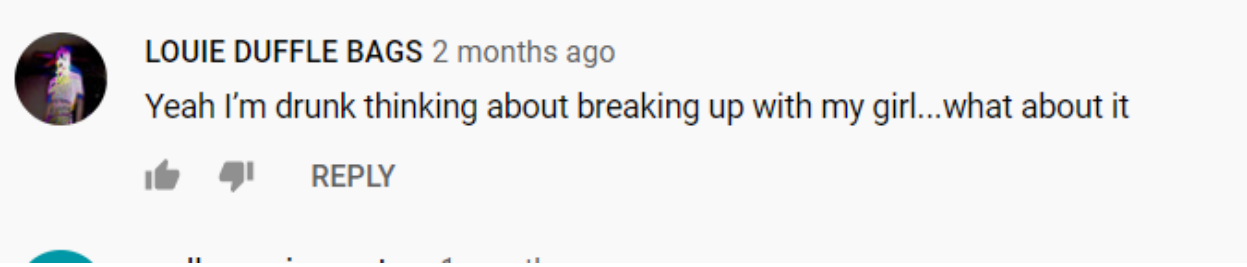


Figure 34. Accessed January 19, 2021.

Figure 35. Accessed January 19, 2021.

Figure 36. Accessed January 19, 2021.



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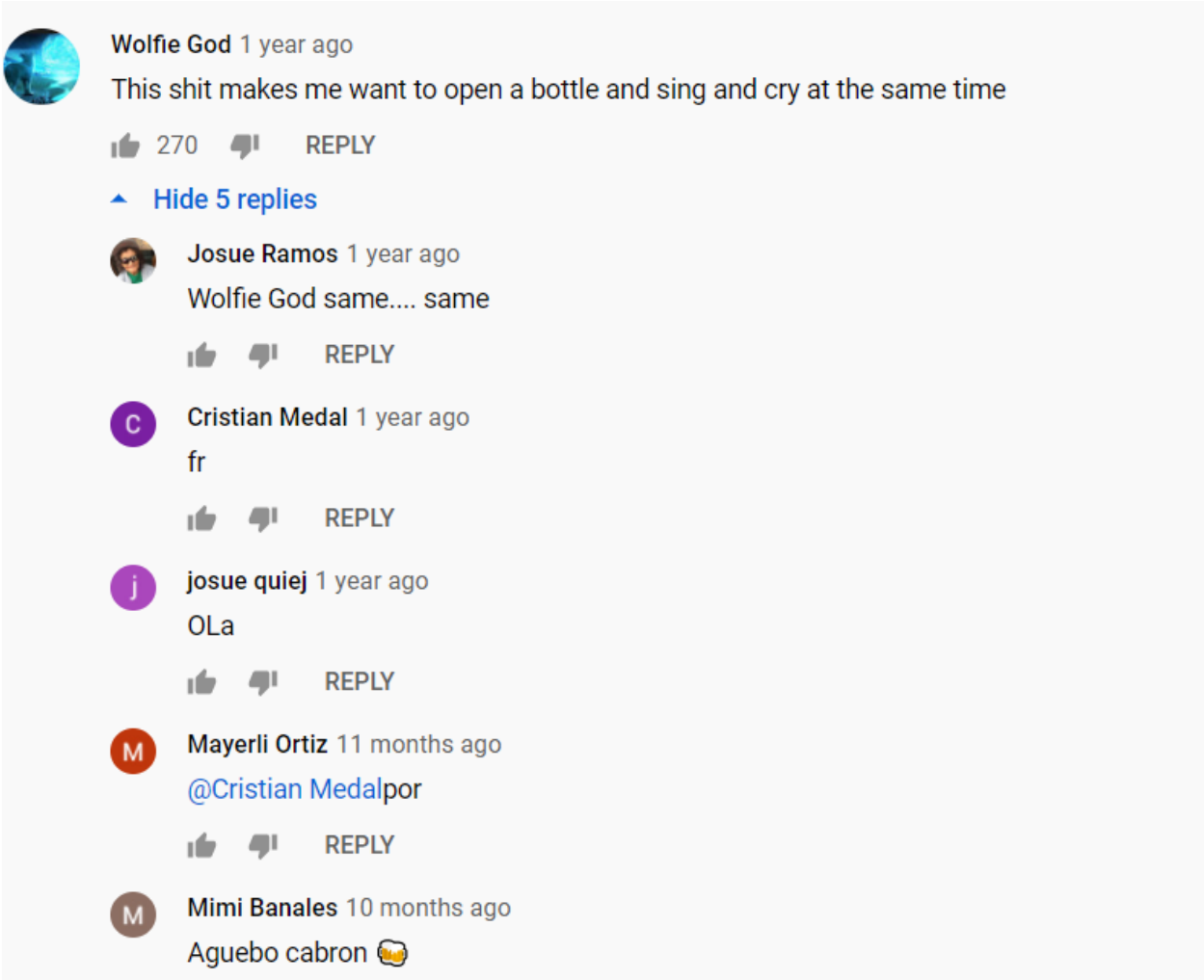

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Figure 39. Accessed January 19, 2021.

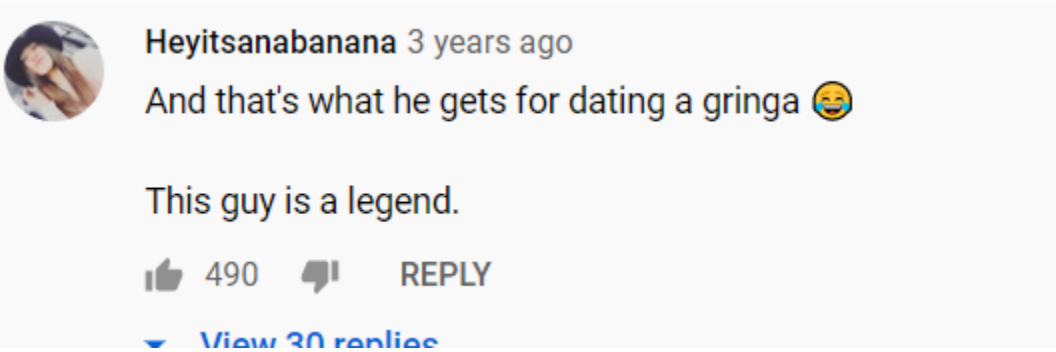

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Figure 41. Accessed January 19, 2021.

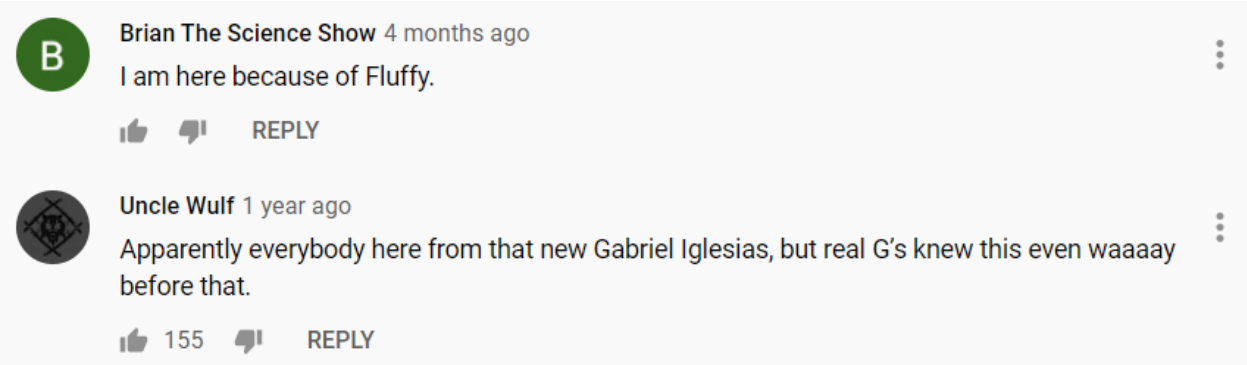

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Figure 43. Accessed January 19, 2021.

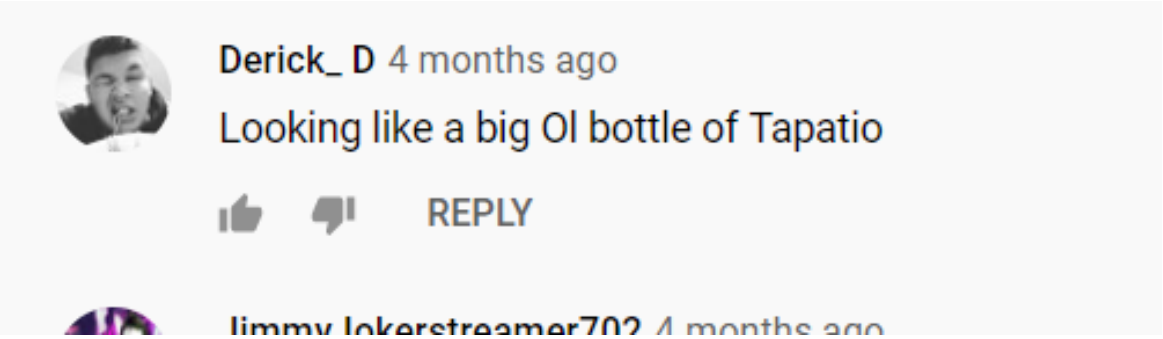

Figure 44. Accessed January 19, 2021