Waila as Transnational Practice

By: [Joan Titus](#)

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Abstract:

This chapter studies the development of *waila* as a local reinvention of traditions from Germany and Mexico among the Tohono O’odham from Arizona, putting in evidence transnational flows that have historically informed the everyday lives and social constructions of the diverse and often marginalized indigenous and local communities at the U.S.-Mexico border. As the author suggests, a study of the transnational history of waila supports the longstanding Tohono O’odham claim that, as cultural citizens from a transnational territory that has been crossed by the political U.S.-Mexico border, they should be granted the possibility to freely cross the border and travel through their land.

Keywords: Waila | Tohono O’odham | transnationalism | cultural citizenship

Book chapter:

It is a familiar story to most Tucsonans. As children growing up in Tucson, Arizona, or even as adults, we are told that Tucson had a different name long ago, before settlers changed the region. We are told that the place was called “Chuk'son,” a Tohono O’odham word for “black base,” until the Spanish and Anglo forces further transformed the name to “Tukson” and then “Tucson” with a soft C; a pronunciation that puzzles most tourists even today. This simplified history is my own, and popularized narratives of its genesis have been spun on the Internet, particularly in regard to real estate or tourism in Tucson. The change of name, moving from “Chuk'son” to “Tucson,” has gone through many more manifestations than I can list out here.¹ This transformation reveals that, similar to other cities in the Southwest, Tucson has had many nations map their multiple and overlapping histories onto it. Tucson, however, is more than a place: it is a concept, a tourist town, a Tohono O’odham village, and an “old Pueblo.”

Within this space, music plays a part of the potential histories to be told. *Waila*, a social dance music, is a musical style that is performed, created, and maintained by the Tohono O’odham of southern Arizona. Similar to Tucson, waila's history is many layered and has been locally

¹ See Will C. Barnes, *Arizona Place Names* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1960) and Papago Tribe of Arizona, *Tohono O’odham: History of the Desert People* (Papago Tribe, 1985).

constructed by nations and individuals. Arguably, waila reflects the ways in which the Tohono O'odham have and continue to co-opt outside elements into their culture. It is my argument that those multiple layers can be revealed when waila is seen as the result of transnational flows; that is, waila can be better understood as a transnational practice, particularly when considering its various local contexts in the Tucson area. One of these local venues is the annual Waila Festival, held at the University of Arizona. As with many facets of Tohono O'odham culture, this festival reveals practices of co-option and negotiation of musical identity in a postcolonial context, and exhibits the history of waila.² To consider waila as a transnational practice helps in peeling back the layers of the performed musical history at the festival; a festival that, as I argue, displays simultaneously a "national" construction of Tohono O'odham identity and individual notions of native-ness and Otherness. I therefore use transnationalism as a mode of inquiry, a lens through which to focus this tangle of histories; the layers are revealed when one examines them closely. Simply using the specifically focused and related concepts of identity and hybridity as metaphors or modes of inquiry for understanding waila fails to reveal the complexity of the phenomenon that is waila, or the O'odham.³ Instead these are products of a larger phenomenon and of a longer O'odham history. I assert that to understand such a phenomenon one should examine it as a transnational process, which affirms waila as a unique product of the O'odham, while weaving it into its larger context. Using the concept of transnationalism therefore focuses a discussion of waila as uniquely O'odham, a localized transformation of global musical styles. To conceptualize waila as a continuing transnational process and product may bring us closer to understanding the politics of national and individual identity, the multiplicity of history, and the role of native music within the cultures of the borderlands.

To apply a concept such as transnationalism to music of the southern Arizona/Mexico borderlands presents a challenge when speaking about the Tohono O'odham. Transnationalism in some music studies often implies that peoples migrate across borders, depriving the borders of their potency and effectiveness and allows musics to transform when faced with new contacts and in new contexts.⁴ To use the idea of transnationalism in regard to the O'odham may at first seem odd, since O'odham have historically lived on the land of this region. I should hasten to add that they were pushed westward after colonial contact to what is now the eleven districts of the Tohono O'odham Nation. But even despite this forced migration several miles west, certain O'odham still regard the area of Tucson and its surroundings as O'odham land.⁵ Instead of thinking of transnationalism then as dependent upon migration, I suggest it could be dependent upon the transformation of space/place. Such thinking allows a focused study of that transformation and its impact on a people who, within that space, have been relocated to accommodate the forces with which they came into contact. I therefore look at how transnational

² For discussions of co-option and the O'odham, see James S. Griffith, *A Shared Space: Folklife in the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995); and James S. Griffith, *Southern Arizona Folk Arts* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

³ I have asserted in the past, in several conference papers, that hybridity and identity were two significant concepts for waila. I derived these approaches from my fieldwork and from the perspectives of my sources. See for example Angelo Joaquin's discussion of waila as analogous to hybrid agriculture in "Native Seeds/SEARCH and a Tohono O'odham Perspective," in *Native Peoples of the Southwest: Negotiating Land, Water and Ethnicities*, ed. Laurie Lee Weinstein (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 2001), 81–88.

⁴ Frances R. Aparicio and Candida Jáquez, *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America*, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 2003).

⁵ Anonymous, personal conversation. Tucson, Arizona, November 5, 2004.

flows have moved beyond the borders of the nation-state; and how diverse cultural units, regionally and locally, define themselves, epistemologically transcending the nation-state's homogenizing discourse of identity, as Madrid suggests in chapter 1 of this volume.

The telling of history, particularly of a space/place, then becomes further complicated, especially when using transnationalism to deemphasize the role of the constructed “nation.” As Seigel points out “transnational history treats the nation as one among a range of social phenomena to be studied, rather than the frame of the study itself.”⁶ In dealing with waila's history, the multiple “nations” that have been impressed on the land created in the past (while living in the present, especially if the Tucson area is still considered “colonized”) also creates another factor to consider in the history of this music and how it plays out today. Is the past “yet another country,” as Seigel also suggests?⁷ If one thinks of waila's or even Tucson's past as a “country,” how does one reconcile the many nations that have crossed O’odham ancestral land, and consequently how they have contributed to the creation of waila?

To think in a multidimensional manner in regard to time and space/place can broaden the historian's and ethnographer's perspective, as it opens up several interrelated phenomena that inhabit this discussion of waila and transnationalism—identity, the construct of “nation,” and postcolonialism. The concept of identity has been discussed in many disciplines for several decades, often focusing on how identity changes over time and in relation to other people and places. One can speak of a national identity, determined by the state and passed along to the individuals that may or may not choose to adopt it.⁸ Individuals, however, often claim their own response to claims of national identity, creating a diversity and multiplicity that shows how a nation, or a national identity, is not a unified, ossified object. As with any “nation,” this can also describe the Tohono O’odham. The nation as a frame seems a fragile one when discussing the Tohono O’odham, not because this frame is one of many phenomena that might explain their experience as a community, but also because of the relative youth of the Tohono O’odham Nation. This sense of nation is part of a construction of power, of attempting to regain some agency when dealing with the various cultures that have come into contact with the O’odham. Before Anglo contact, the O’odham system of governance had been organized around clusters of villages that had specified leaders. By the early twentieth century, when the U.S. government required that they speak with only one Tohono O’odham (then called “Papago”) leader, the Desert People were forced to adopt a system that was recognizable by the American government.⁹ The idea of nation was initially an adaptation; a way to foster communication and to deal with a government that had determined Native American life since that government's inception.

⁶ Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review*, No. 91 (2005), 63.

⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸ Certainly this perspective could apply and has been applied to any government and/or nation. Of the many countries and former governments in the world, Soviet Russia was particularly well known for its dictates and demands of its artists. My work has addressed this issue in regard to Dmitry Shostakovich and his early film music. See, for example, Joan Titus, “Modernism, Socialist Realism, and Identity in the Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich,” Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University (2006), and the work of others in that area, including Malcolm Brown, Laurel Fay, Margarita Mazo, Simon Morrison, Peter Schmelz, and Richard Taruskin.

⁹ Papago Tribe of Arizona, *Tohono O’odham*; and Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 178–179.

This problematizes the concept of postcolonialism in this area of the United States, if it is narrowly understood as something truly “post” or beyond colonialism. Of the many conversations I have had with anonymous Native Americans in the Southwest, and various conversations with Anglos while living in Tucson for over twenty-two years, I have noted that many people express the sentiment that there is nothing “post” about the colonization of the area.¹⁰ This tension is heightened in everyday conversations about indigeneity or “Native-ness” (Is one a Native Tucsonan? And/or Native American?); a tension that I have experienced during my fieldwork. The uncomfortable line between Native and Other highlights the slipperiness of what is colonial, postcolonial, or simply an undefined, unlabeled space.

Although it may seem debatable whether this region is postcolonial, some O’odham have suggested that the region called Tohono O’odham reservation extends beyond the United States, in effect erasing the border of the two major countries that contain O’odham lands. O’odham have been making pilgrimages to what is now Mexico from southern Arizona for many reasons, including feast celebrations, such as those for St. Guadalupe or St. Francis.¹¹ O’odham on U.S. land have expressed the need for the freedom to cross the U.S.-Mexico border with ease, without being stopped by border control. Since they are residents of the Tohono O’odham Nation, supporters have argued that they should be allowed to roam their own lands, despite the border between two other countries.¹² Since 2001, there have been attempts to pass a federal law to give O’odham full American citizenship. This law has not yet passed, thus making it difficult to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly when border control has increased significantly since 2001.¹³ In some ways, the border never existed at all; perhaps this allowance should be a natural entitlement particularly because of religious pilgrimages.¹⁴

The potential lack of border between two major countries in the minds of O’odham underscores the idea that the U.S.-Mexico borderland is a naturally occurring transnational space. It would

¹⁰ Gyan Prakash has commented in summary of an essay by J. Jorge Klor de Alva that natives in Latin America have yet to be de-colonized and states that a similar situation exists in North America. See Gyan Prakash, “Introduction,” in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15.

¹¹ See Griffith, *Southern Arizona Folk Arts*; and James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places: A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); and Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest*. Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA) is a nonprofit organization that co-organized a desert walk in 2000 with the Seri natives of Mexico and the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum that was designed to bring awareness to health issues among O’odham and Seri, particularly diabetes. This walk took place over eleven days, from Seri lands in Mexico moving across the border and ending at the ASDM. I was serendipitously in attendance at the ASDM celebration, and learned about the event firsthand. See <http://www.tocaonline.org> for more information on TOCA.

¹² For information on this conflict, see Courtney Ozer, “Make It Right: The Case for Granting Tohono O’odham Nation Members U.S. Citizenship,” *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*, Spring 2002; 16 Geo. Immigr. L.J. 705; and the Americas Program Center for International Policy Web site at <http://americas.irc-online.org/amcit/3648> (accessed February 1, 2010).

¹³ Ozer, “Make It Right.”

¹⁴ Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest*, 172–173. Although the status and discussion of waila on the Mexican side of the border is not the focus of this article, it begs to be researched. Little to almost nothing has been published about the performance of waila on the Mexican side. This is likely because when waila is discussed it implicitly references the entire reservation, not just the American side, even if the experiences tend to more often come from those on the American part of the reservation.

logically follow that the music would reflect or embody the various (often colonizing) forces that have redefined the borders of O’odham ancestral lands. Waila therefore has been a consciously hybrid construction, a result of the cycling and recycling of musical material that has crossed O’odham lands through contact and intersection of multiple cultures and their music.¹⁵ Its creation, and the continual practice of waila is a part of the unique relationship that O’odham have with a space that has, over many centuries, become transnational. A transnational study of waila therefore recognizes that the “nation” is one of many facets for discussion and, as Seigel points out, “like the self, emerges in relation to others.”¹⁶

Figure 8.1. Map of the O’odham in Arizona and Sonora. In the United States, the Tohono O’odham reservation is divided into eleven districts and exists in three central segments: one directly south of Phoenix, another near Gila Bend, and another containing San Xavier. (All contained within the bold lines on the map.) The Tohono O’odham extend into Mexico and live in communities and cities across Sonora, including Puerto Peñasco, Caborca, Saric, Sasabe, Sonoyta, and Magdalena. There is no reservation in Mexico as there is in the United States. The Akimel O’odham live on the Ak-Chin, Salt River, and Gila River reservations near Phoenix (not noted on map for the sake of clarity). Map drawn by Joan Titus.

¹⁵ For a brief comparison of waila to agricultural hybridism, see Angelo Joaquin Jr., “Native Seeds/SEARCH and a Tohono O’odham Perspective.”

¹⁶ Seigel, “Beyond Compare,” 64.

Waila

Regarded in the past as more of a “reservation secret” than a national phenomenon, waila is the social dance music of both the Akimel and Tohono O’odham of southern Arizona.¹⁷ The reservations of both O’odham are currently located in proximity to the cities of Phoenix and Tucson. The Tohono O’odham lands are indicated on the map in figure 8.1.

For over one hundred years, waila has been a vital part of the southern Arizonan soundscape, integral to the social and religious life of the Tohono O’odham. Although its beginnings are uncertain, folklorist Jim Griffith relates that waila has its roots in missionary contact and American boarding schools from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries.¹⁸ In this time frame, European musical genres—such as the polka, mazurka, and schottische—were introduced, likely as the result of contact with German and Mexican musical traditions. (See figure 8.2)

Brief Timeline of Development of <i>Waila</i>	
•	Mid-eighteenth century – stringed instruments introduced by Jesuit missionaries (violins, guitar)
•	Early nineteenth century – O’odham exposed to European dances (likely via German immigrants and Spanish, then Mexican music)
•	By late 1860s, waila was being played at fiestas
•	After Gold Rush of 1849 and Gadsden Purchase (1853), snare and bass drums appear
•	Older, string instrumentation of waila (violins, guitar, bass drum) in practice until WWII
•	Modern waila instrumentation and some repertory – saxophone, accordion, drum set, bass – appears around WWII, possibly the result of norteño influence (saxophone may have been the result of introduction of the instruments in boarding schools)
•	Current waila repertory borrows from country western, norteño, and American popular music traditions

Figure 8.2. Brief timeline of the development of *waila*, compiled by author.

Until World War II, waila was played by a string ensemble, consisting of violins, guitar, and bass drum. During the most recent phase of waila, post–World War II, instrumentation similar to that of norteño was adopted, including a saxophone, button accordion, lead and bass guitar, and drum set. Unlike norteño, waila is almost exclusively an instrumental music, though some groups have experimented by adding lyrics to waila.¹⁹ More recently, the keyboard has been added to waila instrumentation, and experiments with synthesized sound and distortion are now considered by insiders to be commonplace on the reservation. Since the nineteenth century, waila has been in constant contact with borderland musics, such as norteño, and continues to develop as a hybrid musical style.

What is now southern Arizona bears the mark of varied cultural intersections. As Gloria Anzaldúa has commented, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the

¹⁷ Janet Sturman, “Movement Analysis as a Tool for Understanding Identity: Retentions, Borrowings, and Transformations in Native American *Waila*,” *The World of Music*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1997), 59.

¹⁸ James S. Griffith, “Waila: the Social Dance Music of the Tohono O’odham,” in *Musics in Multicultural America: a Study of Twelve Musical Communities*, eds. Kip Lornell, Anne Rasmussen (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 193.

¹⁹ When lyrics have been added in the past, they are in Spanish or English, depending on the group and the origin of the song. Because waila is an instrumental music, a listener has to know the origin of the song to know the original language.

emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”²⁰ Perhaps therefore it is not surprising that waila is also in a state of transition and continues to develop as a hybrid. In his writings on the history and style of waila, Griffith has described the transmission of waila tunes as being passed down from traditional fiddle groups, learned from norteño through recordings or in person, and absorbed from American traditional and contemporary musics.²¹ This kind of borrowing remains integral today. Songs are borrowed, or modeled after country western, norteño, and American mainstream musical traditions. Pre–World War II waila, often known as the older, string waila, tends to have the structure of European dance songs after which they are often named, such as the polka (often called a waila), the schottische (often called the chod’i), and the mazurka.²² A song like the “Ali Oidak Polka,” from the album *Old Time O’odham Fiddle Music—The Gu-Achi Fiddlers*, is a clear example of early string waila, still played today usually as a historical nod to waila at festivals. It has a clear duple meter, binary form akin to the European polka, southeastern American Old Time music, and local norteño. Typically, as in this song, there are no variations in the phrases or improvised solos taken by the instrumentalists; accordion or other lead instrument solos, common to norteño, are not generally found in waila. Most notable is the scratchy quality of the fiddles, common to the overall timbre of this older form of waila.²³ Post–World War II waila continues to build on the same musical traditions and incorporates the newest trends in Mexican and American musics. The Young Waila Musicians produced their first album with notable references to reggae in the first track.²⁴ Offbeat rhythms, the recognizable “skank,” and medium tempo permeate the song, and align it with the many histories in reggae itself. American country western songs also still serve as fodder for newer waila, as I noted at live performances at the Waila Festival in 2003. T.O. Combo, a known group in the region, played a version of Johnny Cash’s “Ring of Fire” live—a song known for its use of mariachi brass lines and references to music of the Southwest. In this song, T.O. Combo employs what I observe to be part of the waila aesthetic—some rhythmic variation in the rhythm section (drum set and bass guitar), while maintaining a steady dance beat. There are no solo variations in the saxophone and accordion, yet the rhythm section is more active, with offbeat accents and added fills in between phrases. Cash’s song is still recognizable, but its function is for dance—a transformation into a polka, or waila—and represents the borrowing and building on current musical traditions that embody the waila aesthetic today.²⁵

Transforming these tunes into waila is a complex process that speaks to the transnational process of this social dance music. Waila is often identified by its practitioners as a national music—one

²⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 25.

²¹ “Tunes come into Papago repertoires in a variety of ways. Some are traditional waila pieces that have been handed down for generations, since the days of the fiddle orchestras. O’odham musicians learn others from listening to Mexican norteño bands in person or on records. Still others come from both the traditional and contemporary American mainstreams.” Griffith, *Southern Arizona Folk Arts*, 74.

²² The chod’i is probably derived from the chotis, the norteña version of the schottische. Interestingly, however, I have never heard Tohono O’odham publicly mention that the chod’i is derived from the chotis.

²³ The phrase “chicken scratch” often another name for waila, refers not to the sound of the music but to the movement. Occasionally, a male dancer will look as if he is “scratching” the ground with one foot, leading to naming of waila as “chicken scratch” by outside observers. See Griffith, “Waila: The Social Dance Music of the Tohono O’odham,” 193–194.

²⁴ Titled simply “Intro” from Young Waila Musicians, *Young Waila Musicians*, CD, Rock-A-Bye Records, Casa Grande, AZ, 2002.

²⁵ Other American popular music and trends permeate these festival contexts and packaged recordings. In festivals since 2003, I recall hearing versions of “Riders on the Storm” alongside “Turkey in the Straw” from waila bands.

that belongs to the Tohono O'odham. Yet, the music is sometimes viewed by outsiders as borrowed, or a knockoff of local norteño music. It is the slipperiness of a waila sensibility or aesthetic, however—between the hybridization as approach to waila, the meanings of those individual elements that constitute the hybridization, and the claiming of waila as a national art form—that invites a reading of waila as something more than a nationalist phenomenon. The practice of waila as almost purely an instrumental music highlights that slipperiness. Since the lyrics in the original language (often either Spanish or English) are absent, only the tunes themselves indicate origin. This, in some ways, obscures the potential “nationality” of the songs and blurs the boundary between O'odham, Mexican, and American musical traditions. Instead of belonging to one nation, waila can be heard as a co-opted style which exists because it is able to appropriate multiple musics as part of a whole. Waila is arguably, in process and product, a transnational phenomenon.

The performance practice of waila identifies it, perhaps unsurprisingly, as specifically Tohono O'odham. In interviews with musicians Al Pablo and Ron Joaquin, there was a strong emphasis on the social nature of waila. Al, for example, tended to emphasize waila as a tradition of people coming together, as I observed at the Waila Festival. He noted that the Waila Festival reminded him of old barn dances, where small children danced alongside adults.²⁶ Ron repeatedly emphasized the generational aspect of waila musicianship. Passing down the old waila music, generation by generation is “what makes waila special,” he noted.²⁷ A workshop for young waila musicians has been organized for many years, where elders sit among the youth and disseminate songs, techniques, and practices. The Young Waila Musicians, a band mentioned earlier, grew out of this workshop and produced their own album of material that maintains traditions, yet includes newer musical styles such as reggae. The emphasis on family transmission, social contexts, and a focus on educating young musicians in formal contexts reveals Waila's primary function as an O'odham social music, and even though waila's obvious hybridization may seem contradictory, it is also a key factor to its continuity as a style. It is the exclusive practice of waila by Tohono O'odham that distinguishes it from other similar sounding music. This practice of waila as a social activity is apparent in many local contexts, including on-reservation parties, saint day celebrations, and festivals such as Tucson Meet Yourself and the annual Waila Festival.

The Waila Festival and Tradition

The site for the Waila Festival for ten years has been the University of Arizona “Bear Down” field, a semi-grassy area located next to the university stadium.²⁸ Throughout the afternoon, food vendors, musicians, sound engineers, and volunteers arrive to set up their stands. The music typically begins shortly after five o'clock, and sometimes a few veteran dancers leap into the center of the field, encircled by vendors, the stage, and groups of families, who have camped out with their lawn chairs, coolers, and blankets. By early evening, the momentum of the festival has picked up, as more people arrive, populating the dance floor. The festival appears to achieve its

²⁶ Al Pablo, personal interview. Tucson, Arizona, May 10, 2003.

²⁷ Ron Joaquin, personal interview. Tucson, Arizona, May 10, 2003.

²⁸ According to Angelo Joaquin Jr., the festival's director, the Waila Festival was held at the Arizona Historical Society from 1989 to 1998 and was moved to the University of Arizona Bear Down Field in 1998, where it remained until 2007. The festival has not been running for the past two years (2008 and 2009), but has been reinstated in 2010, and was held on the grounds of Old Tucson Studios. Angelo Joaquin, Jr., personal conversation. Tucson, Arizona, August 27, 2010; Angelo Joaquin Jr., electronic communication. September 1, 2010.

goal of bringing together people from varying cultural backgrounds to share in a local, specifically Tohono O’odham, dance-music tradition.

As expressed in the mission statement printed in the program and in conversations and interviews, the overall goal of the festival and of its organizers is to create a positive environment for the sharing of a local form of music. Figure 8.3 shows the front page of the 2003 festival program, which contains a mission statement that has remained more or less the same since then.

Figure 8.3. Front page of the Waila Festival Program, 2003. Artwork by Michael Chiago. Front page design/layout by Janet Sturman. Courtesy of the Waila Festival.

As written in the festival program, “The mission of the Waila Festival is to encourage and facilitate the artistic development of waila music and musicians, to showcase this hundred-year-old musical form in a professional setting, and to bring this aspect of Tohono O’odham culture to the public of southern Arizona for its appreciation and enjoyment.” In this three-part mission statement, the use of words like “professional setting” and “artistic development” highlights the experience that waila musicians have from performing at the festival. In conversations and

interviews, I discovered that both more- and less-experienced groups want the opportunity to play at the festival in order to practice for American festival contexts and, most important, helps the musicians become familiar with non-O'odham audience members and their responses.

Another part of the statement, the "showcasing a hundred-year-old musical form" also reveals the festival's goals. Through interviews, and observation of the waila committee meeting in 2003, I noticed that there was an emphasis on the tradition of waila. One of the three groups included in the 2003 festival, for example, was a string band, a kind of waila that is hardly played today and often placed in the category of "traditional." Other groups, representing more recent waila, were asked to be conservative in their repertory by organizers of the festival. According to Angelo Joaquin Jr., the director of the festival, "the bands are asked to perform waila tunes only." He goes on to say, "Elders have commented many times that they want, at the festival, to hear the tunes their grandfathers played, or at the very least, played in the style of their grandfathers."²⁹ These statements, and the previous comments from Al Pablo and Ron Joaquin about the social nature of waila, support the goal of the festival as a performance of heritage, a showcasing of the music and of its history. The Waila Festival therefore enacts a history of waila that resonates with the few available historical essays on this music and perpetuates a nationalist history that is packaged for outsider consumption.³⁰

The previous statements of the festival director and musicians also implicitly reference a tension between waila's continual development through hybridity and innovation and maintaining a waila "tradition." In a description of Angelo's response to cumbia as a recent dance addition to the waila repertory, Janet Sturman commented:

He is glad to see how many young people are attracted to this rhythm and also dance to it. Polka may seem old-fashioned, but *cumbia* is hip. Youth interest in *cumbia* keeps teenagers actively involved with *waila*, a tradition that many O'odham feel binds them together and sustains community feeling and values (Veteran Waila Musicians Panel 1995). While glad to see them join in community dances, Angelo is sorry to see how few of these young dancers strive to maintain the characteristic dignity of the old dance movements. The *cumbia* seems to encourage ways of moving less characteristic of O'odham, much the way that the powwow encourages participants to adopt dances of an outside heritage.³¹

Despite its relatively high hip-ness factor and potential for disrupting the perceived tradition of waila, the cumbia currently has been accepted into the waila repertory. Even with the inclusion of the cumbia, its emphasis on tradition and conservative repertory suggests that the Waila Festival is therefore a performance of heritage, as constructed by organizers and guided by the Elders and their designation of what is "traditional" in waila.³² The response to the cumbia

²⁹ Angelo Joaquin Jr., electronic communication. October 5, 2004.

³⁰ See Griffith, "Waila: The Social Dance Music of the Tohono O'odham," 187–208; Griffith, *Southern Arizona Folk Arts*; and Andrew Means and Aimee Madsen, "Chicken Scratch: The Waila Music of the O'odham Peoples of Southern Arizona," *Native Peoples*, Vol. 8, No2, (1995), 34–40 for examples.

³¹ Sturman, 58.

³² In some ways I am invoking Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and her discussion of tradition and heritage, particularly in her published version of the Charles Seeger lecture for the National Meeting of the Society for

underscores the tension between approaches that strive to ensure waila's survival, and what I argue is O'odham transnationalism: innovation and tradition.

Returning to the mission statement, I would like to note that its tone emphasizes the noncompetitive nature of the festival. Unlike past "Battle of the Bands" that take place on the reservation, and the Waila Festival is more similar to the original contexts for waila, such the feast day. This festival rotates four groups of musicians, with the central section of the program reserved for a jam session in place of a competition. During this jam session, musicians from the different groups intermingle and are asked to spontaneously perform whatever songs come to mind. Through their performance of waila-appropriate dances, such as the waila, the mazurka, the chod'i, and the cumbia, the musicians have the opportunity to learn from each other, emphasizing a noncompetitive sharing of the musical tradition.

Throughout the festival, as the bands would rotate, or mix in the case of the jam session, several different MCs would tell and re-tell the historical narrative of waila in between sets. These MCs would relate a standard history of waila, designed to educate the audience and reveal the origins and names of the dances, how to dance to them, and introduce the bands and their tunes. Based on the MC's comments and my own observations, I noted that dance style, indeed movement in general, seemed to be an important part of the O'odham aesthetic. At one point in the evening at the 2003 festival, Angelo playfully translated to me a comment made by a MC with an entertaining sense of humor. In response to the previous dance, she affectionately exclaimed in the O'odham language, "That was a very painful cumbia!" Thinking back to the cumbia just moments before, and previous cumbias throughout the evening, I noticed that this dance attracted more dancers onto the floor and was the most popular dance among the non-O'odham in the audience. As Sturman had observed earlier, the cumbia allowed movement not typically accepted in the older dances.³³ It appeared that the dancing of the cumbia at this festival varied widely from the more "animated" dancing of many of the non-O'odham Tucsonans to the almost "still," composed dancing of many Tohono O'odham dancers.³⁴

The MC's comment underscores a Tohono O'odham belief system that was reflected in Angelo's statements about how O'odham dance to waila, as well as reactions that he had to the festival dancers. Angelo considered extremely showy dancing to be almost "disrespectful" to the tradition and to the musicians, particularly since there is a symbiotic relationship between the musicians and the dancers.³⁵ He had explained that to be "still" and smoothly glide across the dance floor was a sign of proficiency and grace, and a way of behaving modestly that is closely related to the *Himdag*, or Tohono O'odham way of life.³⁶ Sturman has discussed the link

Ethnomusicology. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Theorizing Heritage," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 39, No.3 (1995), 367–380.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ This idea of "stillness" was first coined by Sturman. See Sturman, 50-69.

³⁵ Angelo Joaquin Jr., personal interviews. Tucson, Arizona, May 8, 9, and 11, 2003. Although he stated that extremely animated dancing is disrespectful, he also expressed that the festival still encourages people to dance nonetheless.

³⁶ I have heard similar ideas in interviews with local scholars such as Griffith and read statements from other O'odham, such as Ofelia Zepeda, that confirm this belief. James S. Griffith, personal interview. Tucson, Arizona, May 8, 2003. See also Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest*, 186 for Zepeda's comments on the modernity and resilience of O'odham people.

between movement and identity in detail, describing how O’odham musicians and dancers generally maintain straight posture and almost “stillness” when dancing to waila. This idea is echoed in Griffith’s essay “Waila: The Social Dance Music of the Tohono O’odham,” where he describes waila dancing as “solid and matter-of-fact” and having a “visual aesthetic ... [that] is one of smoothness.”³⁷ Having observed O’odham musicians at the Waila Festival since 2003, I witnessed generally no excessive movement outside of what was necessary to play their instruments, just as there are no solos ever taken by the lead instrumentalists. No head banging or hip shaking was apparent, as one might find at an American rock concert, particularly during solos.³⁸ O’odham musicians with whom I spoke also confirmed this behavior, suggesting that moving unnecessarily to the music while performing would be unacceptable.³⁹ This same stillness was echoed in the dancing. I danced with O’odham and non-O’odham and observed that stillness was generally the mark of more accomplished O’odham musicians and dancers, particularly in the older dances. Some couples, who in my estimation had been dancing for many years given their age and fluency in movement, would look as if they were floating across the ground. Younger dancers, often in their teens would appear more bouncy than their elders. In my experience dancing with an O’odham dancer, I found that stillness was incredibly difficult to maintain. As a novice, I found it much easier to bounce, to use the muscles in my upper legs. But after some time, I realized that muscles in the hips needed to be used more often—remaining stationary while moving the lower parts of the legs required significant control. The following morning, I remember trying to move normally and found the muscles surrounding my hips and lower back hurt the most. I physically was faced with the important fact that stillness was an acquired skill that may appear simple, but was in fact a significant challenge.

The stillness of the waila dancers varied from veteran to inexperienced and depended in part on the age of the dance, i.e., a waila-polka or a more recent cumbia. But stillness appears to be part of a larger framing aesthetic choice that is a central concept in Tohono O’odham culture. In interviews with musicians and facilitators such as Angelo, it became clear to me that movement is an identity marker linked to Tohono O’odham philosophy about conducting oneself in daily life. He explained how O’odham should not draw attention to themselves or act in an ostentatious manner in any aspect of life.⁴⁰ Al stated that flashy soloing would attract attention, and Angelo’s above statements about inappropriate dancing also relates to proper conduct.⁴¹ Attracting attention to oneself or generally gaining an advantage over others in a community is not just inappropriate, but is considered a form of bad luck, which could attract “devils” and create “devil sickness.”

As Daniel Reff has argued, the current conception of devil in Tohono O’odham belief is one born from an indigenous perspective that merged with concepts of the Christian devil after colonial contact.⁴² Pre-contact O’odham were presumed to have an egalitarian system that changed when they began to engage in the livestock industry and wage labor. The post-contact

³⁷ Griffith, “Waila: The Social Dance Music of the Tohono O’odham,” 196.

³⁸ Sturman does note in her essay that one band member did head bang during a performance. See Sturman, 60.

³⁹ Al Pablo, personal interview. Tucson, Arizona, May 10, 2003.

⁴⁰ Angelo Joaquin Jr., personal interviews. Tucson, Arizona, May 8, 9, and 11, 2003.

⁴¹ See note 35.

⁴² See Daniel T. Reff, “Sympathy for the Devil: Devil Sickness and Lore among the Tohono O’odham,” *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2008), 355–376. See also David Kozak and David Lopez, *Devil Sickness and Devil Songs: Tohono O’odham Poetics* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

system therefore encouraged an unequal distribution of wealth, but was kept in check with a new approach to thinking about the devil—one that was not the idea of devil(s) as the spirits of previous human beings, but instead as entities that can inflict sickness if one disrupts the balance of the community; that is, the “reciprocity,” as Reff designates it, that is needed to maintain harmony in O’odham society.⁴³

This relates closely to what Angelo stated was the *Himdag*, and the various comments related about waila music and dance by various practitioners. Could it be that the notion of stillness or quiet movements in the veteran dancers and musicians are a product of a part of the *Himdag*, that is, the embedded nature of the devil way in Tohono O’odham lifeways? Do these approaches to behavior create balance and reciprocity between those involved in making, enjoying, and facilitating waila? It may be as Reff suggests:

The great achievement of the Tohono O’odham is that they have succeeded at controlling greed where many others have failed. What is the nature of this achievement? Is it that the O’odham are so “simple” and have so little that they have never had to work to manage competition, or is it that they have elaborated cultural mechanisms such as devil way to foster social harmony?⁴⁴

Reff continues and advocates for the latter—that the balance and reciprocity that Tohono O’odham achieve is specific to their culture, not simply a by-product of colonial contact. In the same sense, normative behaviors associated with waila may also be a product of a specific Tohono O’odham approach to musical creation. Elements of musical styles and dances are borrowed; at the same time, the final musical/physical creation, execution, and overall performance practice is O’odham.

Part of the practice of what is O’odham and borrowed is embedded in the process of identity construction. Many of the things that are labeled O’odham or non-O’odham speak to this difference, a difference that is implicitly a part of a transnational process. In my fieldwork, I noted significant differences in movement and understanding of the festival, at times due to language barriers. As argued, movement is likely embedded in philosophies about daily O’odham life; it can also serve as a clear identity marker in a festival context where multiple subcultures play out their selves. There was a clear difference in movement between younger and older O’odham and non-O’odham dancers, as observed by myself and the MC (as I related in the earlier “painful cumbia” comment). This difference can be perceived from multiple perspectives—as an opportunity to engage differences positively and encourage learning; as a way to claim authority and power over an artistic tradition, particularly when other aspects of life may not be in the control of the O’odham; and as a way to play on mainstream perceptions of the Native American to foster tolerance and peace between nations. Regardless, this difference, underscored by movement, playful criticism, and the educational component, reflects the nature of the dynamics of power between the groups at the festival. In his work on North Carolina

⁴³ Reff, “Sympathy for the Devil,” 369. A similar argument has been made by Michael Taussig, where he observes how different constructions of evil and the devil became evident in post-contact societies introduced to capitalism. See Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

powwows, Chris Goertzen notes that, “formulas such as ‘the Native people have always respected their elders’ implicitly criticize American culture, just as does the equally common ‘Indians never shunned their veterans.’”⁴⁵ Although I feel that the relations between O’odham and non-O’odham at this festival were effectively positive and unifying, the criticisms that were expressed in regard to behavior demonstrate that for some participants, Tohono O’odham identity is self-consciously constructed in this festival context through perceived difference. Although, scholars such as Stuart Hall generally define identity in terms of negation, I maintain that the difference created by this festival is not intended as a negation, but as an opportunity for unified diversity, particularly according to the organizers. Whether every dancer and musician rallied under this cause is unknown; in my interviews, my informants were extremely supportive of the festival and its intent to bring people together. As the mission statement indicates, the festival brings waila to the Tucson community for sharing and is intended to be a positive learning experience for outsiders. Instead of Hall’s description of identity as difference as simply a dichotomous negation, I maintain that identity politics are messier—Tohono O’odham identity, built in response to years of postcolonial contact, is constructed as distinct in order to be a performance of heritage in a festival context that emphasizes unity between multiple and diverse groups.

Another factor contributes to the power dynamics and slipperiness of identity politics, and ultimately speaks to waila as a transnational practice. In my fieldwork on the Waila Festival since 2003 and having lived in Tucson for twenty-two years, it is difficult to ignore my involvement as a fieldworker and former native Tucsonan. One of the aspects of Hall’s approach to identity in cultural diasporas is that identity is “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions.”⁴⁶ Some of the multiple fields that I negotiate—Tucsonan, Ohioan, North Carolinian, professor, perpetual student, ethno-musicologist—are defined by something other than ethnicity.⁴⁷ When I return to Tucson, I redefine my identity in relation to being there. The Waila Festival, in some sense, is like returning home: returning to a familiar soundscape, to music that is not defined as culturally mine, but one nonetheless with which I identify. I realized that on returning to that place that I identified with the cultural multiplicity of that space. Writer Phillip Deloria, the son of the late Vine Deloria Jr., wrote in his book *Playing Indian* that modern American culture has relied heavily upon Native American culture to define its Anglo self.⁴⁸ Was it possible that my identification with waila as a symbol of “home” could be defined as “playing Indian,” or temporarily borrowing and commodifying a Native American identity, as he explains has been done historically by Anglo-Americans since the Boston Tea Party? While this question may be not answered definitively, it does relate to the idea that waila is transnational in practice—allowing outsiders, or in my case, quasi-insiders, to be invited to bring what they have to waila—so the O’odham can continue to learn, co-opt, and adapt as they have after many phases of contact. My identification with waila as a form of home is defined by a shared space, rather than an appropriation of ethnicity. As has been related to me, the life of waila outside of the

⁴⁵ Chris Goertzen, “Powwows and Identity on the Piedmont and Coastal Plains of North Carolina,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2001), 69.

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, “Who Needs Identity?” in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

⁴⁷ See Kathryn Woodward, ed., *Identity and Difference* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997) Hall, “Who Needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*.

⁴⁸ Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

reservation context has been in the control of the Tohono O'odham; that is to say, it has not been appropriated by other Americans in the way that Deloria describes. It has been in my lifetime that waila has moved beyond the reservation borders and into the mainstream American context, primarily via festivals and recordings.⁴⁹ In that time, waila has found a new audience and a new space—bars, festivals such as the Waila Festival, and local Tucson gigs.⁵⁰ This new space is like what Homi Bhabha has deemed the “in-between” space—a new space that is off-reservation, but in the past was part of Tohono O'odham land; and a new space that is also a managing of the past and the present histories that are still playing out on- and off-reservation.⁵¹ Within this space as it now exists, with its borders and designation of ownership, identities of Tucsonans like myself and of Tohono O'odham like Angelo are not monolithic or simply constructed as binary opposites. This space has and still continues to allow a flux of multicultural identity, as often described by Anzaldúa, and scholars such as Timothy Powell, and reveals the nuances of individual identity within a shared space.⁵² Movement on the dance floor and among musicians at the Waila Festival demonstrated a variety of means to mediate the self. The many dance styles of the O'odham and non-O'odham, from the stillness of veterans to the movements of novices and those well outside of the tradition, particularly during the cumbia, can illustrate how individuals have the potential to play in-between presumably static identities. The Waila Festival allows a playing out of past histories in a shared space, designating a newly created space for the interplay of both communities and their identities. The many facets of just my identity are part of that history and point to the complexity of that shared space.

As with most celebrations, the Waila Festival had its share of food that represented some of the reservation contexts for waila and powwows. Frybread, common at many powwows, abounded, but so did O'odham food unique to the southern Arizonan desert, such as cholla buds and “feast food.” Feast food is an amalgamation of food from other cultures, much like waila, and consists of local tepary beans, tortilla, chile stew, and potato salad. Cholla buds, a natural and mineral- and vitamin-packed foodstuff, is considered a traditional food that has come to the attention of outsiders thanks to a local nonprofit organization Native Seeds/SEARCH.⁵³ Tepary beans, another food common to O'odham life, are also a major staple. Other items like tortillas and chile stew appear to reference Mexican food traditions before O'odham ones, and potato salad is likely the newest addition, referencing Anglo food culture. Taken together, this supper references the original reservation context—the celebration of a saint's day, which often begins with the Tohono O'odham Catholic Mass, followed by a dance party outside the church accompanied by waila bands.⁵⁴ Similar to waila, the food signifies multiple meanings and contexts. By being brought into the Waila Festival context these foods contribute to a near simulacrum of the feast day celebration, potentially linking many nations within a shared space.

⁴⁹ See Griffith, “Waila: the Social Dance Music of the Tohono O'odham”; and Means and Madsen, “Chicken Scratch.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁵² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; and Timothy Powell, *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999). Griffith's *A Shared Space* and *Southern Arizona Folk Arts* also discuss the settlement of multiple cultures in the Southwest not mentioned here.

⁵³ Native Seeds/SEARCH, www.nativeseeds.org (accessed February 1, 2010); and Angelo Joaquin Jr., “Native seeds/SEARCH and a Tohono O'odham Perspective.”

⁵⁴ Griffith, “Waila: The Social Dance Music of the Tohono O'odham,” 197–198.

Through the eyes of a historian and ethnographer, the festival itself is a kind of mini-history of waila and of the way that the O'odham have managed their sound/landscape. The mission statement from the festival program can be read as a indicator of how the O'odham, and the festival committee, think about the intended result of celebrating waila in a shared space—to bring people together as waila has been known to do in reservation contexts. The music, often encouraged to be traditional in approach, can also show how those practicing waila continue to borrow and build on surrounding musics. Movement, and dance specifically, varies according to audience participation and shows how people from multiple subcultures can come together to relax and enjoy local music. Waila as a style has been built out of contact—taking what is useful to the culture and creating a unique Tohono O'odham genre from multiple musical styles. The festival is a potential continuation and encapsulation of a history that has already played itself out in the region, showing how the O'odham continue to manage contact and create a “music way” specific and useful to their culture. Similar to the devil way, waila reveals the adaptability of the O'odham—waila creators and facilitators absorb newer musical aspects on contact and develop the music as needed.

Arguably, it is space, that is, the physical place of the festival that allows music, dance and movement, and food to transgress national boundaries at the Waila Festival. The space is clearly not the reservation, but many elements contribute to transforming this space to exist somewhere in-between the current Tucson and the Tohono O'odham Chuk'son. The university field, a part of Tucson and formerly O'odham land, allows for the participants of the festival—musicians, dancers, and on-lookers alike—to people-watch, learn from veterans, and understand their neighboring Others. Traditional contexts for waila bring people together, as Al has noted, as does the Waila Festival. The performance of waila in this space—a music that has traditionally been practiced as a layering and synthesizing of multiple local and national musics—can be construed to be as transnational as the music being performed, despite the promotion of a singular Tohono O'odham national identity. What is potentially a national identity, however, is in practice built on transgressing the material culture brought by multiple nations. The politics of the individual identities of subject-positions such as myself and Angelo, are part of the trans-ness of this festival context. This “in-between” space encourages the multiplicity of identity, as visibly demonstrated through the possibility of stillness or other approaches to dance, particularly when dancing to the cumbia. The merging of reservation contexts for waila, such as the post-Mass dance party, with the festival on university grounds manifests directly in food, symbolically signifying those past contexts. Coupled with the symbolism of the food is the desire to educate the non-O'odham audience with a program and with brief histories of waila told in between sets. This arguably creates a packaged history of waila for outsiders to sample and understand and perpetuates this shared space. In some ways, this festival may seem like an attempt to ossify or commodify a tradition as showcased national “heritage” for outsiders. The space, however, and the past encroaches on this possible intent—the O'odham approach to the creation of waila directly reflects how they have adapted to colonial and postcolonial contact and maintained belief systems that reflect an O'odham *Himdag* separate from that contact. Identity, ethnicity, nation, self, and a colonial past all fold into a space that negotiates people and music of the present. The Waila Festival creates that place, which allows this multiplicity to play out within a transnational space to a music that is transnational in practice.