
Chainsaws, sound, and acoustic violence: Hearing deforestation and conflict in Ajusco-Chichinautzin, Mexico

Andrew Green*¹

¹King's College London – Reino Unido

Resumen

This paper explores the practices of sounding and listening which emerge in contexts of deforestation, and which are implicated both in patterns of environmental conflict and responses to them. It engages a context of severe deforestation in Ajusco-Chichinautzin, a forested, mountainous region to the south of Mexico City, focusing in particular on the town of Santo Tomás Ajusco. Here, sound practices accumulate around deforestation at the intersection of complexly ordered social identities and registers of knowledge, especially regarding the sound of chainsaws – the first indication that logging is occurring. To understand operations of sound in this setting, I apply the concept of "acoustic violence", as discussed by Daughtry, to contexts of environmental loss. In Ajusco-Chichinautzin, forest guards and police seek to identify the sound of chainsaws as part of disciplinary strategies to halt deforestation. Yet the sound of chainsaws is heard in multiple ways. It is heard as a marker of time; in residents' aural memory, absences of chainsaws are attributed to the period in which logging was "controlled", rather than "unchecked". Yet since deforestation has also moved further from towns in recent decades, people likely hear chainsaws less frequently; this sound thus exists as a culturally coded symbol of deforestation, as well as direct evidence of the same. Equally, attentiveness to acoustic violence allows us to cut through sensationalist media presentations of deforestation, to perceive local populations – often blamed for either engaging in clandestine logging or facilitating it – as victims of environmental loss. The concept of acoustic violence may help to show how, in a context not just of environmental loss but of urban encroachment and dispossession, modalities of listening become simplified, instrumentalized, or lost.

Contraseña: music, sound, deforestation, environmental conflict

*Ponente