

¡Americano! Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers Rock the Borderlands of Transnational America¹

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In the mid 1990s, Roger Clyne was frontman for The Refreshments, well-known in the Tempe, AZ college scene and briefly famous for their radio pop single, “Banditos.” Since The Refreshments’ first indie release album in 1994, Roger Clyne and his new band, Roger Clyne & the Peacemakers,² have become a staple on the independent music scene in Arizona and the US Southwest. While Clyne’s music lapses into happy stereotypes and romanticized depictions of the US-Mexico borderlands, his musical utopia represents an alternative cultural politics that explores (albeit clumsily) border crossings, difference, and transnationalism. Using a personal interviews with Clyne and a critical reading of his lyrics, this article explores how Clyne invokes the US-Mexico borderlands as a region with specific landscapes, musical traditions, and mythologies, and also as a metaphor for social change (by breaking down barriers). He revises traditional US-Mexico borderlands musical traditions, such as the border ballad (*corrido*), and asserts a transnational borderlands identity—the ¡Americano!—that exists comfortably uncomfortable between the seams (and sounds) of cultures. Clyne’s music is significant for the way it asks listeners and critics to reimagine the musical-cultural spaces of nation and identity, while advocating for compassionate alternatives to violence from a region characterized by power imbalances, inequality, and violence.

Critic Josh Kun tells us that popular music gives us space to encounter ourselves—we hear ourselves in our favorite songs and come to know and build our identities through our relationships with music. The convergence of sound, space, and identity creates “audiotopias,” Kun argues, where listeners confront “the spaces that the music itself contains, the spaces that music fills up, the spaces that music helps us to imagine” (21).³ An analysis of Roger Clyne’s music and lyrics is enriched by Kun’s theory of audiotopias. As audiotopias, Clyne’s musical borderlands are a chronotope defined by border crossings that offer new ways of charting contemporary

social geographies (Kun 23). Clyne incorporates Mexican musical traditions and fragmented Spanish language into Western American musical traditions (such as honky tonk, country western, cowpunk, American folk, and rootsy rock n' roll) to create music that slips and slides over the borders of genre and tradition. While listeners and critics may insist—unsuccessfully—on pegging Clyne's music within a genre/tradition, it is precisely the music's inability to be absolutely located that invites us to hear Clyne's music as a larger metaphor for how American music—and even national identities—refuse to stay within specific geocultural borders. Listening to and analyzing the lyrics of Clyne's music in the context of Kun's audiotopias can help us understand how music questions and consolidates cultures. These seemingly contradictory acts trouble geopolitical boundaries of both nation-state and genre (22).

Kun explains how music may be informed by nationalisms, but it is always on the move to someplace else (20). Clyne's music is thus the most American kind of music, according to Kun—the kind that travels and moves through spaces where identities, histories and cultures that often at odds with each other are allowed to interact, collide, and occasionally coalesce (23). Clyne re-maps hemispheric American space, musical and otherwise, to demonstrate the imperializing limits nationalism while remaining grounded in the regionalisms of the borderlands. He interrogates what it means to live in America during a time of imperial violence and ambivalence over the meaning of citizenship. In its most utopian moments, his music questions the nation's ability to contain and regulate the mobile allegiances of its people or its music. In his songs, characters move between the United States and Mexico, their physical border crossings becoming symbols of the other barriers they evade, such as language, racism, hate, or violence. Thus, Clyne's music looks outside the boundaries of nation, culture, and genre, which often exists merely to constrain, and towards a transnational space where listeners hear that contested utopic possibility (ala Kun) that in its most hopeful moments contains a desire to unite people across the borders of race, class, gender, citizenship, and musical taste. Clyne's music is indeed utopian in its vision, but not naïve. A critical analysis of Clyne's music demonstrates the potentials and limitations of theorizing transnational American popular music, not from the racialized or marginalized communities often associated with this music, but from a white, male artist who claims the US-Mexico borderlands as his social-sonic-geographic homeland.

“The Living Frontier”

As audiotopias, Clyne’s music has a complex relationship to tradition and genre, musical content, and geography. Clyne has called the US-Mexico borderlands “the living frontier”—an idea that captures the historical and social geographies that his music reflects and enacts. Kun locates American music in the spaces-places of theorist Edward Soja’s social geographies, where “different ways of seeing time and space together, the interplay of history and geography” create “a more flexible and balanced critical theory that re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies” (Soja 11). For Kun, music’s spatiality re-maps sites “normally deemed incompatible” not only in the music itself, “but in the production of social space and the mapping of geographical space that music makes possible” (Kun 23). Clyne’s music is saturated with the sonic-social-geographic spaces of the US-Mexico borderlands. The music is born of the literal (geographic) “contact zone” of the border where disparate cultures enter into complex, unpredictable relationships.⁴ Yet, the music itself is also a “contact zone” where traditions are remixed, where the social geographies of a variety of borderlands characters are reimagined through transnational identity-formations, and in the imagined social spaces of an idealized borderlands, with reconfigured generic conventions, that his music creates for audiences.⁵ Cultural innovation as the result of contact between groups in the borderlands is nothing new. Clyne’s innovation, which clearly depends on his position as a privileged white, male (US citizen) musician, happens when the music connects the borderlands as a physical place, with a variety of regional musical traditions, to the borderlands as metaphor (about breaking down/crossing barriers) to advocate for compassion and tolerance.

The music rests provocatively on a central tension between the physical reality of borders and the fluidity of borders as a metaphor for reimagined social-sonic identities. As the landscape of his musical genesis and inspiration, Clyne’s music engages the physical borderlands literally. He draws on the region’s rich musical traditions to create a sound that is not quite country, not quite American “roots” folk music, not Mexican *norteño*, but with enough regional sound to make it distinct. It exists “in the seams between rock n’ roll’s tough rootsy past, its desperate present and uncertain future” (Jurek “Still Burning” n.pag). Patrick Ferucci called Clyne’s music, “More straightforward than cow-punk and more complex and distorted than typical American roots rock” (“What It Feels Like” n.pag). Clyne himself does not categorize his music as specifically “borderlands” music because

he refuses any generic label, but he admits that the border crossing quality of his musical style reflects his various musical influences. He was born in Tucson, Arizona and spent his childhood on a ranch, where he worked alongside Mexicans and Chicanos and learned to speak Spanish from them (Lustig). He also listened to their music. He heard plenty of Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Hank Williams and “all the cowboy perennial,” but he also remembers listening to a lot of *norteño* music:

There was always the mariachi music in there and I loved—I was always fascinated, and still am to this day, how mariachi sounds the best when it’s breaking the speakers. It probably had an influence on how I present our music . . . I can’t present my music without being passionate about it. And now in my career I’ve gone beyond passion to compassion, which is a really fun road for me . . . so I grew up on *ranchera* music and the mariachi stuff that was around and cowboy perennial and country western kind of stuff and it’s all in there, I’m sure you can hear it in the storytelling and I’d love to incorporate more ethno-mariachi, horn, shakers and stuff in our music (Clyne, Personal Interview).

While Mexican music played a constitutive role in the development of Clyne’s personal and artistic identity, the story is also a familiar one in the history of American music—a story, as Eric Lott has put it, of love and theft. Just as the history of American rock n’ roll hinges upon the appropriation of black musical innovations by successful white musicians, critics of Clyne accuse him of appropriating Mexican cultural forms and using them to his advantage. In response, Clyne says he would rather be seen as an “advocate” as opposed to an “adversary.” He said, “I consider myself someone who’s involved in advocacy and I’m not there to exploit. We have to celebrate diversity. At the same time engineer or steward unity.” Thus, Clyne’s choice to incorporate Mexican musical forms into his music is made available to him as a result of his privileged subject position, but it is also result from his exposure to the music at an early age, and from his conviction that “unity” can be achieved through shared art forms, such as music. He believes “our ability for compassion, tolerance, benevolence is what creates culture.” Clyne’s idealism dismisses how the border has real effects on the lives of people, while glossing over the power differences between himself and the ranch’s workers. His privileged position as white male citizen makes it easy to applaud his message of cross-border solidarity. Yet to dismiss Clyne and

his music because of his position of privilege misses an opportunity to hear how the music and its messages are complicated—and enriched—precisely because of Clyne’s privilege *and* his insistence on making music that is also a conscious act of social justice.

In addition to drawing on his own life experiences growing up in the Southwest, Clyne also fills his music with the mythopoetic characters, myths, and tropes associated with the borderlands region. In choosing the mythopoetic over the (often grim and violent) realistic, Clyne certainly is choosing to indulge in a romanticized story-telling tradition. Yes he does so in such a way that invites listeners to listen closer for the moments when the utopian-mythopoetic opens opportunities for conversations and questions about the limits of nation, nationalism, and borders.

Clyne has commented: “I learned that’s where I come from and those are the characters I sing about, inside and out, all come from those borderlands, both metaphorically and literally. And it’s a great place . . . and so now I get to, in my art and music, I get to use where I come from, the physical location . . . as a good metaphor for talking about crossing lines, institutional or otherwise”(Clyne “Personal Interview”).

Thus, the borderlands also become rich sources of metaphor for Clyne’s songwriting. His music transforms the specificities of landscape into songwriting tropes that gesture towards common myths and stories to emphasize universal truths, such as the transcendent power of love. “Speaking anthropologically,” he said in the *Orange Country Register*, “our central mountain is Arizona, is the Southwest, is Mexico. That’s where our mythology stems from, but the stories, the characters, the heroes, the villains, could be anytime” (Harbrecht n.pag). Within this romanticized storytelling tradition where gringos look to the south/Mexico for inspiration, Clyne imagines the border as a utopian chronotope from which to explore how the international border “doesn’t divide a culture; it defines it . . . if I have any influence on artists of the world, I want to be able to break down barriers . . . so I use the border as a metaphor quite a bit” (Wiser).

As Clyne and his music have matured, metaphors of border crossing have become an increasingly vital part of Clyne’s spiritual worldview: “we need to move back and forth across our borders until they finally disappear, but there’s a spiritual thing in it . . . I think unity is a divine concept; I think it’s truly a divine concept” (Clyne “Personal Interview”). Clyne’s vision may be utopian, but it is important to remember that ideas of utopia can have real-world effects, inspiring social change. Clyne, like Kun, believes the “democratic chorus” can become “democratic chaos” that inspires changes,

even if that change occurs within ourselves first as we move through the audiotopic spaces the music imagines for us (Kun 224).

Gringo Corrido?

As he moves back and forth across borders both literal and figurative, Clyne incorporates and revises some traditional US-Mexico borderlands musical traditions, such as the border ballad, or *corrido*. According to Américo Paredes, the *corrido* emerged out of various ballad traditions, primarily the Spanish *décima*, but has a history unique to the conflict and cultural confluence of the Lower Rio Grande border region (*Folklore*, 138–39). A traditional *corrido* narrates the epic struggles of a revolutionary male hero (usually of humble origins) who, as José Limón says, must defend “his political and civil human rights, and by extension those of his community, against social tyranny and oppression” (Limón 104). These struggles are staged along the US-Mexico border and center on border violence (e.g., Gregorio Cortez’s pursuit by the evil *rinches*, or Texas Rangers, in the famous “Ballad of Gregorio Cortez”).⁶

“The Ballad of Lupe Montosa” from the Peacemakers’ second studio album, *Sonoran Hope & Madness* (2001), reflects the Greater Mexico ballad tradition, even to the extent in which Clyne re(visions) the form for his own aesthetic purposes. Like the true *corrido*, “The Ballad of Lupe Montosa” can be read and heard as a social text that hinges on interracial conflict, illegal activity, and tragedy. The song narrates the death of “poor ol’ Lupe” at “Bootlegger Spring” at the hands of an anonymous “they” as punishment for being a bootlegger. The reference to the Bootlegger Spring and the illegal distillery locates the historical moment of the ballad in the Prohibition Era; thus, the historical frame of “Lupe Montosa” corresponds with the rise of the *corrido*.⁷ The term “bootlegger” referred not only to someone who manufactured illegal spirits, but was also used to describe someone who smuggled booze across the Canadian or Mexican borders into the United States. Such outlaws and smugglers were popular heroes of border ballads that idealized and romanticized smuggling (*Folklore* 24).

As Paredes and Saldívar have noted, one of the most important ways in which the *corrido* functions as social critique is how the outlaw hero engages listener sympathies, thus drawing us into a whole “world of sociopoetic or subaltern myth” (Saldívar 62). The listener, who may or may not share the same background with the hero, becomes momentarily aligned with him, seeing the world through his eyes. Because the killers stole Lupe’s

“only silver ring,” Lupe emerges as a proletariat hero whose plight represents the plight of the community. He is cast not as a lawbreaker, but as a victim of brutality. The mention of his widow—“his sweet lil’ wife Rosa”—and his son, Lupito, downplays Lupe’s law-breaking and renders him as a member of a community, a family man on whom innocent and defenseless figures depended and who have now been left without protection and support.

Here Clyne’s ballad takes an interesting twist on the traditional form. Instead of narrating the slaughter of Lupe’s murderers by a proud avenger, as in “Gregorio Cortez,” Clyne’s ballad rallies the community around the peaceful protests of a priest and lets irony do the avenging:

They found an old curandero to bury the mescalero
 while his family cried for thirteen nights and days
 and when Lupito asked his momma why
 his papa had to go and die
 she said, ‘Dios works in the most loco of ways.’
 and so the Padre tried to settle down
 the angry mob that’d gathered ‘round
 he said, “Let no more tears flow, let no more blood spill . . .”
 people, doncha take revenge . . . in time the Lord will surely avenge
 this crime
 for Lupe and the untimely death of our still!”
 when they found the men who shot down poor ol’ Lupe
 well, their lives were just barely a flicker
 you see they’d all lost their minds
 each one went permanently blind
 from drinkin’ too much of poor Lupe’s good liquor!

Although the community’s first response is to form an angry mob, the Padre manages to channel their anger into Christian pacifism, trusting in the Lord to do the final settling of scores. This is also consistent with Rosa’s response to Lupito’s question, which by way of an interlingual proverb diffuses Lupito’s grief into spiritual resignation and acceptance. Rosa’s mix of English and Spanish is just one of many markers of border culture and identity that appear throughout the song, including identifying Lupe as Mescalero, of the Mescalero Apache tribe of southern New Mexico.

With the protests of Lupe’s community peacefully channeled into assertions of faith, there is no one left to avenge Lupe’s death. Irony, then, swoops into the narrative and finishes off the murderers. We discover that

the men who killed Lupe signed their own death warrants by drinking “too much of poor Lupe’s good liquor.” As a morality tale, the ballad suggests that the murderers are ultimately ruined by their own greed and vice and thus the community’s faith in a just God is rewarded. A more literary reading privileges the ironic twist as the proper ending. In this reading, the storyteller (or balladeer) is Lupe’s real avenger because his clever subversion of formal expectation brings us to the conclusion we want.

These thematic departures, as well as the formal differences such as the repetition of a chorus and the irony of the ending (which calls attention to the form of the ballad) represent a considerable revision of the traditional *corrido*. Perhaps the most dramatic revisioning Clyne offers in “Lupe” is, of course, that the song is written and performed by white musicians. Although Paredes argues that Anglo-Texans did not have a corresponding ballad form as part of their folk culture, in *American Encounters*, Limón argues that certain kinds of Anglo cowboy poem-songs do constitute a folk (i.e. communally shared) expression, and he calls them *gringo corridos* (Limón 106–7). For Limón, *gringo corridos* consist of a sexual encounter between a white cowboy and a Mexican woman—either a high class “Spanish lady” or a prostitute—and the cowboy’s ensuing laments when his desire goes unfulfilled or thwarted due to barriers of race and class. While Clyne’s *gringo corrido* may not have a sexualized female body or narrate a white man’s desire for a Mexican woman, Clyne’s music does, in fact, reveal a heavily romantic and romanticized interest in Mexico. Although Clyne never explicitly genders Mexico as female in his music, a critical reading of gender in “The Ballad of Lupe Montosa” (and elsewhere) could productively tease out the sublimated codes of racial-sexual domination implicit in Clyne’s songwriting and in his choice of Mexico as muse. In this way, Clyne’s music is similar to Limón’s *gringo corridos* in his evasion of the real power differences between his speaker(s) and his subject(s). In my analysis, Clyne’s “Ballad of Lupe Montosa” offers a conscious engagement with and revision of the *corrido* form, in which border conflicts and violence are resolved through peaceful alternatives and formal techniques, such as irony. Instead of reifying the violence of border conflict, Clyne’s *gringo corrido* suggests that community and faith are viable alternatives to racial violence. Furthermore, in Clyne’s *gringo corrido*, the balladeer emerges as the true hero because his crafty storytelling techniques are ultimately more powerful than vengeance. The power of the balladeer to revise demonstrates Clyne’s constant belief in the power of art as peacemaker.

¡Americano!

More than any other Clyne album, *¡Americano!* (2004) explodes with social-sonic US-Mexico borderlands geographies in a confrontational and politically engaged way. Transnationalism as a theme unites these audiotopias: in the stylistic elements of the music and the geographic location out which it was produced, in the identities of characters and the stories they tell, and finally, in how Clyne questions the ability of nations, nationalisms, and patriotism to fully capture the depth of human experiences.

Written by Clyne in Cholla Bay, Mexico in the aftermath of 9/11 and the US second invasion of Iraq, the album decries a world at war and advocates the necessity of peace in an age of nativism, separation, and violence. Clyne's reaction to the war was negative. He felt the United States was "awful aggressive, and very, very imperial. And it seemed we had lost compassion and track of the truth, to be frank" (Wiser n.pag). Thus, the album intervenes not only with a political message of opposition, but also with an attempt to rediscover and celebrate compassion, truth, and human dignity. In several interviews, Clyne has commented on how *¡Americano!*'s conception and birth in Mexico influenced the album's overall tone and messages. The album is a sad, searing, and sultry investigation into what it means to be an American during an imperial war. Clyne has said that the album grew out of his sense of America's failure to live up to its promises to citizens and the world: "I believe in the Constitution and the American ideals. But I've got to say I don't think we're living up to those things. . . . The album is about being very confused in a very complicated time" (Brown). The war and Clyne's self-imposed displacement in Mexico forced him to think about his own role: "I began to focus on where I stood as a citizen and as a man, as a father and as an artist. [*Americano!*] could be viewed as a proud declaration or as a pejorative" (Lustig n.pag). In *¡Americano!*, music does not just flow from north to south, from the hegemonic United States to a subalternized Mexico, nor does it only migrate from the south to *el norte*. Kun writes that music "can be of a nation, but it is never exclusively national; it always overflows, spills out, sneaks through, reaches an ear on the other side of the border line, or one the other side of the sea" (Kun 20). Likewise, *¡Americano!* testifies to a series of transnational flows and circuits, where cultures converge, conflict, and occasionally coalesce.

The album's title track and first song, "¡Americano!" opens with a pounding drum beat, followed by high-energy guitars that build and then drop as Clyne's rough voice enters the track. "¡Americano!" is a gut-busting rock n' roll border anthem that tells a shady tale of the main character's

questionable adventures in Mexico. While “la Policia’s askin questions,” Clyne’s hero lets “the red blood and green dinero flow” even as he prays “Ave María!” for salvation. Clyne has said that this song is about “awakening to . . . [sic] individual or national course of empire” and recognizing the consequences of our actions and taking responsibility for them (Wiser). While the song may camouflage itself as a gringo narco-*corrido*, as the speaker tells his story, he is “awakening to what it really means to be part of a nation” where simple actions have “global consequences.”

Who is the speaker in this song? When Clyne sings, “blue eyes/white lies/straight teeth and a crooked soul,” we are not sure if the speaker is describing himself, denouncing his partners in crime, or ranting against his adversaries. The uncertainty alludes to one of the main questions the song raises: who or what is an ¡Americano!/? Is Clyne’s ¡Americano! a celebratory exclamation of a US white identity—the *norteamericano*—; is it a curse directed at the greedy United States by a double-crossed Mexican bandit; or is it a hemispheric label used by the speaker to identify himself as an *Americano* of the transnational borderlands? Within the song’s narrative, any or all of these possible interpretations would satisfy, but as the album progresses, it becomes clear that Clyne’s “¡Americano!” refuses to finally claim either side of the border. “¡Americano!” introduces a transnational borderlands audiotopia, marked by ambivalence and conflict, but utopian in its vibrant, inclusive social-sonic spaces where peacemaking replaces domination.

As the album continues questioning what nation and citizenship mean, *¡Americano!* circles back to the “gringo” tourist. In the meditative, existential angst-filled love song, “Your Name on a Grain of Rice,” Clyne references the ubiquitous souvenir found in every border tourist town—rice jewelry that has been delicately painted with a name or a small design. The well-known slogan, “Your Name on a Grain of Rice,” used to advertise the service, becomes an incantation to the speaker’s muse, a yearning for love, and a symbol of possible redemption and restitution for a fragmented, ambivalent identity. The speaker describes himself in parts: “a father, a son, a restless spirit” who can “see the light” but can “never get near it.” Filled with doubt and uncertainty, he goes to Mexico for some soul-searching: “now my second home is a third world cantina.” Overcome with loneliness, when he sees a man “sellin’ silver and souvenirs,” he says he will pay “full price /for your name on a grain of rice.” The lover’s name inscribed on a grain of rice becomes the inspiration the speaker needs to find himself.

As the final line of the song's chorus, the phrase itself takes on the incantatory power of the unnamed lover. Clyne transforms a simple and unsubstantial commodity—a grain of rice—into a talisman of love and redemption. Of course, what the song obscures are the disparate power relations between the Mexican vendor, whose daily existence depends on the sale of tourist trinkets, and the white male tourist who can forgo the haggling and “pay full price.” It is easier for Clyne to abstract a grain of rice into a symbol because he does not face the same material challenges as his racial foil—the Mexican man pounds the pavement of a tourist town not as part of an existential quest, but in order to make his living and survive.

This existential quest is part of the romantic tradition of North Americans, especially writers and artists, who go south to Mexico in search of inspiration, revelation, or redemption.⁸ These romantic quests often engage problematic genderings of Mexico as female—as muse, as mistress—and troubling stereotypes of Mexico as paradise, as the “untouched” premodern safe haven from the evils of modernity. Clyne is not immune from these pitfalls in his songwriting. One of the limitations of *¡Americano!* (and certainly Clyne's more recent work) is its uncritical adoration of all-things-Mexican and his failure to engage or critically reflect on this fascination in his music.

While “Your Name” demonstrates the privileges the white male tourist wields in Mexico, the song also reflects a deep ambivalence about the character's national allegiance and sense of belonging. The song opens as the speaker describes a lonely, bleeding landscape where the sun “settin’ over America” reminds him of his own “bleedin’ corazon.” One of many questions plaguing the character in this song is how he feels about the US military presence: “I see the fighter planes tearin’ across the desert sky/Do I curse them or cheer them on?/I still can’t decide . . . /But the silence they leave behind/Sounds like what I feel inside” The use of synesthesia emphasizes his ambivalence. The explosive visual and aural display of military power fails to stir the speaker into a patriotic frenzy, but it also fails to fully rouse his anti-war sentiment. Instead, he finds nothing but an agonizing silence, broken only by his lover's name on a grain of rice.

In interviews, Clyne has said that this song was inspired by his experience watching the second Iraq War unfold on a TV screen in a cantina in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico and seeing how differently people responded. He noted, “the Mexican people looked largely disapproving and very worried and some of the Americans there had the same expression, but others were standing up and cheering” (Bond). The character's ambivalence thus reflects

Clyne's own position "as a citizen of one country, watching this in another country" who is deeply aware of his in-between status. At least in our conversations, Clyne readily acknowledged the privileges of his race, gender, and US citizenship, yet his sense of allegiance is as spiritual as it is deeply regional—a transnational borderlands identity. Perhaps this why his speaker finds nothing but an ambivalent silence in the spectacle of the US fighter jets—as someone who does not identify himself primarily in national terms, he can neither fully rally around nor fully protest such an explicit display of national power. Perhaps that is also why the song deflects these troubling questions of patriotism and nationalism into a love ballad. In place of a sense of national belonging, Clyne takes refuge in the closer, more immediate bonds of love and human relationships. While the song appears to resolve the speaker's crisis through the invocation of the lover's name, left unresolved are a series of provocative questions about the speaker's refusal to fully implicate himself in any one narrative of national belonging.

If "Your Name" probes the limits of national identity and patriotism through individual pathos, Clyne's gritty anti-war anthem, "God Gave Me a Gun" takes larger structural aim at wars waged on the basis of deeply national-cultural ideologies and the rhetoric that accompanies such violence.⁹ In this bitter reaction to the self-righteousness of war, Clyne satirizes the hypocrisy of zealots who use God and religion to justify violence. "God Gave Me a Gun" opens with a series of short, explosive percussion beats and rough guitar chords that mimic gunfire (as does the tough alliteration of the title, repeated three times in every chorus). Throughout, Steve Larson's lead guitar maintains a more aggressive presence than on most of the album's tracks, serving as an effective accompaniment to Clyne's scratchier, angrier vocals. Written in the direct aftermath of 9/11 and the second Iraq War, the song invokes that moment's rhetoric of infidels, the just and moral imperatives of righteous vengeance, and the holiness of ethno-religious cleansing:¹⁰

Military issue
 now I can trust you're never gonna
 raise another fist at me again
 this is how I'll kiss you
 hollow-tip to tissue
 stronger than the sword and
 so much faster than the pen
 Fare thee well to the infidel

your God's name's not spelled the same
God gave me a gun . . .
might makes right now
whom shall we smite now
bullet through the barrel
thy will be done
God gave me a gun

It's a rhetoric that cuts both ways, and Clyne uses it as an indictment of both the Taliban jihadist propaganda as well as the hyper-nationalist war cries of the United States as he has said: "Any ideological entrenchment, whether it be political or religious, it's still an entrenchment. No ideology should give one the right to take a life in the name of God or country" (Mehrazar). In his highly satiric invocation of wartime rallying calls, the song engages the similarities between both sides, a risky move given the nation's political atmosphere at the time of the song's recording and release. The song contrasts archaic and familiar language of religious texts, quoting and paraphrasing well-known Biblical references, with more graphic descriptions of violence: "this is how I'll kiss you/hollow-tip to tissue" and "bullet through the heart."¹¹ The juxtaposition is meant to rip back the veil of religious rhetoric that masks the true nature of war. "God Gave Me a Gun" protests such denials and goes as so far as to trivialize the differences both Christians and Muslims claim as all important: "your God's name's not spelled the same." Clyne's reductive indictment in the chorus ironizes the differences nations and citizens rally ourselves around during war (and peace). He highlights the profound irony of holy wars: "kill to make us holy/kill to make us free/take an eye for an eye/and make the whole world blind." The killing sanctifies no one, frees no one, accomplishing nothing but the complete opposite of what it claimed to do. "God Gave Me a Gun" is Clyne's most openly political and confrontational of all of his songs to date. Located at the core of the album, the song captures the spirit of the entire collection—Clyne's unrelenting passion for peace before war, love before violence, and a deep questioning of nation-based ideologies in the face of transnationalisms that, for Clyne, are fundamentally utopian metaphors for the human interconnectedness.

"Switchblade" is another Clyne border ballad that foregrounds transnationalism as a theme, evident in the border-crossing activities undertaken by the characters, and the interracial relationship between Pablo and Dan. This song also posits love and human relationships as the

alternative to violence. Like the “types” of the tourist-citizen and the lover, the outlaw character reappears throughout the album. Clyne’s outlaws are more cosmopolitan than John Ford’s, more compassionate than Cormac McCarthy’s, but nonetheless take their place somewhere along the spectrum of the southwestern genre in ways that are both predictable and limiting, but also interesting. In “Switchblade,” Clyne tells the sorry tale of three outlaws whose plans go awry. The grief-stricken speaker regrets the day he “went down to Mexico on the Fourth of July” and bought switchblades for his two friends, Pablo and Dan, who never return from their exploits in Mexico. Armed with their new switchblades, Pablo and Dan told the speaker they had a plan to get rich: “pull the double cross/on a double crossin’ narco snitch.” Over a year later, the speaker has not heard from his unlucky pals and finally gets a call from the authorities to come identify the bodies—stabbed to death with switchblades. In this ballad, Clyne invokes the stereotype of the Mexican switchblade as a symbol of border violence and banditry and rewrites it as a symbol of friendship, loss, cruelty, and grief. In the chorus, the speaker laments that his ill-conceived gifts were: “sharp enough to stab/another hole in the sky / Hard enough to make the proudest diamond sigh/Faster than the rockets on the Fourth of July / Strong and cruel enough/to make a statue of Mary cry . . .” The speaker personifies the blades, emphasizing his loneliness and regret. Pablo and Dan are portrayed more as luckless victims of a violent, lawless world than as perpetrators of violence. The world of border banditry Clyne depicts is not the gunslingin’ (or blade-wielding) landscape of the John Ford Westerns, defined by easy morality, clear-cut wrongs and rights, and John Wayneish heroes. Nor is it Cormac McCarthy’s world of depraved humanity and rampant lawlessness. Clyne tempers his universe with truly utopian sentiments based on connections forged between people. Pablo, Dan, and the speaker form an interracial “brotherhood” that crosses national borders and is solidified through the course of the song, not, as one would suspect, through their shared illicit activities, but through the speaker’s pathos as he narrates the tale.

Set against the backdrop of Fourth of July celebrations, the song implicitly contrasts the celebration of revolutionary violence in 1789 (in the spirit of new nationalism) and US imperialism in 2003 with the violence of the US-Mexico borderlands. The song suggests that Fourth of July celebrations ultimately obscure the ongoing violence of US imperialism and hegemony, responsible for much of the contemporary and historical conditions that create violence in the region. The transnational switchblades are, after all, “faster than the rockets on the Fourth of July,” whose puffy,

showy, and self-congratulatory displays are no match for the subversive thrust of a subtle knife. While the United States celebrates a national identity forged from the crucible of interracial contact and conquest, “Switchblade” posits an alternative transnational identity, also defined by violence and conquest, but tempered through the bonds of friendship and love—a classic Clyne technique that we’ve seen at work in songs such as “The Ballad of Lupe Montosa” and “Your Name on A Grain of Rice.”

In “Mexican Moonshine,” the transnational elements of Clyne’s music can be heard in the use of “ethno-mariachi sound.” “Mexican Moonshine” is the only song on *¡Americano!* (but not in the entire RCPM catalogue) that features guest musicians on accordion, trumpet, and piano in order to create a typical *norteño* sound. In this overly indulgent ballad, Clyne uses an extended pun on the word “moonshine” to compare drunkenness to the “surreal, sublime” intoxication of romance Clyne feels beneath the Mexican moon. Clyne needs: “amor more than dinero/In any language every day.” Clyne’s Mock Spanish¹² plays with rhyme and sound in both languages, rhyming *amor* with “more” and using the long ‘o’ sound in *dinero* to emphasize the assonance of the entire line. As Mock Spanish, Clyne’s word play also demonstrates his white privilege because he can ignore the grammatical rules of Spanish to make a clever rhyme (while native Spanish speakers are expected to conform to rigid rules of English grammar). In other tracks on other albums and certainly in his live shows, Clyne’s use of Spanish is more complex, such as the ending to the song “Jack vs. Jose” (a meditation on whiskey versus tequila): “A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando,¹³ Katie, bar the door, pass the gunpowder and praise the Lord [. . .] Cuando a Roma fueras, haz lo que vieres or when in Rome, do as the Romans do [. . .]” Here, Clyne does use code-switching and not Mock Spanish in the two proverbs, privileging neither English nor Spanish. Clyne’s code-switching is more common than his Mock Spanish during live shows, when he often switches and sings his songs entirely in Spanish. And unlike other speakers of Mock Spanish who scatter common words into an otherwise hegemonic English, Clyne speaks Spanish with near fluency.¹⁴ On his combinations of English and Spanish in his music, Clyne has said: “I think it’s okay, as long as it’s an honest effort, and I’m really trying not to be an expert, I’m showing that I’m trying to bridge cultures” (Wiser).

The point Clyne makes about attempting to “bridge cultures” is significant. Substantive work in Chicano/a Studies has studied how code-switching often constitutes a politicized expression of marginalized, transnational borderlands identities.¹⁵ In a different way, Clyne’s linguistic

identity forms an essential part of his borderlands identity. To be clear: Clyne's Spanish does not align him with Chicano/as like Gloria Anzaldúa who have suffered the enduring wounds of colonial and patriarchal language controls. Yet his use of Spanish is also a socially conscious symbolic act. An interesting study could compare Anzaldúa's desire to "break down the subject-object duality" as part of her new mestiza consciousness with Clyne's belief in the struggle towards achieving divine unity while maintaining respect for diversity (Anzaldúa 102).

As Clyne strums his way through new articulations of an ¡Americano! identity, delivering his audiotopic, transborder message of peace from the uncomfortable places where nations grate against each other and bleed,¹⁶ Clyne confesses: "It's not like there is a deep answer here, it's just one song at a time, keeping a focused view of the land, the music and its people" ("Still Burning"). Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers assert that a transnational American identity—¡Americano!—does indeed exist as an alternative to the "ugly American" stereotype. As ¡Americanos!, Clyne calls on us to respect our differences while working together to achieve spiritual prosperity. In Clyne's music, we encounter transnational America with a difference. Clyne's music testifies to the profound interrelationships forged out the constant threat of disconnection at our boundaries. These interrelationships offer new possibilities for alliances through shared cultural expressions, such as music listening, and point toward a more positive future where borderlands subjects are united in struggle, moving beyond passion to compassion as we confront and create new worlds of meaning.

Notes

1. In my use of "America," I am referring to the larger hemispheric space of the Americas, specifically the US-Mexico border. When referring to the United States of America, I use "United States" or "US."

2. "Peacemaker" was the nickname given to the Colt .45, manufactured in 1873 by Samuel Colt. The Colt .45 became known as the gun that "won the West." As historians have proven, the "winning of the West" consisted of a series of violent confrontations between white settlers and the various non-white groups they encountered. Clyne, who holds a degree in Anthropology and Psychology from the University of Arizona, knows the history of the Peacemaker and consciously invokes the term in order to re-define it. Clyne and the band draw upon the violent history of the west symbolized by the Colt .45 not to erase or re-write histories of violence, but to acknowledge them and offer an alternative vision for their listeners.

3. Kun calls the analysis of music and lyrics an “audiotopia.” Audiotopias have “a dual function: to focus on the space of music itself and the different space and identities it juxtaposes within itself, and to focus on the social spaces, geographies, and identities that music can enable, reflect, and prophecy” (23).

4. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

5. At the time of my interview with Clyne, his audiences were mainly white North Americans, particularly those living in Arizona, New Mexico, and California. However, in the years following our conversation, Clyne and the Peacemakers began playing regular shows several times a year in Cholla Bay, Mexico, where his audiences have grown to include local Mexicans, as well as gringos and tourists.

6. Subsequent scholarship by Mark Edberg, John McDowell, Maria Herrera-Sobek, José Limón, and José David Saldívar continue social analyses of the significance and influence of the *corrido* on Chicano and regional borderlands cultures, while studies of contemporary revisions of the traditional ballad, such as the narco-*corrido* (songs about drug trafficking) bear witness to the *corrido*'s enduring legacy as an integral part of borderlands culture.

7. In Paredes' account, the events surrounding the Mexican Revolution helped create the epic *corrido* form that was the dominant until around 1930, when commercialization led to what Paredes saw as “fall” or “decline” of the true folk ballad (*Folklore* 138–39).

8. See Ronald Walker's, *Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel*.

9. In an interview with Sammy Mehrazar of Arizona State University's *Web Devil*, Clyne asserts that “God Gave Me a Gun” is “an anti-war song, period.”

10. See *Leave an Open Door: A Look Inside ¡Americano!*. Dir. Jason Boots. DVD. EmmaJava, 2003.

11. Clyne references and paraphrases the following Biblical passages: “thy will be done:” Matthew 6: 9–13; Luke 11: 1–4; “grapes of wrath:” Revelation 14:19; “eye for an eye:” Matthew 5:38; Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; “Made me in his image:” Genesis 9: 5–7 (New International Version).

12. Mock Spanish, coined by critic Jane Hill, refers to the use of common Spanish words in upper- to middle-class college educated Anglo American speech. For instance, “Hasta la vista, baby.”

13. God helps those who help themselves.

14. In my personal interview, Clyne spoke to me in fluent Spanish.

15. The most well-known and groundbreaking scholarship in this field is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987).

16. Anzaldúa (25).

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