



TRANSNATIONAL
ENCOUNTERS

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE
AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Edited by
Alejandro L. Madrid

Transnational Encounters

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*Music and Performance at the
U.S.-Mexico Border*

EDITED BY ALEJANDRO L. MADRID

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*To Aristeo González Cano
In Memoriam*

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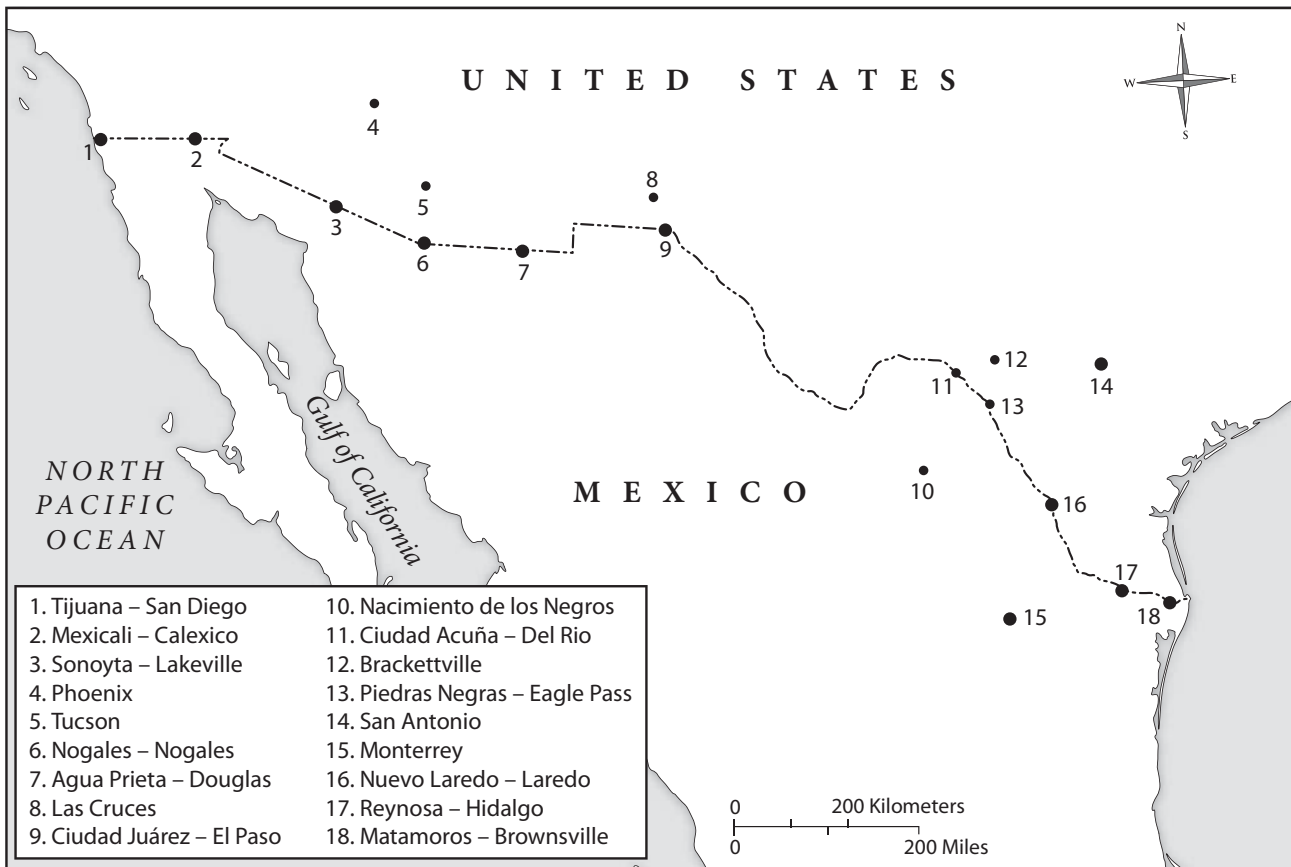
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In the summer of 1975, my family moved from Reynosa, Tamaulipas, to Guaymas, Sonora; it was a two-day long drive that I will never forget. After crossing the border in Hidalgo, Texas, we drove for two days from McAllen, to Eagle Pass, to El Paso, Texas, and then on to Douglas, Arizona, to cross back to Mexico through Agua Prieta, Sonora, and drive south toward the Sea of Cortez. This trip throughout *las chulas fronteras* was memorable in many ways; a particularly warm remembrance is that of my *abuelo* (grandfather) singing *corridos* for me as he drove us through the Gran Desierto de Altar, a large portion of the Sonoran desert in southern Arizona and northern Sonora. It was then that I learned my first corrido, "Los dos amigos" ("The Two Friends"). Aristeo González Cano, my grandfather, a native of China, Nuevo León, and a resident of Reynosa for more than eighty years, passed away as I was preparing the final manuscript of this volume. I wish to dedicate this book to him, a man who spent his life at the U.S.-Mexico border, cherished its people, treasured its history, loved its music, and tried to make sure his children, grandchildren, and great-granddaughter shared these passions. "*Amarillo no me pongo / amarillo es mi color,*" *compañero*, you will be missed.



Map 1 Map of the U.S.-Mexico Border.

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Transnational Musical Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border

An Introduction

ALEJANDRO L. MADRID ■

One could trace the beginnings of border studies as a scholarly field to the 1950s ethnographic writings about southern Texas culture by Américo Paredes or Octavio Paz's empirical, if largely mistaken and controversial, take on *pachucos*¹ in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950).² Although their reasons to engage the contested space of the U.S.-Mexican border were completely different—Paz denies agency to pachucos as nowhere men unable to assimilate to either Mexican or U.S. mainstream culture in his essentialist attempt to define a Mexican national character, while Paredes's project seeks to put in evidence the presence of a community systematically dispossessed in U.S. nationalist discourses—they both take expressive culture as a fundamental element in trying to understand border life. Indeed, expressive culture has been a fundamental subject of study in trying to understand the U.S.-Mexico border. Within the wide array of possibilities that expressive culture offers to researchers, music has played a prominent role throughout the development of border studies. From the folklorist perspective in Paredes's foundational *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958) to the sociological and critical gazes in José Manuel Valenzuela's *Jefe de jefes. Corridos y narcocultura en México* (2003), and José David Saldívar's *Border Matters* (1997), music has occupied a central place in the study of border culture.³ However, most border music studies have tended to focus on a very few and specific musical practices—namely the *corrido* (ballad) tradition in its different incarnations—and the styles most often linked to northern Mexican and Mexican-American communities—*norteña*, *Tejano*, *banda* and related styles and genres. Curiously, although music has been a

fundamental subject in shaping border studies and the field has been well established for a few decades, there is not a single book devoted to the study of U.S.-Mexico border musics in their diversity in order to understand borderland culture in all its complexity.

Gathering essays from a wide variety of disciplinary and multidisciplinary fields, this book seeks to map out the continuous transnational dialogues that have informed culture and life at the U.S.-Mexico border through the study of a wide variety of musical practices from the area. At the same time, the essays in this book explore the transnational connections that inform these musics while keeping an eye on their powerful local significance, in an attempt to redefine notions like “border,” “nation,” “migration,” “diaspora,” etc. Examining music and its performative power through the looking-glass of cultural criticism and formulating nontraditional musicological research questions—asking not only what these musics are, but also what do they do and what do they allow people to do in their everyday lives; in sum, what happens when these musics happen—allows this book to contribute to larger intellectual concerns and help redefine the field of U.S.-Mexico border studies beyond the North/South and American/Mexican dichotomies.⁴

DEFINING THE BORDER

The notion of “border” has been historically defined and redefined according to greater political endeavors. Both in the popular imagination as well as in academia, the understanding of the border has changed according to specific historical, social, and cultural circumstances. Thus, as a political idea, the border in its continuous redefinition addresses and articulates power struggles at the core of the societies that use it to define themselves. As a fundamental aspect of this concern with identity, the notion of difference lies at the very core of the border concept. Throughout the history of the United States, the concept of border has shifted from area of contention to separating line to welcoming portal and to cultural buffer; thus becoming a quintessential concept in the development of U.S. discourses of belonging. In the nineteenth century, as the U.S. expansionist project took shape, the notion of frontier separated the “civilized” from the “savages.” Thus, the frontier was as rigid a line as the advances of the Manifest Destiny allowed it to be; ever changing, the frontier, or the “last frontier,” was a fundamental notion not only to differentiate the “civilized” Selves (Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture) from the “uncultured” or “corrupt” Others (Indians, Mexicans, Spaniards, Catholics, etc.), but also to “morally” validate the U.S. colonialist project. Following on this rhetoric, once the political boundary between the United States and Mexico was established, it came to be a separating line. The border became an imaginary but quickly naturalized line that divided those who were allowed to belong to the nation-state by virtue of their racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural affiliation from those who had to be defined as archetypically different due to their belonging to the “wrong” racial, ethnic, religious, cultural groups and institutions, or side of *la línea* (the borderline).

Similarly, the northern Mexican border, estranged from the rest of the country by distance, geography, and culture has been historically linked to barbarism in the centralized culture of Mexico. During pre-Columbian and colonial times, northern Mexico was considered the realm of the *chichimecas*, a term of disdain used to homogenize the many nomadic indigenous groups of the area. Both Mexicas and Spaniards in Central Mexico marked a difference between their culture and the “uncivilized” ways of the itinerant groups that lived throughout northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest without building urban settlements comparable to the cities of Central Mexico. In this discourse, Central Mexico was the site of culture while the northern lands belonged to the “uncivilized,” “barbaric” *chichimecas*. The adoption of Domingo Sarmiento’s civilization/barbarism dichotomic model by the liberal *caudillos* who attempted to establish the foundations of independent Mexico in the nineteenth century, responded not only to internal cultural dilemmas as it did in Argentina, but also to the anxiety of a constant struggle to stop U.S. colonialism. For nineteenth-century Mexicans, the northern borderlands were literally an unstable site of contention, as the country lost more than half its northern territory to the United States by mid-century, after the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War, and as constant debates over national boundaries arose. Thus, the difficult-to-access northern border became a site of marginalization as well as the last battleground against the increasing influence of U.S. culture; ambiguously, the northern borderlands were both a culturally “forgotten” area somewhat far from Mexico City’s “civilized” ways and often unable to benefit from the country’s centralized economic policies, and a region not-to-be-forgotten and to be constantly monitored to stop U.S. imperialism. Clearly, in the centralized Mexican cultural model, the discourses about border, civilization/barbarism, and center/periphery are historically linked; their emphasis obeys the desire to develop a sense of cultural hierarchy within the nation-state, as well as to the anxiety of identity construction in relation to the United States. Under these discourses of difference the idea of the border is homogenized, essentialized, and ultimately racialized as a site to contain the Other.

Both the U.S. representation of the border as a separating line and the Mexican notion of it as the last cultural battleground have been in constant redefinition throughout the twentieth century as the relationship between the two countries grew tighter economically and culturally. Between 1910 and 1920, during the Mexican Revolution, migration from the Mexican countryside toward the United States increased as a result of both the collapse of the Mexican economy and the demand for field workers in the United States. This dynamic was further emphasized in 1942, when a shortage of farm workers due to World War II forced the creation of the Bracero Program, a temporary contract labor program that allowed Mexican agricultural workers to enter the United States until its end in 1964. Slowly, the border came to be represented as a portal, the entrance to economic betterment for some and the source of much needed cheap labor to others. The vision of the border as portal became the preferred metaphor as the government of both countries, responding to the economic pressures of late twentieth-century

globalization, lobbied for the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s. This representation of the border as portal brings a shift in understandings of identity, belonging, as well as dichotomist models of civilization/barbarism and center/periphery. At a fluid border, acknowledged as a transnational formation, identity constructions are sites of multiplicity that transcend the nation-state as a unit of identification.⁵ In this somewhat postnational framework, the ambivalence of the center/periphery, civilization/barbarism, desire/anxiety dichotomies, and even the North/South models collapse as individuals fulfill their desires for modernity; overcome national anxieties of difference; and maintain family ties through everyday economic, cultural, and even political practices that systematically imply crossing the geographic limits of the nation-state.

But the contemporary recognition of the borderlands as a transnational cultural region does not negate the fact that beyond discourse, the history of the borderlands is indeed a transnational one. Transnational flows are nothing new to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Due to their shared geography, history, political experience, and overall marginalization from Mexican and U.S. mainstream cultural life, the borderlands, including the U.S. Southwest and the Mexican North, should be understood historically as a true transnational cultural region. As an area whose meaning arises by a multiplicity of dialogues and negotiations, the frontier, the border, and the borderlands have been historically defined by transnational flux and change. The borderlands have never been the fixed, racially segregated area that the United States and Mexican nationalist discourses wanted us to believe. Rather than a separating fence or a dividing river, the border is instead a porous line that has always allowed transnational flows and has prevented the segregating discourses that the idea of the border helps to create from actually being a reality. The very notion of the borderlands as a cultural area that transcends the border both to the south and to the north challenges such understanding.

It is precisely the recognition of the border as a porous line, the reality of the cultural borderlands, and the consequences of this recognition on the U.S. anxiety of difference that have triggered the current fear of the borders and the public outcry to close them. As I mentioned earlier, migration, diaspora, and transculturation have been constant characteristics in the history of the borderlands; it is no surprise that, although a fundamental premise in the discourse of U.S. national formation, the notion of migration came to be at the core of the contemporary discussions to close the border. From Samuel R. Huntington's remarks about an arguably "Mexican assimilation" that "lags"⁶ to the xenophobic ideology behind Lou Dobbs' *Broken Borders* to the controversial SB 1070 and HB 2281 laws in Arizona, it is an extended ignorance about the specifics of migration, diaspora, and transculturation at the U.S.-Mexico border or a precarious and grotesque attempt to control the area's changing racial and ethnic dynamics what pushes both intellectuals within the walls of ivy league universities, conservative public opinion leaders, members of the U.S. Congress, and even local governors to talk about it as a problem. When interpreting these discourses against the larger conservative, puritanical ideology that has driven U.S. politics during the last three

decades—what Arved Ashby has called “Reagan’s version of the Puritan ‘City upon a Hill’”⁷—one realizes that the fear and anxiety that nourish the chaste/impure dichotomic rhetoric used by the mainstream to account for the U.S.-Mexico border is clearly a political strategy within a struggle for representation. Looking at them as politically motivated discourses helps us dismantle the legality/illegality dichotomy that informs many of today’s anti-immigrant platforms since legal frameworks about legal or illegal immigration have constantly changed throughout the history of the borderlands due to diverse political motivations. Looking at music as “the perennial undocumented immigrant [that] has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork”⁸ can give us a different angle, a new perspective to better understand the political struggles behind the representation of the borderlands and to challenge the essentialist claims that often dominate this discussion.

Furthermore, at a moment when the “war on drugs” started by Mexican president Felipe Calderón has spiraled out of control, bringing some of the most dramatic and continuous episodes of outrageous violence to border cities like Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, or Ciudad Juárez, one would be tempted to return to old dichotomies like civilization/barbarism or to national frameworks of interpretation to explain such border chaos. This would most certainly be a mistake since this situation is not just the result of national policies or the failure of the Mexican nation-state to provide opportunities for social mobility to its citizens, it is also a result of the transnational cultural and economic flows that inform life at this highly contested but also highly structured border. Not only is the drug economy that the Mexican government aims to eradicate the result of transnational capitalist flows, in fact the very presence of the weapons used by the different cartels in this war is also possible due to American policies that are way beyond the control of Mexican politicians.⁹ Since the current situation on the Mexican side of the border is the result of such transnational flows it can only be fully understood through a transnational approach. Moreover, it can only be tackled through a true bi-national effort that not only recognizes the uniqueness of local, transnational borderland cultural and commercial networks, but that is also willing to engage them. Recurring to essentialist dichotomies to understand it would not only reinforce exclusionary discourses of borderland representation, it would also fail to address the complex transnational networks that inform everyday life and culture at the U.S.-Mexico border. The passing of SB 1070 and the immediate negative consequences it had on Arizona’s economy are good examples of how allowing bottled bitter racial and ethnic resentment to dictate immigration policies that upset everyday transnational, if unregulated, flows can lead to severe social, economic, and cultural harms and contradictions.¹⁰

Defining the border has been a political activity of prime importance to the very identities of the individuals who try to define it; whether as voices from the center of mainstream national cultures, or as individuals from the borderlands, for them the border is a very personal matter. It is no surprise that for many Mexican-Americans systematically excluded from the racialized discourses of U.S. nationality that privilege a black/white dichotomy, the disenfranchised

borderlands became the place of origin as the Aztlán myth was revived by the Chicano movement in the late 1960s. Reconciling Aztlán, the original land of the Mexicas and the Nahuatl tribes that founded the pre-Hispanic civilization of Central Mexico, with the U.S. Southwest was a performative action to override negative discourses about the borderlands, ascribe political meaning to the region, and allow Chicanos to symbolically reclaim a portion of U.S. soil as theirs. The Aztlán mythology is a good example of how individuals from the borderlands can develop cultural discourses and artifacts to construct symbols of local pride and identification and overcome mainstream discourses of marginalization. The essays in this volume show not only that expressive culture and music in particular are essential elements in the performance of the borderlands and the struggle for their representation, but also that, since “identities are constructed within discourse,”¹¹ the control over representation itself is a crucial element in the politics of identification.

BORDER STUDIES AND BORDER THEORY

Just as the contested mainstream notions of border and the representations of the “contact zone” between the United States and Mexico acquire meaning as part of larger political projects, the development of border studies as a scholarly field is also crossed by both the politics behind the histories of displacement, dispossession, acculturation, resistance, and transculturation of the people living in the area, and the academic politics in fields such as U.S. history, Mexican history, American studies, Latin American studies, as well as Chicana/o studies.

Although the 1950s work of Américo Paredes and Octavio Paz, which I mentioned earlier, gave mainstream United States and Mexican intellectual and academic circles an excuse to take the U.S.-Mexico border and its culture as a meaningful and serious subject of study, the study of the “Spanish Borderlands” had already occupied U.S. historians in the 1920s and 1930s. By addressing the Hispanic perspective, Herbert Eugene Bolton’s *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (1921) challenged the mainstream univocal Anglo vision that characterized U.S. accounts of borderland history, and, as Richard Griswold del Castillo argues, “awakened scholars to the importance of the Mexican frontier as a historical bridge between Anglo and Latin America.”¹² However, by emphasizing the Spanish character of the borderlands, the work of Bolton and his followers essentialized border life and failed to account for the power, racial, and ethnic struggles within that so-called Spanish society. Responding to these shortcomings, historians Carlos E. Castañeda and George I. Sánchez in the 1930s and 1940s focused on the experiences of ethnic Mexican communities in Texas and New Mexico.¹³ Américo Paredes ethnographic efforts in the 1950s were part of a project that gave an alternative account of Mexican-Americans, their history and experience in the Southwest as the marginalized subjects in the construction of the U.S. national project. When Paredes coined the concept of Greater Mexico “to indicate the gathering of symbolic cultural forms at

divisive imaginary national boundaries,"¹⁴ he was not only acknowledging the existence of a Mexican culture and history in the U.S. Southwest before an Anglo presence, he was also recognizing a shared history of injustice, discrimination, and dispossession among members of this community, and in fact, challenging the U.S. discourse of national identity as the result of harmonious acculturation. As Ramón Saldivar puts it, "in an epoch when the intellectual modes dictated either and old historicism or a restrictive new critical formalism, [Paredes] went insistently against the grain of the usual analytical methods [and] offered a new way of doing folklore."¹⁵ By questioning border life and culture and thus negating the nationalist rhetoric of American studies, Paredes opened the door for a new critical field of studies that took border culture as a "site of social struggle."¹⁶

Following on Paredes' challenging work, 1960s historians working in the context of the Chicano movement further emphasized the inequalities, racism, and exploitation of Mexican-Americans in the borderlands. Accordingly, it was at this contingency that the field of "border studies" was born as a critical response to nationalistic academic projects, such as early American studies, and as an articulation of the nascent Chicano civic rights struggle; thus, border studies became a politically charged multidisciplinary effort based on the social sciences (including history, sociology, anthropology, and economics). In the 1980s, the seminal work on theory and literary criticism of scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa, Renato Rosaldo, and Néstor García Canclini changed the trajectory of border studies and aligned it with some of the projects in cultural and postcolonial studies, particularly the recognition of agency among marginal, subaltern border subjects.¹⁷ In these authors' work, the notion of hybridity became central in arguing the fluidity of border subjects to navigate in and out of cultural networks.

The theoretical turn experienced by U.S.-Mexico border studies in the 1980s and 1990s was fundamental in shaping the new course of the field and its focus on the individual "border crosser." One could also trace the origins of this shift to Anzaldúa's theorization of *mestiza* consciousness and how subjects who carry the border within can transcend discursive dualities.¹⁸ This focus on individuals allowed border theory to surpass the geographic location of the U.S.-Mexico border as it came to be applied to many situations involving limits, cultural contact zones,¹⁹ or even the diasporic body as an epistemological border, a site for the encounter of different visions of the world, as I have labeled it elsewhere.²⁰ By focusing on these issues, U.S. border theory was enriched by the theoretical insight of scholars in both Latin American cultural studies and cultural history, particularly as the notion of transculturation took root in those disciplines emphasizing the developments of new symbolic formations as a result of cultural encounters that transcend the nation-state.

Curiously, a very different response to Anzaldúa's work came from a group of Chicano scholars who attempted to focus on a type of deeply territorialized border studies that would take the experience of lower-border Mexican Americans as the field's object of study. Scholars like José E. Limón and José David Saldivar privileged Américo Paredes's "tightly localized, specific, richly ethnographic assessment of one specific part of the border,"²¹ thus rejecting the branch of border theory that would

apply these ideas in trying to understand other contact zones and epistemological borders. This move should be understood and valued within the complex politics of Chicano studies; it was a project that made an effort to celebrate the culture of a specific population of marginalized border subjects, Mexican Americans.

However, both these approaches, as Pablo Vila states, did not come without shortcomings, particularly the tendency to construct the border subject “into a new privileged subject of history,”²² into the only individuals who can naturally come in and out of clashing cultural formations by virtue of their border life experience. Furthermore, by being rooted in the dichotomic paradigms of U.S. nation building (United States/Mexico, North/South, developed/underdeveloped, etc.) and privileging the American side of the border, border theory came to somehow essentialize the U.S.-Mexico border experience and largely avoided a multiethnic discussion of the borderlands that would include non-Mexicans, African-Americans, as well as the large variety of indigenous and ethnic communities on both sides of the border.

TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS

The articles in this volume honor and engage the long and rich traditions of border studies and border theory while also addressing their limitations via multiethnic, transcultural, and transnational frameworks of interpretation that offer new perspectives for the study of the U.S.-Mexico border. Particularly important in our reconceptualization of border studies is the notion of transnationalism, the idea that individual and even communal experience takes place within imagined communities that transcend the nation-state as a unit of identification. As Micol Seigel suggests, this point of view recognizes that “the nation is one among a range of social phenomena to be studied, rather than the frame of study itself.”²³ Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo exemplify these transnational flows precisely with the lifestyles and experiences of migrants under globalization who live across national boundaries and whose lives are simultaneously defined by conditions in their host country as well as their place of origin.²⁴ To paraphrase Inda and Rosaldo, people who live in these cultural, political, or even epistemological border spaces are intimately linked to more than one nation and to no one nation in particular;²⁵ they live in a borderland for which *la línea* is undoubtedly an important component of everyday life but not what defines emotional or cultural loyalties and networks of identification and belonging. Instead, these migrants and border crossers experience a transnational world; therefore, if we want to understand their symbolic formations and lifestyles we need to refer to units of identification and interpretation that also transcend the nation-state and its nationalist discourse. In understanding these transnational flows we obviously place special attention to the borderlands as a geographic space; however, against more essentialist approaches that see the borderlands as a space where one is, we prefer to look at it as a space where one becomes. Such a perspective privileges mobility, process, transitivity, and impermanence, and understands the

borderlands as a space in continuous construction that is endlessly resignified as power struggles change the ways in which borderland individuals relate to each other and to competing ideological discourses. In such a Latourian, relational understanding of the borderland, what is relevant is to trace the construction of associations and to investigate the development of networks that give meaning to the notion of borderlands and the people who perform themselves as borderlanders there.²⁶ From the development of the *cumbia* scene in Monterrey to the political uses of reggae among Chicanos in the American Southwest, and from the Mascogo reinvention of transnational Blackness through *capeyuye* to the rearticulation of traditional musics in the development of networks of queer identification, the articles in this volume explore how music allows the construction of a wide variety of networks of belonging and how different understanding of the border and the borderlands are born and challenged by these forms of musical expression and their performance complexes. In sum, these articles show how music plays a fundamental role in the formation of associations and networks that in turn define the borderlands as different social fields. By challenging essentialist dichotomies like United States/Mexico, developed/underdeveloped, North/South, that are taken for granted in the more fixed understandings of the notion of social field, the articles in this volume illustrate how everyday border struggles could foster creativity and opportunity.

Furthermore, some of the essays in this volume seek to take the notion of the body as epistemological border in diasporic situations as a theoretical tool and redirect it to the particular situation of the U.S.-Mexico border. Such an interpretative move allows us to challenge traditional understandings of diaspora and show the similarities between border culture and new diasporic experiences under globalization when the place of origin is not unavoidably left behind and later resignified abroad but rather kept at shorthand via technology. By redirecting the notion of the body as a border site into the U.S.-Mexico borderlands themselves we seek to trace a connection between new and traditional conceptualization of space, liminality, and diasporic experience. The essays in this volume show the singing body, the performing body, the dancing body, or the political body not only as bodies crossing borders but also as bodies crossed by the border, bodies codified by the border but also bodies whose very act of embodying culture performs the borderlands themselves. The transnational musical bodies discussed in these essays occupy the border space and its imaginary through performance and the creation of expressive culture, and thus reterritorialize it into a transnational representational space. By emphasizing these phenomena, we confirm the performing border bodies as critical players in the struggle for controlling the representation of the border and therefore the construction of its identity.

Border music scholars have privileged Tejano, norteña, and corrido at the expense of indigenous and other types of popular and folk musics from the region. Although a few essays in this volume do focus on some of these traditional genres (Tejano, quebradita, narcocorrido, and norteña in the articles by Limón, Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga, Hutchinson, Edberg, and Ragland respectively), they do it from a critical angle, taking the music to illuminate important issues at stake in contemporary

border culture: anti-immigration sentiments among Mexican-Americans, technology and translocal virtual communities, the development of alternative forms of cultural capital and citizenship, as well as media and the construction of masculinity. The rest of the articles focus on less-researched border musical manifestations; from the fluid transnational cultures that have nurtured historical and current indigenous musical practices (Yoreme, Tohono O'odham and Mascogo in the articles by Simonett, Titus, and Madrid) to mass mediated popular musics (rock, reggae, hip hop, and maricahi in the articles by Kun, Alvarez, Corona, and Henriques), to working-class musics (Ramos-Kittrell), to new uses of traditional sounds in the re-conceptualizations of gender and ethnic identity (Rivera-Servera and Gorman). These essays contribute to current conversations on transnational cultural processes, new identity constructions under globalization, longstanding arguments about indigenous groups, minority rights and citizenship, as well as the recent immigration debate that has occupied U.S. politics and media in the last decade.

The book is divided into seven large sections: Border Meanings, Nationalisms, Indigeneity and Modernity, Cultural Citizenship and Rights, Trans-Border Cosmopolitan Audiotopias, Contested Identities, and Performing Locality and Gender. The first section, Border Meanings, brings together texts that focus on the multiethnic formations, dancing bodies, current resignifications of traditional genres in the performance of new popular culture icons; these essays question traditional understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border and situate their challenge within the new struggles brought in by globalization and political upheaval on both sides of the border. Luis Alvarez's chapter explores the contemporary reggae scene at the border, suggesting that border identities are deeply rooted in specific senses of place and space, as well as the relations and networks that such places promote and the struggles it forces people to engage. In her essay, Sydney Hutchinson offers the idea of kinetopia to refer to how body movement allows for the definition of particular spaces under particular circumstances. In this case, Hutchinson approaches *quebradita*, *pasito duranguense*, and other border dances as kinetopias that, like border crossing, are specific kinds of "politically inflected bodily movement," as she well puts it. Mark Edberg's chapter examines the figure of the drug trafficker at the U.S.-Mexico border in relation to narcocorridos. He is particularly interested in studying how narcocorridos resonate with a number of popular culture icons (especially the "social bandit"), and how these relations inform the signification of the narcotrafficker as a cultural persona that embodies these icons and practices, although within a new political and economic environment.

The second section, Nationalisms, studies the formation of Mexican American and Tejano identities in the borderlands as they contradictorily engage discourses of nationalism and cultural iconography from Mexico responding to particular political moments in the history of these communities. Donald Henriques looks at the fundamental role of technology in the representation of mariachi and its acceptance among Mexican American communities in the borderlands as a symbol of cultural identification. Henriques's study, based on both ethnographic

and archival research, show how mariachi transcends the borders between high-brow and lowbrow art, folk, and elite culture, and popular and classical music, thus providing Mexican Americans with a transnational, trans-border space of identification that intersects tradition and innovation. In his essay, José E. Limón takes a somewhat testimonial tone to tell us how he has witnessed the rise of an anti-Mexican rhetoric among Tejano groups that resonates with the larger anti-immigrant sentiment that has flourished in the United States in the last fifteen years. Limón shows how music and the ideas of loyalty and authenticity linked to it play a fundamental role in the validation of these discourses, as Mexican American politicians in Texas capitalize on the Tejano fans' anxiety that their favorite music might be changing due to the growing influences of the *nortaña* music favored by new Mexican immigrants. The authors show that, although considered a localized phenomenon, nationalist discourses are in fact part of larger, transnationally inspired projects and can only be fully understood and explained within those transnational dialogues. *Indigeneity and Modernity* is a section comprised of two essays that focus on the ways in which indigenous communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border have reacted to globalization. Helena Simonett takes the uses of rap in the *Yoremensamble* project as a way to imagine a contesting globalized Yoreme music by non-Yoreme musicians in northwestern Mexico. This allows Simonett to explore the frictions between indigenous and mestizo urban communities when it comes to constructing the representation of the marginal through digital technologies that both challenge and exacerbate traditional notions of space and place. Simonett argues that the case of the *Yoremensamble* project shows how indigenous people are often the victims of a globalization that appropriates their cultural expressions to actually perform itself. In the second essay, Joan Titus 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. Furthermore, as Titus's essay 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.

The fourth section, *Cultural Citizenship and Rights*, explores new ways in which marginal communities develop a sense of transnational citizenship through cultural belonging. In the first chapter of this section, I take *capeyuye* (the singing of spirituals) as a point of departure to study the Mascogos' continuous struggle to define themselves as bi-national people, as Afro-Seminole living in Coahuila, Mexico. By reflecting on the intersections of race, nationality, and the body within the specificities of Mascogo border culture and history, I problematize Anne Anlin Cheng's notion of "racial melancholia," suggesting that self-rejection might be a more strategic move than Cheng acknowledges it to be. In the end, I coin the term "dialectical soundings" and propose that the singing of spiritual among the

Mascogos in fact operates as such, rendering Blackness visible in the context of the Mexican border essentialist racial discourse. I argue that such visibility allows Mascogos to develop a sense of cultural citizenship as part of the larger Afro-Seminole diaspora. In the second essay, Jesús Ramos-Kittrell explores how locally marginalized young musicians and dancers from Monterrey, Mexico, adopted and transformed cumbia in order to develop a sense of transnational belonging that ties them not only to Colombia, the place of origin of the genre, but also to the United States. Borrowing Raymond Williams's notion of "structures of feeling," Ramos-Kittrell shows the preeminent place of music and sound in the construction of a sense of cultural citizenship that is clearly transnational. In the last essay of this section, Margaret E. Dorsey and Miguel Díaz-Barriga also explore the issue of cultural citizenship; they study the performative power of the "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival as a space that allows the construction and maintenance of patriotic networks of identification. The festival and its music remember the loss of Mexican-American lives to defend the United States. Set against the current local political animosity prompted by the construction of the border wall in south Texas, this chapter takes Lázaro Lima's notion of necro-citizenship as an interpretative tool to argue that for borderland Mexican-Americans these acts, both dying and memorializing the dead through a specific type of Mexican-American music, perform them as valid U.S. citizens.

Trans-Border Cosmopolitan AudiotoPIAs is a section based on Josh Kun's notion of music as an audiotopia, a sonic space "of effective utopian longing where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together, not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and mapping of geographical space that music makes possible as well."²⁷ Josh Kun's study of the 1960s Tijuana rock scene puts in evidence the globalized character of a city that, although often criticized by both American and Mexican discourses of identity, has often provided a musical answer to the desires for cosmopolitanism of Mexican youngsters throughout the country. By tackling recordings by American and Mexican musicians, Kun examines how the development of an American "Tijuana Sound" helped in the development of an American imaginary of the border and how it overshadowed the musical practices of young tijuanaenses who were resignifying American rock from a border perspective. Kun's narrative style, based on the historical contextualization of a number of well-known and obscure LPs, is a model of how to approach recordings as documents that illuminate transnational cultural practices and discourses at specific historical moments. In a similar manner, Ignacio Corona's essay about contemporary youngsters from Monterrey, Mexico, and the development of an avant-garde, cutting-edge music scene labeled *La avanzada regia*, shows how cultural production can effectively turn around traditional center-periphery dichotomies that privilege Mexico City in the national imagination. In this chapter, Corona explores how the combination of a complex transnational production process with a deeply territorialized sense of identification, one centered on the notion of *regio* (from Monterrey) culture, intersect in *La avanzada regia*. Through a detailed exploration of what he calls a transnational aesthetic in the music and lyrics of Monterrey bands like Control

Machete, Plastilina Mosh, and Kinky, Corona shows the importance of regional sites of enunciation in the imagination of postnational and globalized scenarios.

The section entitled *Contested Identities* focuses on the uses and appropriations of Hispanic New Mexican musics in relation to *Nuevomexicana* identity. Brenda Romero's chapter offers a testimony that reminds us of how the notion of the border—and in particular this geographic border—is something very personal for the authors in this volume. With Romero as a guide, the reader takes a journey through the complex ways in which music has facilitated the consolidation of a '*Manito* identity within the ethnically contested discourses of belonging that have been historically developed by *Nuevomexicanos* to negotiate their heritage at the margins of the U.S. nation. Such '*Manito* identity takes language and its expression through song as a space where cultural, ethnic, regional, and transnational alliances are possible. In her chapter, Lillian Gorman explores the difficult relationship between the ideas of appropriation, dispossession, authenticity, and sincerity behind any trans-ethnic musical borrowing. Through a critique of *El Gringo*, an Anglo musician who has developed a musical persona through the adoption of *Nuevomexicana* music, Gorman problematizes Madrid's notion of "dialectical soundings" suggesting that music and its performance might not only make visible hidden social stories and experiences, but in fact could also work as an active force in some processes of cultural and ethnic erasure. Gorman also warns us about the problems behind one-sided interpretations that privilege either resistance or compliance, showing the ways in which cultural meaning and significance is created in complex processes of production, representation, consumption, and regulation.

The last section, *Performing Locality and Gender*, returns to a central issue in border studies, an exploration of the desires that inform the construction of gender discourses and the development and sexualization of a sense of Otherness in liminal contexts. Cathy Ragland's chapter studies the persona of Mexican musician/actor Eulalio González, "El Piporro," in the developing of a sense of *norteña* masculinity that eventually took over the representation of *norteña* culture in Mexico. Ragland's chapter shows how the performance of a local, regional *norteño* identity informed by the transnational experiences of border crossing workers both borrowed from and challenged mainstream Mexican popular culture from the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, in Ramón Rivera-Servera's essay, two seemingly excluding *Latina/o* dance venues in Phoenix, Arizona, provide a perfect excuse to explore how expressive culture has worked as a site for the development of discourses of masculinity and queerness at the U.S.-Mexico border, and how these discourses have been transformed into bodily practices and behaviors in transcultural and transnational settings that contest essentialist stereotypes about ethnicity and sexuality. By ethnographically tracing the arrival of reggeatón to Phoenix *Latina/o* queer clubs, Rivera-Servera explores the moving geographies of *latinidad*, challenging identitarian narratives that emphasize a historical national origin or an intersectional collective future.

It has been thirty years since journalist Joel Garreau coined the term *Mexamerica* to define a cultural area tied by the common interests, lifestyle,

culture, and shared historical experiences of the people from the American Southwest and the North of Mexico.²⁸ Since then, this notion has been revered by ideologues of NAFTA and bashed by outraged xenophobes on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexamerica has come to represent both the most naïve belief on a harmonious neoliberal integration of “modernity” and the “developing” world, the paranoid visions of a Mexican reconquest of the American Southwest from the most radical Republicans, as well as the collapse of Mexican sovereignty by nationalists from Mexico City. By taking a decisively transnational perspective that is at the same time aware of the profound value and significance of locality for people in the borderlands, the articles in this volume engage and problematize the crux of Garreau’s idea and show that the meaning of musical cultures in this region is defined by historical processes of globalization as well as the performative power of these musics’ deeply territorialized character.

Notes

1. Young Chicanos who embraced zoot suit culture in the 1930s and 1940s. See Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2008); and Catherine S. Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
2. I refer to Américo Paredes, *“With His Pistol in His Hand”: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958) and Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959 [1950]).
3. For example Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*; José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto. History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); José David Saldívar, *Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997); and José Manuel Valenzuela, *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en México* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 2003).
4. In the special issue on Music and Performance Studies of *Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música* published in 2009, we defined the concern of a performative perspective in music scholarship as the issue of that “what happens when music happens.” See Jnan Blau, “More than ‘Just’ Music: Four Performative Topoi, the Phish Phenomenon, and the Power of Music in/and Performance,” *Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música*, No. 13 (2009), <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans13/art02.htm> (accessed January 16, 2010); and Alejandro L. Madrid, “Why Music and Performance Studies? Why Now? An Introduction to the Special Issue,” *Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música*, No. 13 (2009), <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans13/art01eng.htm> (accessed January 16, 2010).
5. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, “Introduction: The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing,” in *Postnational Musical Identities. Cultural Production, Distribution and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 3.

6. Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 230.
7. Arved Ashby, "Nationalist and Postnationalist Perspectives in American Musicology," in Corona and Madrid, *Postnational Musical Identities*, 37.
8. Corona and Madrid, *Postnational Musical Identities*, 5.
9. Although a rather simplified explanation, the capitalist logic behind drug dealing at the U.S.-Mexico border would place supply on the Mexican side and demand on the U.S. side. Regarding weapons and other technology, the Mexican cartels obtain these in the United States, where national politics make restrictions on the right to purchase weapons impossible.
10. For information about the negative economic effects of SB 1070 see Chris Good, "Immigration Law Comes with a Price," *The Atlantic*, May 7, 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/05/arizonas-immigration-law-comes-with-a-price/56416/> (accessed August 21, 2010).
11. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity?'" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 4.
12. Richard Griswold del Castillo, "New Perspectives on the Mexican and American Borderlands," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1984), 199.
13. Carlos E. Castañeda, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519–1936*. 6 vols. (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1936–1958); and George I. Sánchez, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996 [1940]).
14. Ramón Saldivar, *The Borderlands of Culture. Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 401.
15. *Ibid.*, 191.
16. Saldivar, *Border Matters*, 40.
17. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007); Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2001 [1990]); and Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
18. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 80.
19. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
20. Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-tec Rifa! Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3 and 203.
21. José E. Limón, *American Encounters. Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 157.
22. Pablo Vila, "Conclusion: The Limits of American Border Theory," in *Ethnography at the Border*, ed. Pablo Vila (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 307.
23. Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review*, 91 (2005), 63.
24. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, "Tracking Global Flows," in *The Anthropology of Globalization. A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008 [2002]), 23.
25. Inda and Rosaldo state that "These are people [migrants] who, because they are intimately linked to more than one place and to no one place in particular,

are able to escape, to some degree, the nationalizing apparatuses of the nation-state.” Inda and Rosaldo, “Tracking Global Flows,” 23.

26. Bruno Latour states that the social does not exist nor does it articulate and give meaning to a series of cultural fragments and relations; instead, he proposes that the social is continuously created and recreated as these cultural fragments enter into different relations with each other and create new associations and networks that in turn perform a social field. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
27. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia. Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 23.
28. See Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (New York: Avon, 1981).

PART ONE

Border Meanings

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Reggae on the Border

The Possibilities of a Frontera Soundscape

LUIS ALVAREZ ■

In February of 2008, El Foro, one of the premiere live music venues in Tijuana, Baja California, hosted the city's fifth annual Bob Marley Day celebration. Advertised throughout the Tijuana and San Diego areas as the "Tribute to the Legends," the concert and festival was one of many held around the world in honor of reggae's biggest star, his music, and his message of social justice. The show also highlighted the unique reggae scene that has emerged along the U.S.-Mexico border since Marley's death in 1981. While the live performers included internationally known acts Alpha Blondy from the Ivory Coast, Cultura Profética from Puerto Rico, Don Carlos from reggae's birthplace of Jamaica, and Midnite from St. Croix, local acts such as Tribal Seeds from San Diego, Astrorumberos from Tijuana, and Cartel de Zion from Tijuana also donned the stage. Event promotion was bi-national, conducted via radio stations and ticket outlets on both sides of the border, including Tijuana's own reggae-themed store, Tijuana Roots and Culture. And, like many other reggae events in the San Diego-Tijuana metro-area, concertgoers came from both sides of the international border to join the party. As much as the show was evidence of reggae's global popularity, it also illustrates the particular ways that ethnic identity, cultural politics, and the African diaspora meet in the production and consumption of reggae music along the Mexico-U.S. border.

The Tribute to the Legends show in Tijuana is a good way to begin thinking about the complexities of a region that is among the few in the world where the first world meets the third to simultaneously produce deeply rooted interdependence and inequity among the nation-states and people that live there. This chapter explores the social identities and political possibilities of the reggae scenes that have emerged along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and extended borderlands since the 1990s.¹ It asks how and why border communities

of Mexicans and Chicanas/os find common social and political ground playing Afro-Caribbean inspired music. Though it is difficult to gauge how big the border reggae phenomenon is, the dozens of bands, routine concerts and festivals with hundreds, if not thousands, of fans in attendance, and intricate cultural infrastructure of specialty shops, radio shows, and recording studios that dot the border region indicate a growing and sizeable reggae scene. Ultimately, this chapter underscores how people living in the border region have used reggae to fashion multiethnic and transnational political and social formations as one response to the local impact of neoliberal globalization, border enforcement, and immigration policy.

Surveying the “Chicana/o” and “Afro-Mexica” genres of border reggae, with particular attention to the first, I investigate how artists fuse their everyday experiences of being Mexican, Chicana/o, and indigenous in the U.S.-Mexico border region with the musical and cultural influences of Jamaican reggae and Rastafarianism to create new ethnic sensibilities and social movements. Chicana/o reggae from U.S. border towns like San Diego, El Paso, and even Los Angeles exhibits a cosmopolitan, internationalist, and multiethnic Chicano identity. “Afro-Mexica” reggae from Tijuana and Mexicali-based bands draw from life experiences just to the south of the geopolitical boundary to imagine a *mexicanidad* that emphasizes historical and contemporary connections with indigenous, African diaspora, and U.S. Chicana/o communities as much as with other Mexicans. Taken together, the artists that make such music and the communities they come from form a loosely affiliated border reggae scene that is driven by deeply local identities and politics at the same time it connects a range of experiences, places, and people in their struggles to make sense of and survive in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

If, as some social and cultural theorists have suggested, the failed project of industrial modernity and neoliberal globalization has fomented ethnocide, ecological devastation, and economic exploitation in lieu of democracy, abundance, and freedom, this chapter explores how border reggae artists have used their music to generate new political possibilities from the interstices of capitalist social relations and cultural technologies. Border reggae traverses the capitalist networks of popular music, youth culture, and new media, exposing the perils of commercialization, unequal gender relations, and racial conflict in its cultural practice. At the same time, it cultivates a collaborative social and political spirit that results in shared organizing and struggle around issues related to the border, immigrant and indigenous rights, *zapatismo*, and self-determination. In the pages that follow, I argue that border reggae generates unique identities and cultural politics that simultaneously critique the impact of globalization on their communities and makes use of its far-reaching networks.

I ultimately suggest that border reggae helps its participants claim dignity in the face of the dehumanizing effects of global economic and political patterns. There is often an intricate relationship between border reggae and social movements, lending support to cultural critic George Yúdice’s contention that some cultural practices and venues have the potential to be turned into resources that might “be

mobilized in the pursuit of social justice under certain circumstances.”² Border reggae is thus one example of how globalization operates in the form of everyday cultural and political expression as much as it does in the activity of transnational corporations and nation-states. Rather than assume border identities and communities are liminal, deterritorialized, and displaced from concrete movements for social change, border reggae shows us they are deeply rooted, deeply territorialized, and deeply placed in local relationships, cultural politics, and efforts for social transformation along the extended U.S.-Mexico border.³

BORDER POLITICS AND (IN)DIGNITY

As it has around the world, the global economic restructuring of the last several decades has shaped the life chances of those who live along the U.S.-Mexico border(lands). In what George Lipsitz explains as “a brand of economic fundamentalism favoring free markets,” the intensification of deregulation and global flows of capital, ideas, and labor, along with the growth of mass technology and communications, has resulted in “low wages, high unemployment, slow growth, high interest rates, and devastating declines in social spending on health, housing, and education” all over the map.⁴ These conditions have been no less stringent for the Chicana/o and Mexican communities from which border reggae has emerged since the 1990s, fostering a volatile, often hostile and contradictory, political context in which artists make their music.

Where the United States meets Mexico people see and live the paradox of what Peter Andreas calls a “borderless economy” with a “barricaded border.”⁵ Andreas describes how the contradiction between the free movement of trade and the hyper-controlled movement of people at the border shapes the lives of those who live there and cross the geopolitical boundary. More than a simple dichotomy of border life between goods and people, however, globalization elicits a myriad of political, economic, and social relationships, structures, and experiences that shape the creation and flow of culture, reggae music included, along the dividing line between the U.S. and Mexico. The very presence of Afro-Caribbean inspired reggae music at the border—with its many sounds, identities, and politics—reveals that people often spawn unexpected cultural relationships and efforts for social transformation amid the seemingly overwhelming and denigrating forces of global capital.

The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) serves as one marker ushering in the latest stage in neoliberal ideology that has shaped decades of border economic development including intensified commercial exchange, the rise in *maquiladoras*, and a growing disparity between the haves and have-nots, which is often experienced in border *colonias* and barrios as more poverty, less social services, and increased violence, particularly against women. Indeed, it was during the 1990s when hundreds of unresolved kidnappings and murders of women occurred near the Juarez/El Paso border; and when thousands of immigrants died from exposure, dehydration, or being run over by moving cars in

attempts to illegally cross the border.⁶ At the same time, we see what Andreas, Tim Dunn, and Joseph Nevins have explained as the militarization of the border.⁷ The use of low-intensity warfare by Mexican and U.S. authorities against illegal immigration, the war on drugs, and illegal smuggling has seen the deployment of military inspired and hi-tech fences, technology, and enforcement techniques, all with an aim to controlling the human traffic across the border. The result has been government initiatives like Operation Blockade in El Paso (1993), Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego (1994), Operation Safeguard in Nogales, Arizona (1994), and Operation Rio Grande in east Texas (1997). Add to these structural efforts to close the border an impoverished civic discourse about the impact of “illegal aliens” and border security on the U.S. economy and democracy led by talking heads like Lou Dobbs (formerly of CNN), critics like Samuel Huntington, and self-organized public groups like the Minutemen and one can understand the seemingly overwhelming forces shaping the lives of border dwellers, crossers, and migrants.⁸

From California to Texas across the U.S. Southwest, the political fallout of such conditions and debate has been no less harsh. While efforts by the border patrol, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and, more recently, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have been applauded by many, others can't help but see the violent repression and dehumanization of Latina/o immigrants and ethnic Mexicans who have lived in the region for generations. The angry outcry over illegal immigration and the shifting demographics of California and the Southwest toward “majority-minority” status and “Latinoization” led to a number of anti-immigrant legislations and campaigns. California's Proposition 187 in 1994, which sought to limit access by undocumented immigrants to health care and education; late 1990s anti-affirmative-action campaigns in California and Texas resulting in Proposition 209 and the Hopwood decision, respectively; the anti-bilingual education Proposition 227 in California; the 2000 anti-gang Proposition 21 in California; the federal passing of House Resolution 4437 in 2005 that imposed stiff legal sanctions for “aiding” undocumented immigrants; and Arizona's passing of Senate bill 1070 criminalizing undocumented immigrants in 2010, all served to stir an anti-immigrant, racially tense political climate.

As Victor Viesca notes in his work on contemporary Chicana/o music in Los Angeles, such tensions have generated new and conflicting forms of political opportunism, social activism, and cultural expression. Some, like former California Governor Pete Wilson, who won reelection in 1994 despite low approval ratings, capitalized on anti-immigrant fear campaigns to protect white privilege. At the same time, many Chicana/o, Latina/o, and other activists mobilized politically, resulting, in part, in renewed and regenerated senses of Chicanisma/o, mexicanidad, and latinidad.⁹ Inspired to fight against draconian measures of border and immigration control and in support of new social movements like the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, the same conditions of global capital that stripped the dignity and life chances of borderlanders served as the context for political and cultural revolt. From the 1990s protests against

Prop. 187 to the 2006, 2007, and 2008 May Day mobilizations for immigrant rights to the up-swell against SB 1070 in 2010, people have lashed back at power by reclaiming dignity, crafting new identities and social formations, and imagining a different border experience.

Alongside and, in some ways, ahead of these more organized political movements, the cultural production of border reggae has offered new ways of thinking about such challenging times. From the spaces in between capitalist networks and the social and cultural practices they presume to, but cannot totally, control, come alternate takes on border identity, culture, and politics. Loosely affiliated with organized political action, these efforts come with the heavy rhythm, drum, and bass of a reggae beat and are something of a soundtrack to the ways that different border communities have responded to the debates and policies about the places they call home. Though border reggae (and other cultural productions) may not have the power to repel globalization head on, in part because it is deeply embedded in the circuits of transnational capital itself, it does show, as Roberto Alvarez argues in the context of his work on border commerce and the United States Department of Agriculture, that “the local-level behavior of people illustrates a complex reordering of identities, economies, and political persuasions.”¹⁰ Herein lies one important lesson of border reggae. If borderlands culture and identity has routinely been described as either that of northern Mexico, the southwestern United States or a hybrid mix of the two, border reggae suggests that the complexities and articulations of border identity, culture, and politics may be too great to categorize in such a consistent or overarching fashion. The transnational, multiethnic, and social movement inspired reggae music coming from Tijuana, El Paso, and points in between reveal that there are countless ways to embrace and make the border one’s own.

CHICANA/O REGGAE

Amid the intense politics and shifting economy in the U.S. Southwest a vibrant reggae scene has emerged in cities along the U.S. side of the border over the course of the last two decades. Mirroring the growth in the popularity of reggae in Latin America, East Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Europe, border reggae is unique in part because of the active presence of Chicana/o artists. Indeed, while west coast surf culture, Pueblo and Hopi reggae enthusiasts in New Mexico and Arizona, and college music scenes have helped fuel the music’s popularity across the Southwest, grow the number of reggae specialty stores, and attract touring international acts, urban Chicanas/os have embraced the rasta sound and vibe as much anyone, putting a new spin on the much longer histories of Mexican-Americans playing “black” music and Southern California and southwestern traditions of creating music that borrows from a range of sources, styles, and sounds.¹¹

Chicana/o reggae bands Quinto Sol from Los Angeles, Big Mountain and Quinazo from San Diego, Rasta Farmers from Phoenix, Rising Roots from Calexico, and Border Roots and Radio La Chusma from El Paso have created a

distinct brand of reggae that articulates a unique multiethnic and transnational Chicana/o sensibility. Simultaneously making use of and challenging the cultural nationalism of previous Chicana/o generations, these artists exhibit a Chicanisma/o that is neither separatist nor assimilationist, but both local and transnational, and fundamentally based on their interactions and identification with other marginalized groups. Chicana/o reggae artists imbibe longstanding *movimiento* iconography and ideas with new meanings, social relationships, and political formations. They also build on the long history of Chicana/o cultural work that grew from aesthetic, social, and political collaboration with other racialized and aggrieved communities.¹² Chicana/o reggae artists craft their identity from their politics rather than drawing their politics from their identity as so many have before them.¹³ They make their music and politics in concert with first-hand experiences with globalization, migration, and border crossings and often deep diasporic relationships with the black practitioners of Jamaican, British, and African reggae. Driven by reggae's universal appeal and messages of peace, social justice, and resistance, these Chicana/o musicians interweave their music and political activism to claim dignity in the face of the dehumanizing effects of the anti-immigrant ethos, militarization of the border, poverty, and criminalization that shape the lives of many Chicanas/os and Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Southwest.¹⁴

The Chicana/o sensibility evident in border reggae includes an intricate and, at times, contradictory relationship with indigenous, Mexican, and Afro-Caribbean iconography, music, history, and cultural traditions. Chicano reggae acts, for example, often put interethnic, transnational, or contemporary spins on Chicanismo's historical claims to a Mexica indigenous and Mexican identity.¹⁵ Quinto Sol, who formed in the early 1990s as part of East L.A.'s Chicano activist and underground music scene, is named after the reference in Aztec philosophy to the historical period of the fifth sun, or the contemporary moment. Evoking what vocalist Mizraim Leal calls a "Razteca" identity, Quinto Sol combine their claims to indigenous Mexica and raza identities with deep Rastafarian and reggae influences. For Leal, even reggae's signature "skanking" of the guitar chords "represent[s] the Mexica, always marching forward."¹⁶ El Paso's Radio La Chusma similarly dubs their music as "Pachuco reggae-puro Razafarian," drawing on El Paso's history as one pre-World War II era birthplace of the iconic Mexican-American zoot suiter and *pachuco* style and their roots in Jamaican music.¹⁷ Accordingly, Radio La Chusma's founder Ernesto Tinajero explains the cover art on the band's 2007 album *91.5 MexM* depicting an FM radio tower broadcasting from the top of an Aztec temple as follows. "It represents the transmission and communication of our ancient culture... The youth, especially the Chicanos, need to explore themselves, question the history that was taught to us, and figure out how to utilize our knowledge of our ancestors with today's situations. This album is only a window, it's up to the listener to connect with the past, present, and future and feel proud to be of this Earth."¹⁸ Joaquin "Quino" McWhinney, the Scotch-Irish and Chicano front man for San Diego reggae outfits Big Mountain and Quinazo, invokes his song "Tierra Indigena" to explain the role of indigenous history in his evolving notion of Chicanisma/o. In addition to highlighting the historical links of the Aztecs with the political, spiritual, and imagined Chicana/o homeland of Aztlán,

Quino elaborates that “The song is about indigenous culture, many struggles, the struggle of African people, the struggles of the indigenous people of the Americas, about being able to interpret history correctly.”¹⁹

At the same time many artists see that their Chicana/o reggae, culture, and identity is shaped by both indigenous and black histories, struggles, and traditions, it’s revealing that their claims to indigeneity are animated through their love and adoption of Afro-Caribbean reggae. While this seemingly circuitous route to claiming indigenous history and identity might be viewed as contradictory, it may in fact be a result of the border region’s complex history of multiracial relationships, cross-cultural exchange, and, in the case of ethnic Mexicans in particular, often contentious and alienating history with indigenous communities. If reggae opens a long way around for Chicanas/os to reclaim their indigenous roots, however, it’s equally evident that such a process can invoke both Blackness and indigeneity as empty, monolithic, and ahistorical signifiers.

The multiethnic, contemporary, and transnational political spheres from which Chicana/o reggae artists craft their own sense of indigenous, Mexican, and Afro-Caribbean inspired identity thus suggests at least an implicit grappling with the pitfalls of cultural nationalism and historical selectivity. As cultural critic Josefina Saldaña Portillo astutely warns, claims to indigeneity by Chicana/o activists have historically been riddled with contradictions. Saldaña Portillo argues “the limits of *mestizaje* as the dominant trope in the formation of Chicana/o identity ... fetishizes a residual Indian identity to the detriment of contemporary Indians in the United States and Mexico.”²⁰ Influenced by indigenous political struggles around the world and, particularly, by the emergence of the EZLN in Chiapas and *zapatismo*’s powerful tenets of popular participation, radical democracy, and collective struggle, some Chicana/o reggae artists address these concerns. Big Mountain, for instance, explained the meaning and symbolism of their group’s name by stating:

Special recognition goes to the Dineh’ People [Navajo] of the Big Mountain region of Northern Arizona. It was their struggle that inspired us to name ourselves Big Mountain. They are involved in a bitter fight with various forces, including the U.S. government, that conspire to remove them from their ancestral lands, and turn their lands over to mining interests. This could only lead to the destruction of their sacred land, their culture, and the only way of life they’ve ever known.²¹

As do Quinto Sol, Quinazo, and other Chicano reggae artists, Big Mountain continues by drawing links between the struggles of indigenous populations around the globe, claiming they

are dedicated to bringing awareness to the struggles of indigenous peoples everywhere. Whether it be the sovereignty movement of the Hawaiian people, the Zapatista freedom fighters in Chiapas, or the incidents at Oglala, we are all bound in the common fight for the survival of our native cultures. We must recognize the solidarity, we all must share against injustice.²²

The reggae of El Paso's Border Roots further reveals a Chicana/o identity that is based on its fluid, multiple, and intersecting character. Lead singer and guitarist Mark Moses Alvarado, who began his music career as a member of the Santa Barbara band Soul Force while a student and DJ at Santa Barbara City College in the early 1990s, strikes a balance between the universal and particular in his brand of Chicanismo. Alvarado cites the band's local border roots in El Paso and Juarez as central to their musical and political identity. "We are a Chicano band because we possess a certain identity in terms of what is going to separate Border Roots from any other international reggae band." At the same time, he continues, "we wanted to create something that stands out, something that represents issues that affect everyone such as [the] cultural, political, social, and philosophical."²³ "Even though we're on the Mexican border," he elaborates, "we know our music reach[es] out and touch[es] people all over the world and that's a great feeling."²⁴

A multiethnic and transnational Chicana/o sensibility is also apparent in the reggae music itself, which often integrates the sounds, instruments, and rhythms of Mexican corridos and folk, salsa and cumbia, rhythm and blues and jazz, ska and punk with the reggae sound into a Chicana/o-Afro-Latina/o border soundscape. Quinto Sol bassist Martin Perez and Mizraim Leal note that being from Mexicana/o families in Los Angeles each "listened to puro cumbias and salsa and all this good stuff, you know in the fiestas growing up as little kids. That's why we have that blend because that's what came natural... The reggae was the hard part! We were really just a bunch of Chicanos trying to play reggae. So people say, 'hey, you guys blend in all this bad Afro-Cuban, salsa, cumbia, mixed with reggae... That was already in the blood. We didn't have to learn none of that stuff... Most of what we know was just from listening growing up.'" Both their sound and politics were also shaped by several band members' affinity for ska, punk, skateboard culture, and anarchism in their younger years.²⁵ Quino McWhinney's most recent musical project, Quinazo, which released its first album, *La Ofrenda*, in 2009, explores the contours of Chicanismo/o more directly than Big Mountain ever did in its recorded music. Quinazo's Chicana/o awakening is partly a result of Quino's developing engagement with Chicana/o folk music and Mexican corridos, an influence that stems in part from Quino's friendship and collaboration with long-time San Diego Chicano musicians Chunky Sanchez and Rick Sanchez, who have been active in the city's Chicana/o music scene and grassroots politics for more than forty years as part of their band Los Alacranes and the city's Chicano Park Steering Committee.²⁶ Like virtually all other Chicana/o reggae bands, Radio La Chusma cites Bob Marley as a formative musical and political influence. They also note Santana, Los Lobos, The Beatles, James Brown, Toots and the Maytals, Manu Chau, Ozomatli, and "all Mexican music: mariachi, cumbia, corridos, boleros" as inspiration for their amalgamation of reggae, rock, and cumbia.²⁷ Guitarist Raul "Scoop" Valdez appropriately describes La Chusma's sound as "Bob Marley meets Carlos Santana."²⁸ In their own diversified portfolio, a number of members in Border Roots got their start in Tejano and rock. The band's Web site describes their sound as "Chicanos influenced by roots reggae, rasta, the farm worker movement, civil rights, Bob Marley, Malcolm X, MLK, Cesar Chavez, Benny Moré,

Motown, oppressed workers all over the world, Chicano youth and our mothers and fathers.”²⁹ Border cities from San Diego to L.A. to El Paso are thus sites for ethnic Mexican, indigenous, black American, and Afro-Caribbean cultural fusion by Chicana/o reggae artists.

While Chicana/o reggae’s ethnic and cultural sensibilities are drawn in part from black American and black Caribbean historical influences, among the most important influences shaping the music and identity of the artists is their everyday border(land) life experience. Border life is dramatically evident in the themes and multilingual lyrics of much border reggae (which is often sung in Spanish, English, and, in the case of Quinto Sol, Nahuatl). Most follow conventional reggae’s recipe of struggling against oppression, colonialism, and imperialism in many of their jams, but often with a firmly local Chicana/o twist by highlighting issues of border living, immigration, indigeneity, and *latinidad*. El Paso’s Border Roots affirms the importance of their physical location on the U.S.-Mexican border in El Paso-Juarez in more than their name. Chicana/o reggae from El Paso is a top draw in the city’s nightclubs and across the border in Juarez in part because the bands’ music, lyrics, and politics are firmly rooted in border life. Speaking of his pursuit for degrees in Chicana/o and Border Studies at the University of Texas, El Paso (UTEP), Border Roots’ Mark Alvarado asserts that “living on the border has taught me to look at things in a different perspective, one of the biggest things that blew me away was when you go to the state of the art library at UTEP and you look out the window you see complete and utter poverty.”³⁰ Alvarado’s observations are reminiscent of Gloria Anzaldúa’s classic statement that the U.S.-Mexican border is where “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (is an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”³¹ This border sensibility informs both the cover art of Border Roots’ first CD, *Barrio Reggae*, which depicts a conquering rasta lion with red, gold, and green flag amid a telephone wire and shanty-filled *colonia* (neighborhood) that might be on either side of the El Paso-Juarez divide, and the music and lyrics that illuminates their views on border life and Chicana/o identity.³² Radio La Chusma similarly anchors their approach in the El Paso-Juarez area. “Our main goal,” argued Ernie Tinajero, “was to expose everybody to the border region,” a charge that manifests itself in their full-length albums *Sonidos de la Gente* and *91.5 MexM*, an exploration of everything from cruising El Paso to *La llorona* to Afro-Mexica politics and spirituality.³³

Further west and closer to the southern California border with Mexico, Big Mountain, Quinazo, and Quinto Sol also simultaneously root their reggae in their most immediate surroundings and in a broadly imagined landscape of Chicana/o politics. Big Mountain’s more political tunes include “Border Town,” a heavy roots track about life in San Diego that is an incisive critique of immigration policy, the militarization of the border, and “silly fools in their big green vans” (border patrol agents), at the same time it is a passionate plea to see the connections between U.S. Chicanas/os and Mexicana/o immigrants, “if it weren’t for fate we might be each other.”³⁴ On *New Day*, Quino explains that the entire album tells “the story of the

United States—about the different people coming here and their stories and exactly how we're gonna deal with the fact that we're all very unique. We're not blending into this melting pot that everyone talked about since its inception." Ultimately, Quino views that album as a critique of the global capitalism that determines the life conditions of many immigrants.³⁵ McWhinney's more recent *La Ofrenda* with Quinazo includes odes to the mixing of Mexica-rasta traditions, life "up north," and a call for "Huelga en general" (general strike) for human rights and dignity in a peaceful manner.³⁶ Up the coast in Los Angeles, Quinto Sol's solo and joint venture albums pay homage to their Mixteca, Afro-Caribbean, and Chicana/o roots in East Los Angeles.³⁷ As Victor Viesca, Josh Kun, and Yvette Doss have shown, the broader context in which the Quinto Sol sound evolved from their 1993 beginnings was determined by shared performances, social space, and organizing with East L.A. bands Quetzal, Ozomatli, Aztlán Underground, Ollin, Slowrider, and others who were involved in unionization and early Zapatista activism, as well as efforts to create and sustain, for at least a year, the Eastside Peace and Justice Center.³⁸

Quinto Sol, to be sure, is not alone as Chicana/o reggae artists who have gone beyond the multiethnic and trans-local musical aesthetic and concert crowd to integrate their Chicana/o sensibility into networks of political organizing and activism. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to gauge where the music ends and politics begins, as they are often one and the same. Virtually all of the Chicana/o reggae artists under scrutiny here have long been active in local barrio politics, struggles for immigrant rights, Zapatista solidarity work, border issues, labor organizing, independent art and cultural work, and the global justice movement. Back in El Paso, Border Roots and Radio La Chusma have long track records of appearing at progressive Chicana/o and border fundraisers, rallies, and protests in support of maquiladora and farm workers, immigrant rights, and colonia and barrio organizations, including regular gigs at Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Independence Day, and Cesar Chavez Day celebrations. Radio La Chusma, for example, was the featured entertainment at the February 2009 "A Day in the Sun: Adios ASARCO, Hello Future" event that celebrated grassroots efforts to oppose the reopening of the ASARCO smelter company near El Paso, a century-long corporate presence in the area that, as historian Monica Perales illustrated, was responsible for devastating lead contamination in the company town where its largely Mexicana/o workers lived.³⁹ Border Roots' Guerrero has also complemented his musical career with work for El Paso Community College and the city of El Paso on behalf of workers displaced by NAFTA; neighborhood revitalization; community development in rural colonias along the border; and urban programs in health, education, and social services.

Less than twenty miles north of Tijuana, Quino McWhinney's reggae influenced Chicana/o activism dates back to at least the late 1990s when he enlisted the aid of Mark Alvarado of Border Roots in developing a border coalition for immigrant rights.⁴⁰ McWhinney's community organizing has crystallized in his more recent work with Quinazo and Rebel Ink, which is his independent music and art media group devoted to "conscious artistic expression for conscious people."

Following the May Day immigrant rights marches across the country in 2006, when McWhinney mused that “on May 1, we’re gonna shut this country down,” Quinazo became a fixture at San Diego-area pro-immigrant, anti-deportation events and helped organize a student protest.⁴¹ Staying true to their multiethnic, transnational, and fluid Chicana/o sensibility, Quino elaborates the community-based and collaborative logic behind the group’s public activism and his efforts for independently supported Chicana/o cultural production. *Rebel Ink* is about “bridges of understanding between communities, conduits or parallels that will allow us to recognize areas of solidarity that will allow us to work together.”⁴² He further underscores his belief that “the more we concentrate on our own labels, our own newspapers, our magazines, this is where the real progress goes... the real concrete change that’s happening in the community, that’s what we’re really all fighting for.”⁴³ In the same vein, like their San Diego and El Paso counterparts, Quinto Sol’s Martin Perez and Mizraim Leal have continued to steadfastly perform at L.A. area Chicana/o and Latina/o festivals; fundraisers for community institutions, like author/poet Luis Rodriguez’s Tía Chucha Café Cultural; at their own barrio music and art store; and to provide free music lessons for youth.⁴⁴

As much as such political activity is oriented toward Chicana/o, indigenous, and border issues, however, most Chicana/o reggae musicians note Bob Marley and Jamaican Rastafarianism as among their most formative *political*, not just musical, influences. Quinto Sol duo Perez and Leal say as much when they recall that when they came across Marley, “we wanted to do what they were doing for the black people, we wanted to for the brown people... uplifting music, speaking conscious stuff, stuff for a better tomorrow.”⁴⁵ The politics of Chicana/o reggae is multiethnic and inclusive, local and transnational, and constitutive of a kind of contemporary border Chicana/o movement fueled by reggae music. This new movimiento, however, is more a movement of movements, one where a range of local struggles from L.A. to San Diego to El Paso to Juarez are loosely affiliated through shared ideology and personal relationships and less concerned with sparking “Revolution” with a capital R than it is with cultivating revolutions with a small r and an s on the end. In this, Chicana/o reggae artists demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the zapatismo that has so inspired many of them since 1994, while it reveals their ongoing analysis of the first Chicano movement’s nationalist limitations and internationalist possibilities.⁴⁶

Chicana/o reggae exhibits a Chicanisma/o dependent on a multiplicity, perhaps infinite number, of musical aesthetics, cultural identities, and political struggles that are both uniquely situated in border(land) locales at the same time they recognize common links, experiences, and histories with one another. The music and activism of these artists is at once transnational, even post-national, in its aesthetics and politics. That is, border reggae conveys a sense of living beyond older paradigms of nationalism that informed earlier Chicana/o politics, documents a world where intensified patterns of globalization often result in political and economic crises for the nation-state, and encourages cultural and political alliances beyond the borders of the nation state.⁴⁷ Yet border reggae also constantly reminds us that border dwellers deal with the imposing structural, economic, and

social conditions of the nation-state every day. In the end, we should take heed and listen to how Chicana/o reggae might help us see how some folks claim dignity and humanity in the wake of neoliberalism's dehumanization, criminalization, and militarization along the border.

"AFRO-MEXICA" REGGAE

Border reggae involves more than Chicanas/os and boasts a burgeoning scene in urban areas just south of the geopolitical boundary. Mainly in Tijuana, but also in Mexicali, the early 2000s saw the rise of what a number of observers have labeled "Afro-Mexica" reggae. Played by mostly young Mexican men, with lyrics in both Spanish and English, and inspired by the Chicana/o reggae of San Diego, Marley, and touring Jamaican artists (who have frequented beach and bar venues in Tijuana and Rosarito), as well as by rock en Español, ska, punk, and Mexican cumbia, Afro-Mexica reggae is similar to its Chicana/o cousin north of the border. It hastens the hidden history, perhaps unexpectedly, of a black cultural and political presence in Tijuana and much longer patterns of Mexican-black interaction in the area. Afro-Mexica reggae recalls African-American musician's long fascination with the border city, including Gerald Wilson's "Viva Tirado" during World War II (later of El Chicano cover fame in the 1960s), Charles Mingus' 1957 "Tijuana Moods," and earlier twentieth-century black forays across the border by Jack Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Sonny Clay, and others, including efforts to establish autonomous African-American agricultural colonies to the south and east of Tijuana in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁸ Afro-Mexica reggae grows from this often obscured interracial past at the same time it is deeply rooted in the contemporary Mexican border experience. As Pablo Vila has argued about border dwellers more generally, these artists display the ability and willingness to cross multiple borders at the same time they reinforce borders to ensure their own ethnic and cultural uniqueness.⁴⁹ Afro-Mexica artists thus articulate a Mexican identity and sensibility that is interracial and transnational at the same time it is, as poet Bobby Byrd might say, "*puro* border," filled with "cross-contamination of our language and culture. It is like a biological weapon, an organism that grows into the shape of who we are and where we live. It feeds on words and sentences spoken in the streets and alleys of our cities and towns and pueblos on both sides of the line..."⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, the Tijuana scene and its interracial, cross-border sensibilities have been dramatically influenced by the cultural reach of Southern California reggae. Not only do local California bands like Quinto Sol have histories of performing in Tijuana, but international tours that frequented San Diego and L.A. began to periodically swing through Tijuana beginning in the early 1990s, especially for big beach festivals held in nearby Rosarito that draw thousands of partiers from south and north of the border. Some Jamaican artists have exceptional followings in San Diego—it's rare, for example, to go a week in San Diego without hearing Eek-a-Mouse's "Skidip" or Barrington Levy's "Broader than Broadway" booming at red-light intersections—because they consistently played Tijuana

over the years and visits to the city inspired songs like Eek's "Border Patrol," which is about the difficulties in navigating U.S. border control and customs.⁵¹

The local San Diego scene, in particular, has had even a greater impact on the rise of Afro-Mexica reggae in Tijuana. As Astrorumberos member and native Tijuanaense Carlos García notes, "the radio doesn't play reggae down here," so many turned to the airwaves carrying reggae shows from San Diego.⁵² San Diego's own Makeda "Dread" Cheatom has been at the forefront of helping grow the Afro-Mexica scene from Tijuana's sister city to the north. The longtime hostess of the weekly "Reggae Makossa" program on San Diego's 91X FM, who also serves as director of the World Beat Center, which is located near downtown San Diego in Balboa Park and at the forefront of promoting reggae shows and related culture in the city, Cheatom has taken a keen interest in developing reggae south of the border. She has been instrumental in organizing, advertising, and MCing the annual Bob Marley Day festivities and other concerts in Tijuana. For Cheatom, the emerging Afro-Mexica scene "is a good opportunity for Mexicans to recognize that Africa is part of their history... This is the perfect time to recognize the diversity that exists in Mexico." If Afro-Mexicans, perhaps most widely associated with the Veracruz and Oaxacan coast regions, "are Mexico's forgotten roots," Cheatom sees Afro-Mexica reggae as a potentially important connective tissue in coalitions and support between African-American and Mexican-American communities in Southern California.⁵³ Cheatom's claims that many Mexican youth in Tijuana learn more about Mexico's black history and the African diaspora through reggae may not be far from the mark. Chris Fregoso, keyboardist for Tijuana reggae bands Esencia and De Raíz says as much. In addition to the bootleg videos and tapes of Marley that circulated around Tijuana, Fregoso, now in his early 30s, notes that he and many other Tijuana youth grew up listening to Reggae Makossa every Sunday night and that "we'd hear in the music, the similarities between Jamaican and Mexican cultures—the struggle for poor people to survive."⁵⁴

Just as the impetus for growth has come from artists' transnational cultural encounters, so too has it stemmed from the rootedness of Afro-Mexica artists' experience in Tijuana. Esencia's Fregoso has been at the forefront of the local scene, particularly since he saved money from his non-music related job as a driving instructor to build Comunidad Rubydreads, a recording studio in the barrio of Colonia Valle del Rubí. The studio has become something of a nerve center for the Afro-Mexica scene in Tijuana, in part because, as Fregoso explains, reggae's message of struggle and resistance struck a chord in the neighborhood. "Rubí is working class. A lot of people here work in the *maquiladoras*. Some are teachers; some are carpenters and construction workers... Today if you are living here in La Colonia, it's the same as in...other parts of Latin America. There are the same problems and troubles—lack of jobs, high crime and overcoming poverty and drug addiction."⁵⁵ As much as Afro-Mexica has been a product of the transnational flow of reggae vibes via the African diaspora and south across the border from San Diego, it is also very much a uniquely *Tijuas* scene.

Reggae and the urban border context have combined to create a vibrant and growing Afro-Mexica scene that articulates a multiethnic, Afro-inspired, and

transnational mexicanidad that is rooted in the local Tijuana experience and history. Particularly visible since the turn of the new millennium, Tijuana bands like Esencia, Cañamo, Los Astrorumberos, Cartel de Zion, and Yumanos have helped build a diverse reggae and rasta scene in the city. With regular gigs at venues like El Foro, Bar Berlin, Tilly's, and the Voodoo House, and Tijuana Roots and Culture (their reggae specialty shop on Avenida Revolución in the heart of the city started by Ras Alfonso, an original member of the band Natural), Afro-Mexica artists have a growing cultural infrastructure in support of their music at their disposal.

The resulting hybrid musical aesthetic of Afro-Mexica mirrors and reinvents the claims to indigeneity, pan-latinidad, Afro-Caribbean links, and, in some cases, radical politics seen in Chicano reggae. Maíz, led by singer and trumpeter Karlos Paez, who is also the front man for the more well-known B Side Players who are a San Diego and Tijuana favorite, is known for tunes like "La Raza" and "Tierra Maya" emphasizing cultural and ethnic pride. In a kind of body politics of rasta-inspired indigeneity, Paez's dreadlocks and tattoos of the Aztec calendar and Zapotec corn God exhibit a visual capturing the seemingly disparate cultural streams of Afro-Mexica.⁵⁶ Los Astrorumberos style has been called "Latin dub Afro-beat" for their combination of English language covers of Bob Marley classics and Spanish-language originals. And, though their material may lack the political edge of Marley, in that they are not alone, bassist Garcia makes it clear that among the band's motivations is that "we are kind of angry about racism and problems at the border."⁵⁷ In their two demos "Botas" and "La quedijimos," Cañamo combine reggae, jazz, rock, blues, bossa nova, and cumbia with lyrics ranging from general calls for peace and unity to shout outs to border living and crossings. Their sense of the local and global is easily remedied in the self-description that the band are those "who walk through the streets and corners of Tijuana and the entire planet."⁵⁸

In another example of Afro-Mexica's diversity and progressive cultural politics, we might also point to the popularity of San Diego based Elijah Emanuel and the Revelations in Tijuana. Demonstrating the cross-border and multiracial ethos of Afro Mexica reggae, Emmanuel's band has been as popular in Tijuana as San Diego since its inception in the 1990s. A military brat born in Panama, where he was introduced to reggae and rasta cultures from Jamaicans working on the Panama Canal, Emanuel was among the first *reggae en español* artists, with most of his recordings and live performances a pretty even split between English and Spanish lyrics. Musically he drops African polyrhythms, Native American chants, Cuban tres, jazz horns, and cello into his reggae groove. Emanuel's unique sound drew a devoted following among Tijuana youth in the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially, and helped spawn the Afro-Mexica scene. His attention to border politics and social movements and noted role as immigration rights activist, results in songs and lyrics supporting undocumented immigrants in the United States, questioning the dehumanizing discourse of "illegal aliens," voicing solidarity with the Zapatistas and contemporary indigenous struggles in Mexico, and highlighting the presence of African diasporic cultural productions in the borderlands.⁵⁹ At the same time his music is rooted in the San Diego-Tijuana

border region, Emanuel claims the kind of universalism common to the reggae form. “Where I want to take it [reggae]? Where it’s not localized to one geography and not limited to one culture.”⁶⁰

Let us think that Afro-Mexica’s politics are not rooted in the particularities of Tijuana, we need only look at the way reggae artists have addressed the popular reporting on both sides of the border about drug trafficking, gang violence, kidnappings, and the perceived unsafe nature of Tijuana in the 2000s, particularly in debates over U.S. “homeland security” following 9/11 and even more so amid the most recent revival of the century-old “Mexican problem” fearing the perceived immoral, socially deviant, and economically draining impact of Mexican immigration. Rather than ignore such realities or exaggerate them into discourses that further mark Tijuana and its residents as dangerous or threatening, Afro-Mexica artists have played an important role in creating, sustaining, and circulating the city’s progressive cultural production. Alluding to both the social and political turmoil in the city and the cultural response of Afro-Mexica artists, Cañamo bandleader Osvaldo Julián notes that “Tijuana is super-inspiring. In Tijuana, you see things that don’t happen in the rest of Mexico.” Julián may have put his finger on the locally rooted nature of the city’s cultural pulse that led one area literary agent to state that “people are continuing to work and showing that here there’s more than shootouts and kidnappings. Violence is not going to stop Tijuana’s rhythm, and it’s not going to stop the creativity of its artists.”⁶¹

Afro-Mexica reggae in Tijuana generates an infusive *mexicanidad*, one open to interracial histories, the African diaspora, transnational cultural and political projects, and the very local incarnation of border living in Mexico’s largest *frontera* city. As Alejandro L. Madrid shows in his study of Nor-tec music in Tijuana, both Mexican and U.S. residents have long viewed the city in contradictory ways. People in the United States often view Tijuana as both a symbol of immorality and perversion and a site of emancipation where red zones and party culture make it a place of desire and excess. People in Mexico might see the city as inhabiting the geographical and cultural periphery of *mexicanidad* and an entry point to American modernity.⁶² Amid this cultural terrain, Afro-Mexica reggae is one site to map the political possibilities of a black/brown, Mexican/American, cross-border cultural scene that inspires its practitioners to imagine a different Tijuana, one where dignity might be rescued from the clenches of neoliberalism’s inhumanity along the border.

IS ANOTHER BORDER(LANDS) POSSIBLE?

Is another border(lands) possible? As much as this brief survey of border reggae might suggest that Chicanas/os and Mexicans are already reimagining their identities along multiethnic, interracial, and locally inflected transnational axes, there are tricky and imposing, if not debilitating, limits to such political possibilities. If border reggae is part and parcel of a new type of geographically disperse, ethnically diverse, and transnational cultural politics whose greatest strength and

weakness might be its lack of cohesion, organization, and singular sense of purpose, we see the pitfalls, complexities, and even contradictions of such a project in how it engages commercialization, gender, and race.

Like much of popular music, border reggae artists make use of and exploit the same networks of global capital that have restructured borderland communities and lives to open possibilities of new politics. George Lipsitz reminds us that popular music embodies the contradictions of commercialized culture and serves as a “dangerous crossroads,” “an intersection between the undesirable saturation of commercial culture in every area of human endeavor and the emergence of a new public sphere that uses circuits of commodity production and circulation to envision and activate new social relations.”⁶³ To be sure, border reggae reveals more than an oppression/resistance or colonialist/colonized binary. The very presence of border reggae is a result of transnational flows along the border and, if we listen carefully, it illuminates a spectrum of border identities, experiences, and perspectives that range from destabilizing and challenging local forces of globalization to feeding the neoliberal machine. Just as border reggae might serve as a vehicle to critique the militarization of the border or help spark and support new social movements along the border, for example, it might just as easily be used to sell border tourism in the form of weekend getaways to Rosarito for a big reggae beach festival or even a red, gold, and green colored poncho bought by Americans crossing back to the north. At the same time, border reggae and border tourism more generally, as Alejandro L. Madrid reminds us, offer a forum for borderlanders themselves to recast border identities in unexpected and unconventional ways that take advantage of and create room to maneuver in the globalization unfolding around them.⁶⁴

It may be helpful to return to the case of Joaquin “Quino” McWhinney and Big Mountain for just a moment. Despite great commercial success in the 1990s, which stemmed in large part from their reggae remake of Peter Frampton’s “Baby, I Love Your Way” the band made for the soundtrack to the movie *Reality Bites*, McWhinney and the band struggled to maintain control over their artistic product during the time they were signed to the big record label Warner Brothers and in their subsequent dealings with a Japanese-owned label. More than a decade later, McWhinney might be juggling his independently owned and community-based Rebel Ink label with his full-time job as a multimedia vocational school-teacher in Chula Vista, but his reggae influenced Chicana/o identity with the new band Quinazo is flourishing.⁶⁵ Though McWhinney’s journey and engagement with the commercialism of the popular music industry may not be unique, his underscores that just as border reggae music is commodified, bought, and sold, there is risk that the fabric of its new social identities and political movements might suffer the same fate. For McWhinney and other border reggae artists, however, such struggles may be less about banal debates over authenticity, selling out, or “keeping it real” and more about what performance studies scholar Ramón Rivera-Servera labels sincerity. As they navigate the pitfalls of a globalized music industry, border reggae artists’ intent is as important as the content of their music; their sense of self is as important as the CDs, MP3s, and concert tickets they sell;

and, whether fueling commercial interests or falling outside of them, sincerity is not always crystal clear and often contested.⁶⁶

It is also apparent that border reggae, at least among those who produce the music, is a masculine affair. All of the bands discussed are fronted by men, with very few women musicians and back-up singers involved. In some ways, this inequity reflects the gender hierarchy of the larger music industry and reggae specifically, but in others it replicates much of the male-dominated, patriarchal, macho, and hyper-masculine character of Mexican and Chicana/o communities along the border. While there is a conscious effort by many of these border reggae artists to address such concerns in their music and lyrics, one overriding propensity is to equate resistance and warrior-like activity with manhood, a tendency that may result, at least in the context of certain live performances, from male reggae artists entertaining largely male audiences. Another common feature is the construction of a typology of Chicana, Mexicana, or indigenous women as either objects of male sexual desire or as feminine protectors of the old ways and traditional culture. As Michael Bucknor argues about the reggae aesthetic more broadly, these tendencies not only risk reinforcing longstanding patterns of patriarchy, but also obscure and silence a wider range of gender and sexual identities and voices.⁶⁷ Border reggae thus runs the risk, at times, of being a cultural terrain where dominant or heroic masculinities, couched in terms of sexual prowess or political power, are defined as such against the subordination of alternative masculine, feminine, or sexual identities.

The conflicted gender politics of border reggae mirror developments evident in reggae's digital dance hall genre over the last twenty-five years, where male performers often assume the ability to understand women and know what they want in ways that uncritically accept troubling assumptions about patriarchal power. Such trends not only blunt the empowering possibility of border reggae because they limit the agency of Chicanas, Mexicanas, and others, but also suggest that the social movements and broader struggles for social transformation, of which border reggae is an active part, also need to more critically interrogate their gender and sexual politics. There is no easy answer, but it is imperative that the political possibilities of border reggae necessarily hinge on the continued engagement with and recognition of such potentially disruptive and counter-productive activity. Whether border reggae's unequal gender relations stem from male artist's presumption to understand women, their local borderlands communities, the popular music industry, or all of the above, we are forced to reckon with these patterns that, as Bucknor asserts, demonstrate that border reggae often "elides the politics of gender and sexuality in the favor of artistic revolt."⁶⁸

It is also worth noting that the multiethnic, interracial, and transnational encounters between border reggae artists and the African diaspora are not uniformly smooth and without conflict. Such relationships are shrouded in competitions over the racial and cultural ownership and authenticity of reggae. Despite cross-border gigs and shifting demographics that suggest a built-in and growing consumer market for border reggae, it's not a sure thing. Border Roots' Mark Alvarado notes that one place "that was difficult to get a following was in

Chihuahua, Mexico. Every time we played there they always wanted us to play songs by Carlos Santana, in fact one time they booed us off the stage.”⁶⁹ On the flip side, as comments from Maíz’s Karlos Páez and Elijah Emmanuel demonstrate, this conflict appears in other forms, too. Páez recalls that when Maíz first opened for legendary Jamaican reggae group Black Uhuru, they were “dissed” and “perceived as posers.”⁷⁰ Emanuel admits that “sometimes I question when Latin Americans embrace reggae music. Its ideologies and beliefs come from a black, African consciousness. If you don’t put a lot of thought into those beliefs, you’re mimicking the culture.”⁷¹ Despite the often deeply rooted nature of the social, political, and cultural identities that grow from border reggae, there are still indications that Chicana/o and Afro-Mexica reggae in the borderlands struggles to make sense of its many performances of blackness and brownness and faces great challenges in mobilizing across ethnicity, race, and nation.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these impediments, border reggae underscores the shifting terrain of cultural politics in the last twenty years along the U.S.-Mexico border. Deeply rooted in struggles for dignity that merge everyday Chicana/o and Mexican experiences with the African diaspora, these artists and musicians remind us that people regenerate their border identities relative to complex, diverse, and contradictory conditions. The multiethnic, interracial, and transnational terrain upon which border reggae artists tread results in Chicana/o, Mexican, and indigenous identities that are not so easily described as displaced and deterritorialized. In fact, place matters in border reggae a great deal, as it is deeply rooted in the fibers of frontera life and efforts to make it better. If we are wise, we will listen to border reggae and consider how it might help us consider the possibilities of a frontera soundscape.

Notes

1. For shorthand, I occasionally use the term “border(lands)” to encompass both the territory within proximate distances to the U.S.-Mexico border and those areas that Mike Davis refers to as the “third border” (in addition to the geopolitical boundary between nation-states and the extended border checkpoints) that “polices daily intercourse between two citizen communities: its outrageousness redoubled by the hypocrisy and cant used to justify its existence. Invisible to most Anglos, it slaps Latinos across the face.” Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (London: Verso, 2000), 61.
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Breaking Borders/ *Quebrando fronteras*

Dancing in the Borderscape

SYDNEY HUTCHINSON ■

German sociologist Georg Simmel argues that boundaries are at the core of what it means to be human, a necessary part of identity construction. Boundaries both “hinder and enable,” liberate and confine, consolidate and exclude.¹ Although he notes that boundaries are not primarily spatial but sociological,² geopolitical borders are indeed a special kind of boundary with political, economic, cultural, and historical dimensions. Very often, they are laden with baggage—much negative, some positive. For instance, some words frequently used to describe the borderlands and those who inhabit it include marginalized, stolen, contested;³ conflict, separateness;⁴ police; trade, policy, governing, officials, documents;⁵ “hybridity, mestizaje, fusion, acculturation, syncretism, and multiple identities,”⁶ and doubleness.⁷ These terms can be grouped around several types of border: the historical border, drawn principally through war; the cultural border, based on the division of a population, settlement and forced resettlement, and subsequent interethnic friction; and the political-economic border, based principally on law enforcement.

Expressive culture in border areas is clearly a part of what I call the cultural border. It is also dependent on historical, political, and economic configurations of the border and may even influence them. If boundary making is a central part of being human, as Simmel contends, what does it mean to the people who live in the context of an externally imposed, highly policed boundary, one that frequently serves to magnify social inequalities and ethnic difference?⁸ How do people express themselves in such a context, and what sorts of things do border dwellers

find it important to express? In this chapter, I look particularly at how people express themselves bodily in this context, one in which policing is frequently enacted upon bodies and in which the bodily crossing of borders is a recurring theme.

In his studies of border folklore, Américo Paredes offers one answer to my questions. He suggests that in the context of interethnic struggle and persecution on the Texan border, “Conflict—cultural, economic, and physical—has been a way of life” and thus “problems of identity” are common among border dwellers.⁹ In this “in-between existence,” caught in between two hostile powers, the racist United States and centralist Mexico, Texas Mexicans developed a complicated relationship to both lands.¹⁰ As Richard Bauman explains, Paredes demonstrates that Texas-Mexican folklore was generated not from the kind of bounded, homogeneous group identity earlier folklore studies focused on, but grew out of “the stark social oppositions of the border regions,” a response to differential—not shared—identity.¹¹ Thus, *corridos*, to cite one example, expressed a “tradition of resistance” to Anglo domination.¹² As new cultural expressions are generated in this way, new identities emerge and are again defined in opposition, so that today we might find new borders arising between further differentiated groups like Tejanos and Mexicanos.

In my book on the *quebradita*, I similarly argued that many border-area youth became involved with this popular dance in the early 1990s as a reaction to the climate of xenophobia exemplified by the passage of California’s Proposition 187, a measure that denied basic rights to undocumented immigrants and simultaneously produced further racism against U.S. citizens with Mexican or other Latin American heritage. In fact, some Los Angeles-area dancers explicitly told me their conviction that their dance choices were based on these political conditions, and that their dancing had political consequences, including a greater awareness of and connection with Mexican and Chicano culture, even participation in organizations like MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán).¹³ For these disenfranchised teenagers of Mexican descent, dance was a way of connecting with heritage, establishing peer communities, and contesting prejudice through a confrontational aesthetic—in other words, one way to view *quebradita* is as the latest installment in this “tradition of resistance.”¹⁴ At the same time, the fact that these teenagers freely drew from country line dancing and hip hop as well as Mexican *baile folklórico* suggests that they were less concerned about “the risk to [their] way of life that cultural contact entails”¹⁵ than were earlier creators of Greater Mexican border culture and indicates that border dwellers may have grown more secure in their regional and ethnic identities in recent years—less concerned, perhaps, with having to conform to a centrist model of what it means to be Mexican, American, or Chicano, or with ideas about cultural purity. These dance practices in fact reveal a range of identities located in between Mexicano and Chicano ones, while underscoring the regional variations that exist in these identity formations.

Quebradita is only one type of dance to be found in the U.S.-Mexico border area. In fact, just about any dance can be found there, from ballet to hip hop, Filipino folk dance to *bharata natyam*, and everything in between. In this article,

however, I wish to focus on those dances that have interacted significantly with the border cultural context, and I therefore exclude those which consciously try to maintain an identity tied to other spaces separate from the border. I aim to define some general characteristics of border dance as a part of border cultural spaces. In particular, I wish to examine how certain dances become part of the “borderscape”¹⁶ and either demonstrate or actively produce practitioners’ embodiment of the historical, political, economic, or cultural border. Looking at dance demonstrates how border identities need not be deterritorialized expressions; in spite of their frequent crossings and borrowings, they can be deeply rooted in localities through bodily practices. But looking at how border dances move to new locations also brings into relief the ever-expanding reality of “Greater Mexico,” Américo Paredes’s term for the community of people who share Mexican traditions, wherever they may be found.¹⁷ The Greater Mexican border may therefore be found wherever people from such communities come into contact with others, raising questions of the relationship between geography, space and place, and culture.

DANCING THE BROKEN BORDER

Border space has been seen variously as the supreme site of postmodern experimentation (García Canclini’s “laboratory of postmodernity”),¹⁸ as a liberating metaphor for the crossing of boundaries, and as a hyperviolent, hyperpoliticized space. For some people on either side of the border, but especially the north, the border is also a source of paranoia. The title of this essay has a three-fold reference. First, it was partially inspired by conservative CNN anchor Lou Dobbs’s “Broken Borders” news program series, which aimed to provoke widespread fear about the permeability of the United States’ political boundaries, particularly with respect to undocumented immigrants and their crossing of the southern border. Second, it relates to the *quebradita* itself, which has often been compared to break dancing, and whose name means “little break,” referring either to the female partner’s backbends or to the “breaking” of a wild horse in the dance’s multiple references to *vaquero* life. Finally, it evokes the *Broken Line* (*La línea quebrada*), the title of an experimental bilingual magazine founded by Guillermo Gómez-Peña in 1986, and thus also references the aesthetics and agendas of this artist and his collaborators. They have relied heavily on recycling (he states, “border culture is by nature one of recyclement [*sic*]”);¹⁹ on establishing a new, imaginary “center” around minorities or bilingualism while pushing the “monolingual/monocultural Americans” into an uncomfortable peripheral position;²⁰ and on a view of the border as “a laboratory for social and aesthetic experimentation.”²¹ The triple reference of “Breaking Borders” places dance and movement at the center of a discussion about border policy and racism, while also highlighting the playful, experimental quality of dancing that crosses borders—both real and imagined—with no passport.

The border dances I examine here celebrate the permeability Dobbs and his ilk so fear, while questioning the border politics of such xenophobes. These dances

are characterized, among other things, by their eclectic combination of diverse movement vocabularies connected with different times and ethnic groups, and by their awareness—whether implicit and internalized or explicitly articulated—of conflict and power struggles. Instead of fearing the broken border, they embrace the broken line. Yet today, border dances are often practiced in contexts far removed from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, as evidenced in the *quebradita* and *duranguense* performed in Chicago.²² Paredes noted in the 1970s that the conceptual border was shifting south, an observation based on young Mexicans' then-recent increased sympathy for Chicanos; today it is also moving north, making its presence felt in the U.S. Midwest and East Coast. In addition, *quebradores* and other dancers who participate in online communities today help to redefine the border and its cultural expressions by not only refusing to cross borders but removing the dance from this hotly contested geography entirely. In so doing, the new generation of border dancers creates a virtual Greater Mexico that forces us to reexamine our basic notions of boundaries, migration, and movement, and even to question what, if anything, makes the physical border and its culture distinct.

Border dances, then, both define and question the border as a particular kind of space. Because it is sometimes defined through dance, we may call the border a kinetopia, a place of movement, and the dances may conversely be considered kinetopian, in that they are movements which are defining of space. I examine this neologism and its implications later on; in this section I simply compare various border dances in order to arrive at a definition of this category that allows for their description and comparison. And although I realize that every border is different, and that every part of the long U.S.-Mexico border exhibits unique sociocultural characteristics, I also believe that comparison is a valuable tool for developing hypotheses that can enable interdisciplinary and cross-cultural conversations. In order to move in this direction, I will briefly summarize a few types of expressive culture on the border that might be considered kinetopian and thus fit into the category of "border dance," and I will suggest some characteristics that might be considered defining of this somewhat elusive category. While by no means a comprehensive list, some dances I consider to be "border dances" of the U.S.-Mexico border include *cumbia norteña*, *waila*, Western or country swing, *Nor-tec* dancing, and *quebradita*.²³ Any dance can be or become a border dance, and many more dances than I have named here could fit into this category, but few of them have been studied or even described. Border dances like these translate some of the political and cultural dynamics of borders into motion, and I therefore expect that some of their characteristics may be comparable to dance practices on other world borders.

The *matachines* is without doubt the best-documented border ritual dance.²⁴ A religious dance drama dealing with the time of conquest and performed in many parts of Mexico, in the border area it is performed principally by Tejanos, Hispanos and Pueblo groups in New Mexico, Yaquis in Arizona, and Rarámuris in northwest Mexico. Romero finds that in Mexico it is a symbol of indigenous identity, while in the United States it is more often viewed as a Spanish survival,²⁵ and in Laredo

it is considered emblematic of *mestizaje*.²⁶ Even this ritual dance, generally believed to be conservative and ancient, is revealed to be a mixture of influences when practiced in border contexts, combining Cohualhitecan costuming²⁷ with a *mestizo* or European focus on virtuosity²⁸ and a name deriving from European carnival celebrations.²⁹ Even a Plains Indian-style “war bonnet” may be used to reference both Native resistance and popular culture.³⁰ More recently imported ritual dances, like *danza azteca*, may be more explicitly political than the *mata-chines*, although they deal with much the same material, the story of conquest and culture clash. But while *danza azteca* arose as an effort to divest related dances like that of the *concheros* of syncretized Catholic influences, symbols like the cross are being reintroduced into the dance by Chicano practitioners who see the dance’s “hybridity . . . as part of their history that cannot and should not be separated from them.”³¹ Some such dancers attempt to participate in global indigenous movements³² and are political activists.³³ Thus, a dance born in one border encounter long ago becomes “re-borderized” through the work of present-day Chicanos.

Social dances like the *polca* (polka), *vals* (waltz), *corridos*, and *rancheras* of the *norteño* and *Tejano* traditions are even more widely dispersed throughout the border area.³⁴ Peña tells us that while the polka in the border area was originally danced with the bouncy, energetic step that characterizes the European or Euro-American version, in the 1950s Tejanos changed to a slower, smoother, shuffling step called *tacuachito* or opossum, a name Peña suggests was a way of identifying the dance with the region and making it uniquely Texas Mexican. The vals, too, bears little resemblance to its European forebear (particularly when danced to banda music): dancers may often step on the first count only, following it with a slow sway performed in a deep knee-bend; sometimes the male partner lowers the female nearly to the floor and swings her back and forth in a cradle-like movement. While many listeners feel the music sounds similar to European and Euro-American polka and waltz variants, no one would be likely to confuse the two dance styles: in this case, they have become thoroughly borderized.³⁵

Numerous other social dances arose in or adapted themselves to the borderlands in the twentieth century. Western swing, for instance, arose in Texas in the 1920s, enjoyed a second wave of popularity in California in the 1940s, and combined Anglo-American fiddling with European immigrant, African-American, and Latino musical practices.³⁶ 1940s Western swing dancers used lindy hop and jitterbug steps,³⁷ but in the 1950s–1960s the dance style became increasingly “whitewashed” as a result of the popularity of music like honky-tonk and square dancing, which was then being presented as “an authentic vestige of a western Anglo-American frontier.”³⁸ This dance style thus began as part of a border culture that acknowledged the cultural mixing characteristic of the region, but ended up altered by racist politics. Country line dancing and its great boom in the 1990s may be a dance with a similar story to tell, but further research is required.³⁹

Native American social dances may also exhibit features of borderization. *Waila*, a popular instrumental music and dance of the Tohono O’odham people of southern Arizona, is avidly danced by people of varied ethnicities in Tucson, where it has become a kind of symbol of local culture used in many civic

celebrations. O'odham dancers and musicians choose their movements from a repertoire of rock, Tejano, norteño, O'odham, and pan-Indian influences.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Mexican-Americans in southern Arizona often dance cumbia norteña in a non-coupled, counterclockwise form similar to waila, indicating a possible reciprocal Native American influence on local norteño dancing.⁴¹

Nor-tec has been perhaps the best-known musical project coming out of the border area in recent years. Dance is essential to this music, which is a combination of electronica with northern Mexican sounds like norteño and banda music produced by a collective of musicians and artists in Tijuana. Tijuana dancers combine traditional steps and movements from polka, *chotis*, and *redowa* with those “typical of ravers and clubbers in the U.S. or Europe,” Madrid says,⁴² thus articulating a kind of fantasy in which tradition is reconstituted according to a desire for future modernity.⁴³ When Nor-tec leaves the border area, changes in movement style may result: in Chicago, some dancers utilize Afro-Caribbean or salsa moves, others quebradita, and still others Michael-Jackson-like 1980s pop styles.⁴⁴

Most of these border dances are connected to border musics, those musics which likewise juxtapose a myriad of ethnically diverse styles and demonstrate an awareness of the political conflicts of the border, but are not necessarily so. Quebradita music did draw from a variety of musical genres, but came from elsewhere—specifically Guadalajara, and thus while it did comment musically and lyrically on injustices in the Mexican system, it did not interact to a great degree with U.S. or border politics and culture. Early swing likewise was borrowed from the East Coast and based on African-American models, and West Coast Mexican-American dancers preferred it precisely because they saw it as a truly (U.S.) American style.⁴⁵ These examples suggest that expressive culture is often most clearly adapted to border situations through the body, while sound may remain more conservative. This effect may be due to the easy long-distance distribution of music through print, recordings, and mass media: until the advent of YouTube, at least, dances have been less easily transportable and have therefore necessitated face-to-face and body-to-body learning.

Not all dances that exist in the border area are border dances, because not all of them place themselves within the borderscape of culture clash and interchange, of inequality and struggle, of occasional cooperation and frequent friction. Yet any type of dance, from *kuchipudi* to *nihon buyo*, has the possibility to become “borderized” if its practitioners choose to participate in and comment on border life in their movement practices.⁴⁶ In so doing, kinetopias are produced that relate to the border environment in their often startling juxtapositions of movements which alternately build cross-cultural bridges, ironically comment on ethnic stereotypes, and subvert meanings or produce new ones through recontextualization. At present, these juxtapositions can seem startling to observers, and while this is no longer the case with the earlier border dances, we must at least entertain the possibility that such was the case at the time of their emergence. What did polka look like to a nineteenth-century border dweller?

CASE STUDY: QUEBRADITA ON THE BORDER
AND IN VIRTUAL SPACE

Elsewhere, I have written extensively on quebradita dancing in the southwestern United States and beyond, as well as on the later development of *pasito duranguense*, a related style, in Chicago, Illinois.⁴⁷ Here I briefly summarize the historical trajectory of the quebradita in order to present a more concrete example of how a border dance interacts with the border environment to produce a kinetopia. I suggest that the current state of quebradita dancing brings into question the limits of the border area, as well as the basic concepts of borders, boundaries, migration, and movement.

Quebradita is a social or competitive dance and transnational musical style that became hugely popular across the southwestern United States during the early to mid-1990s. With its flashy Western clothing, catchy *tecnobanda* music, and impressive acrobatics, the quebradita inspired thousands of young people to join dance clubs or attend quebradita events in their spare time. The music was produced principally in Guadalajara, where 1980s record producers came up with the novel concept of a very fast *cumbia* rhythm played by a *tecnobanda*, a synthesizer-heavy update of the traditional Mexican regional *banda*, or brass band; *norteño* groups, and indeed *bandas* themselves, also played the style. Yet although it resembles some earlier dance forms from Mexico, and may reference them in its movement vocabulary, it seems that the acrobatic form of quebradita dance was actually a product of the broader border region, particularly Southern California.

Like other border dances discussed here, the quebradita combined aspects of existing movement vocabularies, including ballet folklórico, corriditas or norteño, cumbia, country line dancing, hip hop, and swing, into a unified whole depicting dancers' urban, multicultural environments. At the same time, it employed a confrontational aesthetic based on a combination of *lo ranchero*, an aesthetic that references cowboys, the "country" and "our ancestors,"⁴⁸ and *rasquachismo*, a border aesthetic that relies on recycling and bright, bold juxtapositions.⁴⁹ While often earning the disdain of the middle classes in both Mexico and the United States, who frequently saw it as "tacky," this bold dance served to make urban Mexican-American youth nationally visible in a positive way for a time.⁵⁰ For instance, numerous newspaper editorials extolled the power of the dance to lure teenagers away from gangs.⁵¹ Because the political context in which the dance emerged was one of racism and exclusionary policies, it might be seen as a radical move. It confronted such policies head-on with loud music and fashion, while challenging both externally imposed ethnic stereotypes and internal class- and immigration-based ones. In bringing together both Mexican-born and U.S.-born youth, it represented an unprecedented youth cultural movement that created (at least for a time) both a more unified community and a voice for a group previously silenced in the mainstream media. It also served to reposition the border as not a peripheral zone but a new center capable of producing trends for export.

Quebradita was practiced very differently in different locations, emphasizing the locally specific nature of cultural practices even in a transnational formation like that of Greater Mexico. For instance, South Central Los Angeles dancers organized themselves into neighborhood-based clubs and focused their energies on organizing and attending “flyer parties” held in warehouses, where the list of associates and artwork on the flyer were indicators of a dance club’s social cachet. In Tucson, in contrast, most clubs were organized in schools, and they invested more time and energy into practicing dance steps for competitions and performance. L.A. dancers also absorbed influences from dance styles of Jalisco, Sinaloa, or Nayarit due to immigration from such locations, while Tucson dancers more often reported utilizing the ballet folklórico steps they had learned in school or popular dances like the Electric Slide.⁵² L.A. dancers living in areas where gang activity was high even created a hybrid *cholo-quebrador* clothing style where airbrushed T-shirts were paired with cowboy boots. In Chicago, where *pasito duranguense* emerged as an outgrowth of quebradita in the 2000s, the choice of dance movements was more affected by proximity to Puerto Rican neighbors and their preference for merengue dancing, while clothing choices were based on a norteño look disseminated by popular music groups. Social processes underway in these localities thus affected both how the dance was performed and how it looked. Wherever it was found, however, quebradita remained sharply defined by age group, as it was everywhere a youth culture.

The quebradita was the focus of intense activity in the form of dance clubs, competitions, and flyer parties in the early to mid 1990s. But at the time of my first fieldwork on the topic in 1999, quebradita appeared to be either dying out or becoming absorbed into other border cultural expressions as participants tired of the music and the incessant dance practices. During a second phase of research in 2005, other kinds of border dances like Chicago’s *pasito duranguense* were taking up where the quebradita left off, while bringing the concept of “border dance” into geographic spaces far removed from the physical U.S.-Mexico border. The quebradita’s influence continued to be felt, however, not only in the movements of *duranguense* and the names of its dance clubs, which frequently echoed their *quebrador* predecessors, but also in the experiments of modern dancers, *salseros*, and rock musicians who sometimes presented the popular dance as “traditional” or “folkloric,” possibly for marketing purposes.⁵³

At the time of this writing, in 2009, the quebradita seems to be undergoing an unexpected renaissance on the Internet, where dancers around the United States post videos and comment on each others’ performances; as a form of studio dance taught principally in salsa dance congresses; and even as a commercially viable type of competitive dance. In updating my research for this chapter, I relied principally on Web sites such as YouTube to view recent quebradita activity around the world. Such sources are becoming increasingly important to ethnographers of all sorts, but perhaps especially so for those working in dance and music. YouTube is now a means in which dances and dance steps are disseminated. Users frequently post dance and music lessons alongside videos of performances, which may then be emulated at a distance and discussed by people in disparate locations

who otherwise might never have the opportunity to meet and talk. It has even, I would argue, caused increased visibility for dance in general, as can be witnessed in the spread of dance videos on YouTube from the sudden popularity of “jerking” in 2009,⁵⁴ to the viral popularity of Matt Harding’s multinational “Dancing” video,⁵⁵ to the oft-copied idiosyncratic music videos by OK Go, apparently invited to the MTV video music awards on the strength of their choreography alone.⁵⁶ Quebradita has spread far through such means, as well as through marketing and through conventional face-to-face interactions, albeit in a globalized context.

Salsa dance congresses have become the most important feature of the global salsa industry in the new century, providing a forum for competition, development of new dance moves, and dissemination of formerly regional styles. In this way, New York “On 2” salsa dancing has become one of the most widely danced styles among semiprofessionals not only in New York but around the globe.⁵⁷ Victor and Gaby, a dance duo from Mexico City and leaders of the dance company Salsa con Clave, began performing their own distinctive blend of salsa with quebradita at the Los Angeles Salsa Congress in 2002, as part of a larger trend toward incorporating tokens of national or regional dances and costumes into performances as a somewhat gimmicky way of distinguishing one’s group from others. While it originally seemed like simply a novelty, Victor and Gaby’s blend has turned out to have staying power, and they continue to teach “salsa con quebradita” at salsa congresses throughout the world. Two Austrian disciples of the pair, Gil and Anke, have also been teaching and performing the blend in Graz, Austria, and at various European salsa congresses since 2004.⁵⁸ Still further afield, Malaysian dancer Jaxen utilizes quebradita moves with *bachata* in a style he has coined “BachaZouk” and which he teaches, along with salsa, together with other members of his company “Rhythm Identity” in Kuala Lumpur.⁵⁹

Quebradita dancing’s commercial appeal has apparently been noticed not only by dance teachers but also by big business. In March 2009, MasterCard launched a new thirty-second Spanish-language TV ad entitled “quebradita.” It features competitive quebradita dancers performing an acrobatic routine to music that resembles a blend of mambo and banda.⁶⁰ The spot is intended to market debit and prepaid cards to U.S. Latinos. The fact that it was released nationwide and not only in local southwestern markets indicates that quebradita is now seen not only as Mexican or Mexican-American but, at least potentially, as part of pan-Latino dance culture. Similarly, quebradita has been included in the mish-mash of Latin American popular dances and aerobics that is Zumba, a fitness craze (and registered trademark) started by a Colombian-born, Miami-resident gym instructor. With the partnership of Kellogg’s, Zumba has been aggressively, and apparently successfully, marketed via infomercials to Latinos.

Further evidence for quebradita’s change in status can be seen in the dance’s inclusion in a hugely popular televised dance competition in 2007, billed as “the first” International Dance Championship on Mexican TV. This competition was an outgrowth of a popular program titled *Bailando por un Sueño*, a Televisa show similar to the United States’ *Dancing with the Stars*. In this event, competitors from eight countries had to perform a series of dances, ranging from ballroom

standards like quick-step to Latin dance classics like salsa and samba to recent popular dances like hip hop and reggaetón. A final element was “acrobatic dances,” a category which entailed a choice between rock or quebradita.

I mention all these recent developments not only for their novelty factor, but also because they are important indicators of how much has changed in the last ten years. When I first did research on quebradita it appeared to be among the most hated dances in the Americas, a frequent object of middle-class scorn, at least among adults. Today, it has been cleverly repackaged to form another addition to the progression of “hot Latin dances” that periodically take over North America and Europe, from the tango of the 1910s to lambada in the 1980s and salsa in the 1990s. The insertion of quebradita lessons into international salsa congresses, together with the comments frequently appended to Web videos of quebradita performances by those looking for dance lessons, suggests that the dance is rapidly crossing ethnic boundaries and will be danced by more Anglo Americans, Europeans, Asians, and others. Quebradita dance classes can also frequently be found in Mexico, even in Mexico City, formerly a stronghold of resistance against northern culture.

The inclusion of quebradita in an international dance competition seems to indicate it has even reached canonic status, an impression heightened by its now somewhat frequent use as a representative of “Mexico” in foreign contexts. For instance, in 2007 quebradita was performed in the Mexican pavilion of the Winnipeg, Canada, festival called Folklorama. YouTube viewers’ responses to this performance varied, with some calling it “100% Mexican” and stating that “it’s great that they want to represent Mexico and show its dances,” others finding the performance too repetitive with too many rock moves, and one noting that quebradita is “NOT Traditional Mexican Folkloric Dance . . . not a good example for the people of Canada.”⁶¹

Quebradita performance and competition also seem to be resurging in community contexts around the United States, where the dance still looks much as it did fifteen years ago. Responses to YouTube videos of such events are generally highly positive, with tens of thousands of views, most ratings ranging between four and five stars, and numerous requests from those wanting to know where they can learn to dance it, too. Negative comments generally appear from those who wish to assert their own superiority on the dance floor. Some of these draw on the writer’s authenticity as a Mexican citizen to assert that s/he dances better than the Mexican-Americans in the video, thus turning quebradita dancing into a point of Mexican pride. One, for instance, comments, “you guys aren’t even Mexican anymore, better dedicate yourselves to hip hop.” When one recalls that in the 1990s quebradita was generally viewed as a Mexican-American invention with which few Mexicans (at least middle-class Mexicans) wished to be associated, such comments can be understood as revealing a complex process in which newly generated cultural capital changes notions of authenticity and spurs contesting claims of ownership. Acceptance of the dance has occurred, but only after it has been successful abroad.

Quebradita has thus risen in status over the past decade to become a widely accepted symbol of modern Mexico. However, some concessions had to be made in the dance and its performance in order to make this change in status possible. The principal change is in the clothing style, which today looks quite different

than what was used in the early 1990s. Outfits have been toned down, so that dancing couples tend to use costumes in only two coordinating colors. Solid-color satins seem to be preferred over the lamés, metallics, and sequins worn in the past. The cowboy hats or *tejanas* so essential in the 1990s are now used infrequently. In performance and competition, a hint of the earlier quebradita flavor may be given through the use of boots and fringe, sometimes a chaps style to the pants or a large belt for the man. Other times, dancers may simply wear jeans or sweat suits.

These changes in clothing have not gone uncontested. For instance, one YouTube viewer congratulated some quebradores from Mexico State who had posted a video of their performance at a rodeo there. He found their Western attire particularly refreshing:

It is true that they dance quebradita in Chicago but not like this, like in the rodeo. The stupid *paisas*⁶² dress ridiculously, they don't know that quebradita is a *vaquero* [cowboy] dance. They think that it's a dance for *cholos sin barrio* [gangstas without a 'hood]. Let's see when they'll start dressing like real quebradores.⁶³

Similarly, in response to a video of quebradita performance by a Chicago dance club wearing red sweat suits, viewers approved of the dancing, but commented:

Here in Sonora one dances with boots and Levis, really cowboy, not like you guys who look like you're dancing hip-hop, not quebradita.

You're right. It's the first time I see quebradita danced in this style, it's like something isn't right.

Quebradita is characterized by the clothing... You dance well but the clothing makes it worse. Sorry but... clothing helps a lot. You look common and everyday. Pay attention to my comment.⁶⁴

The ongoing debate over quebradita costuming indicates that the dance is still in the process of entering the canon of international Latin dance; it has not been standardized, so its exact dimensions are still subject to negotiation. And while not everyone loves quebradita—as demonstrated by the Canadian performance, some see the dance as a symbol of Mexican pride but others think it is not Mexican enough—its use in folk festivals, commercials, fitness programs, and televised entertainment indicates that most of the resistance to the dance has disappeared or is in the process of doing so.

Not so with pasito duranguense. As I have elsewhere suggested, duranguense took up where quebradita left off, using some of the same music and dance material but adding to it a more explicit discussion of immigration and musicians' location within the United States, since duranguense videos showed the music as part of the U.S. landscape, unlike the quebradita, which relied on building an imagined connection to Mexico.⁶⁵ Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps owing to its

greater youth, duranguense continues to raise hackles in a way that quebradita no longer does. A much more virulent YouTube exchange took place over a video of pasito duranguense as performed by a high school Spanish club in Sacramento. Predictably, fashion was one source of concern, as was dance style, one viewer claiming, “One thing I’m sure . . . you ain’t from Chicago. Learn how to dance.”⁶⁶ But other comments revolved around racial stereotypes, and these were posted both by Mexicans and non-Latinos (or apparently so: since ethnicities are generally not decipherable in cyberspace, participants in these discussions made assumptions about their interlocutors’ backgrounds based on their usernames or comments). One of the latter suggested the dancers “pick vegetables instead,” to which another responded that the writer, presumed white, ought to “fill out papers for your welfare and food stamps.” Spanish speakers also contested the video along racial lines, one writing: “how do you get the idea of doing that in a high school? That’s why racial hatred exists, because of assholes like this bringing the whole Hispanic community down. Lynch these *** to get the hick, commoner, and Indian out of them.”⁶⁷

Such a comment demonstrates not only that racism and classism within the Mexican-American community is alive and well, but also that the misconceptions and low opinions formerly attached to quebradita have now been transferred to the newer duranguense. One must also note that those responding to this acidic poster did not take on the question of his or her prejudices at all, only tried to distance themselves from the dance that had elicited such hatred. One, for example, explains, “We (the Mexicans) are not that, this [isn’t] Mexican, [it’s] American . . . Don’t confuse us with those guys because that is not from Durango, it’s from Chicago, from some exiles . . . that’s why we kicked them out of the country.”⁶⁸ Respondents thus contested only the association of the dance with Mexico, not the YouTube poster’s racism and classism. In addition, although we are viewing the process of Mexicans’ adoption of a Mexican-American dance, the reciprocally critical gaze of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, each of whom authenticate the dance and its performance according to their own different terms, illustrates that the border between the two groups is constantly shifting along with current valuations of cultural capital.

Cynthia Bejarano has explained that while teenage Mexican-Americans often have “fluid identities,” easily exchanging ethnic labels, they have also recently tended toward a reclaiming of immigrant identities rather than further assimilation.⁶⁹ Proof of this trend can be seen in the numerous youth who today choose to dance quebradita or duranguense rather than the hip hop the YouTube commenter above recommended (not to negate the possibility that some dancers may do both). At the same time, Bejarano found that Mexican-American youth often reproduced the social stratification of the larger U.S. society in their high school hierarchies, creating divides between Chicanas/os and recent immigrants,⁷⁰ boundaries that “repeat and acknowledge the border.”⁷¹ While southwestern quebradita clubs in the 1990s appeared to overcome that divide for a time, comments like those quoted above indicate that young people continue to divide their social groups along lines of origin—lines that may appear as internal divisions to outside

observers, but which are experienced as external to the youth themselves. And while Bejarano suggests that the presence of the border serves to magnify experience, so that people residing in Chicago “do not experience the sensation of being torn apart that characterizes border life,”⁷² these examples show that, in fact, the border is often mapped onto young Mexican-Americans in Chicago by those who question their cultural authenticity and their local dance style. Such occurrences may mean that, although the border does not “tear apart” Chicago duranguense fans, the boundaries at work within U.S. and Mexican youth cultures function equally divisively.

In conclusion, in moving from the physical space of the border to the virtual space of the Internet, the *quebradita* has been removed from a space of violence and conflict and recontextualized within a very different one; one which varies between utopian equality and dystopian inter- and intra-ethnic conflict. In the process, the dance has been newly valorized as a symbol of Mexico, in spite of its U.S. roots, and has simultaneously entered the repertoire of decontextualized Latin American dances bought and sold as cultural commodities around the world. Outside of the border context, the dance loses its prior meaning as a kind of resistance to repressive, racist politics, and the depoliticized version becomes free to circulate among geographically dispersed, diverse populations. However, not yet subject to the same process of forgetting the passage of time has effected in the *quebradita*’s case, and not having been adapted to middle-class taste in mass-mediated performances, *pasito duranguense* has not achieved the same level of acceptance on the Internet or elsewhere.

Quebradita has moved from the borderscape into Gómez-Peña’s supremely heterotopic Fifth World, defined as “virtual space, mass media, the U.S. suburbs, art schools, malls, Disneyland, the White House & La Chingada.”⁷³ Funny, but also apt, the Fifth World spaces of decontextualization and often depoliticization are the gateways through which these dances apparently must pass in order to enter “mainstream” U.S. popular culture. However, as John Gray has written, “new technologies never create new societies, solve immemorial problems, or conjure away existing scarcities. They simply change the terms in which social and political conflicts are played out.”⁷⁴ While Gómez-Peña has argued that the aforementioned mainstream is itself becoming increasingly borderized, a statement that has a degree of truth to it, technology like the Internet can sometimes cause users to further other the Other, rather than facilitating the mainstreaming of those cultures. The dialogic and interactive nature of the Internet does not in itself guarantee openness and tolerance.

THEORIZING BORDER DANCE: FROM BORDERSCAPES TO KINETOPIAS

The border dances examined here seem to have much in common with the cultural expressions today described as transnational, postmodern, or globalized. But they are nothing new, even though they may appear so, and indeed they continually interact with each other over generations. 1930s swing dance moves

were incorporated into 1960s rock 'n' roll dancing, and both contributed to the acrobatics of the quebradita in the 1990s. Ethnic groups are simultaneously separated and joined through dance practice. For example, the emergence of quebradita in the early 1990s occurred in the same time and space as the California swing revival. Both drew from the same movement vocabulary but contextualized those moves in very different aesthetic systems, so that the first was practiced primarily by Mexican-Americans and the latter primarily by Anglo Americans. Today, the appearance of quebradita in salsa dance congresses brings it to an entirely new demographic.

Border dances also tend to be in some way political, either explicitly, as in the case of danza azteca, or implicitly, as in quebradita. These politics may be formal ones working at the government level, as when quebradita dancers chose to counter Proposition 187 with dance, or they may be informal ones functioning at the level of individual identities, as for those high school quebradores who chose the dance as a means of asserting their pride in Mexican roots. They may contest interethnic boundaries and stereotypes, as in Nor-tec, or they may reinforce them, as in later Western swing. One danza azteca group leader, Rafael Navar, aptly noted, "Just by dancing you're being political, you're saying that we're from this land, hey we have a history."⁷⁵ Choosing to dance a visibly Mexican-identified dance in the border area may thus be an inherently political and resistant act, while choosing an apparently white dance may be a reactionary one (depending on who is involved), and performing African-American moves may mark one as a cosmopolitan, as is the case for many youths who choose to participate in urban, international hip hop culture.

Border dances are also not only multiethnic and transnational, but also transcultural, a word Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz chose to describe the process of creating a new culture or cultural practice through the loss of some practices, the adoption of others, and the combination of both acquisition and loss in the creation of new expressive forms. Limón⁷⁶ and Peña⁷⁷ for instance, concur in assessing *conjunto* music and its accompanying dance as transcultural because they entail both assimilation and resistance. Ortiz saw transculturation as particularly characteristic of the Caribbean, and perhaps by extension the Americas, because of the number of cultures involved and the intensity of their interaction there. He writes, for instance, "In Cuba the cultures that have influenced the formation of its folk have been so many and so diverse... that this vast blend of races and cultures overshadows in importance every other historical phenomenon... The whole gamut of culture run by Europe in a span of more than four millennia took place in Cuba in less than four centuries."⁷⁸ But while this attaching of process to place may be useful in looking at Caribbean and American history and contrasting it with the other continents, through globalization, this intensive interaction of multiple cultures now occurs in most cities throughout the world.

Transculturation is a term often paired with the buzzword hybridity, especially in studies of border cultures. But while hybrid cultural forms may be utopian, promising a more harmonious future, as do Kun's audiotopias, focusing on

hybridity can reinforce essentialist ideas about culture while ignoring the unevenness of power relations involved.⁷⁹ It may also cause undue emphasis on the “impurity” of the new cultural forms, ignoring the maintenance of traditional ones that often simultaneously occurs.⁸⁰ In this sense, transculturation is a more useful concept in discussing border dances. These dances are also the product of a context of unequal power relations, and dancers may exhibit both experimental and traditionalist impulses. Actors in colonial, neocolonial, or postcolonial situations have many decisions to make when creatively combining materials drawn from different sources. The loss implied by transculturation may surface subsequently in nostalgia for earlier practices and an attempt at revival; the acquisition of new practices may be hotly debated as a deformation of “traditional” culture; and the combination may be alternately celebrated as a true reflection of society or denigrated as an adulteration. Finally, these three reactions may either combine to place the new expressive form as simultaneously traditional and modern, resolving the tension through an acceptance of juxtaposition and contradiction, or result in a division of labor between two separate styles, one “traditional” and one “modern.”⁸¹ In fact, border dances are subject to all these processes. *Danza azteca* and *ballet folklórico* are two reactions to feelings of loss, resulting in the revival of earlier dance practices. In the 1990s, *quebradita* was alternately decried as a-traditional and tacky and celebrated as the true representation of “*el Nuevo L.A.*”

While border dances emerged from a particular geographic space, they are no longer confined there; they are part of a larger border zone, or a borderscape. *Borderscapes*, we can infer from the neologism’s collapsing of border with *landscape* and the various *scapes* of Arjun Appadurai,⁸² are both geographical locations and conceptual conjunctions of the flows of people, technology, media, money, and ideas along a geopolitical boundary. Adding another ‘scape to the list, Josh Kun has suggested that a borderscape is also an audioscape created through migratory flows of sound and music that disregard geopolitical boundaries.⁸³ These descriptions demonstrate that ‘scapes—and borders—also have to do with movement. But these movements are not disembodied, as appears to be implied: they rely on physical bodies moving through space. Borders relate to bodies through the mass migrations of people; through discrimination based on perceptions of bodily characteristics; through underpaid, hard, physical labor; even through the bodies of refugees marked by war, rape, or torture. Borders separate political entities that exist in the world of ideas but they have physical, bodily effects on the people who live near them or cross them. Bodies and their movements are thus a central part of the border experience, but a part often lacking in the scholarly literature. Studying dance is not the only way of coming to understand body and movement on the border, but it is a good one, for it takes into account a conscious form of bodily communication engaged in by numerous border dwellers.

Borderscapes, the border’s conceptual frameworks, have also been described as “heterotopias,”⁸⁴ a term drawn from Michael Foucault. For Foucault, heterotopias are a special kind of space of juxtaposition and deviation from societal norms which, in their inversion, contestation, or representation of the everyday, serve to

shape how we view and understand the world. They are unlike utopias in that they do exist in the real world, and in every society. Some common examples are the sacred or taboo places of “primitive societies”⁸⁵ (his term) that place people at points of transition, like adolescents, pregnant women, or honeymooners, outside of society; “deviant” heterotopias like rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, or prisons; and cemeteries, cities of the dead. Heterotopias may be characterized by the juxtaposition of difference spaces, like a Persian garden representing the four corners of the world; by their relation to breaks in time, as in festivals, or slices of time, like museums; by their simultaneous penetrability and isolation, governed by a system of rules for entry, like the Muslim *hammam*; and by their special relation to other spaces, often as a more “perfected” version of outside society, such as the former Jesuit colonies of South America.⁸⁶

For Alejandro Morales, the border zone is a heterotopia because both terms describe “a space accommodating a wealth of displacement of different entities.” He adds, “All people are migrants and border crossers in heterotopia... Today in heterotopia settlement is a continuous process. People never really achieve complete settlement.” The border as a heterotopia is thus a space constantly in movement, flux, wherein migrants constantly search for utopias but find only places of otherness. Culturally, it is multidimensional and cosmopolitan; it, like any heterotopia, is “a place of radical cultural juxtaposition, syncretism, and coalescence, which originate a prosperity of referential codes.”⁸⁷ This bordertopia seems to coincide with Gómez-Peña’s Fourth World, defined as “a conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the deterritorialized peoples, the immigrants, and the exiles; it occupies portions of all the previous worlds.”⁸⁸

Josh Kun extends the borderscape-heterotopia concept into the realm of music, proposing the term “audiotopia” to describe “sonic spaces of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and mapping of geographical space that music makes possible,” or rather the “contact zones” border musicians (and others) often create.⁸⁹ For Kun, a borderscape is thus also an audioscape created through migratory flows of sound and music that disregard geopolitical boundaries.⁹⁰ But while Foucault does not necessarily see the heterotopia as utopian, only different and special, Kun does see music as an ideal almost-place in which we can experience new possibilities and, perhaps, imagine a more just future.⁹¹

Borders do in some ways resemble a Foucauldian heterotopia: two societies, economies, political systems, and cultures are there clearly juxtaposed; they are a space of transition; there are clear rules for entering and leaving the space. Juxtaposition may be especially important here since it is also a key feature of *rasquachismo*, the visual arts aesthetic Ybarra-Frausto associates with the border, and may therefore be among the most frequent and obvious traits of border expressive culture.⁹² But borders are also unlike heterotopias in their more ordinary relationship to time, and their often extreme “imperfection.”⁹³ These qualities may make them more often resemble dystopias than utopias, especially during the present moment of heightened violence. Nonetheless, perhaps the heterotopia

model can help us to recognize the border as a special kind of space with characteristics of its own, without depending on the more common center/periphery model. While the border is the literal periphery of both the United States and of Mexico, border denizens often reimagine it as a center through their cultural practices, creating new forms of art and sending them back to the national “centers.”

In “audiotopias,” Kun emphasizes, “contradictions and conflicts do not cancel each other out but coexist and live through each other.”⁹⁴ Such an experience is indeed important in border musics, which simultaneously celebrate and critique the meetings between cultures in that space, but it is not unique to music; it is also enacted through dance. Switching our focus to movement necessitates the recognition of yet another kind of borderscape: the kinetopia, literally a place of movement. The borderlands are themselves a kinetopia, a space constructed through movement, particularly through dance,⁹⁵ as sites of juxtaposition, difference, conflict, and conversation—in short, as heterotopias. Kinetopias may also be found in more specific locations: discotheques, street festivals, high school dances, and wherever else such processes come into play while dancing. Border dances like the *quebradita* create kinetopias by expressing a clear vision of the border as a place in their performance. As in Kun’s audiotopias, kinetopias may also, but do not always, display a reimagining of the border as a “perfected” site of equal exchange, removing the border from real time and space, separating it from the reality of violence and exploitation, relocating it in bodies moving to music. Unlike the audiotopia, the kinetopia requires contact between bodies, it often entails consciousness of an Other’s gaze upon the body, and it creates an internalized, bodily relationship to a context of movement policing and culture clash. Kinetopias are firmly grounded in a particular time and place, even when they reference other ones: they are not only conceptual spaces, but also physical ones. They also have to do with border crossing, as not only a political but also a bodily movement.

Noting their transcultural qualities, we can think of kinetopias and border dances as being more processes than products. If creolization—another related term—is the fusing of languages, cultural forms, and ethnicities within a context of colonization, exploitation, and forced migration, borderization is the fusing of forms within a context of xenophobia, hyperactive law enforcement, economics of dependency and inequality, nationalism and jingoism, displacement, and constant awareness of an unwanted other, often paired with a perhaps exoticized desire for some version of that same other. A dance that becomes borderized may manifest this change in the juxtaposition of movement styles, political engagement, and/or the awareness of the presence and observation of cultural Others exhibited in dances like those described here. In performing border dances, people create kinetopias in which the presence of different groups is acknowledged without forgetting the power differentials involved.

Gómez-Peña writes, “I carry the border within me, and I find new borders wherever I go.” Through performance, he and other border artists “see through the colonial map of North, Central, and South America, to a more complex system of

overlapping, interlocking, and overlaid maps. Among others, we can see Amerindia, Afroamerica, Americamestiza-y-mulata, Hybridamerica, and Transamerica—the ‘other America’ that belongs to the homeless, and to nomads, migrants, and exiles.”⁹⁶ Although they may perform more for themselves than for others, and do not necessarily require an audience, dancers of Nor-tec, Western swing, cumbia norteña, quebradita, and duranguense are also performance artists of sorts. And although far fewer books have been written about their works than about those of Gómez-Peña, they too perform the border with their bodies, revealing Transyncretiberian Meximerican maps with every step. Such performance practices demonstrate how the local still exists within the transnational, an adjective which surely describes the state of Greater Mexico today, or even how the transnational is constructed from the bottom up.

CONCLUSIONS

I believe issues of the body and movement are one area in which border studies can and should grow. Both are fundamental to the border experience. If the border is a zone of violence, where else is violence enacted but on bodies? If one of the most influential metaphors in ethnography of the past decade or so has been “crossing borders,”⁹⁷ what is border crossing but a specific kind of politically inflected bodily movement? Dance is just one way we can study border bodies and movements, but it is surely an important one, both quantitatively, because of the great numbers of people that participate in social dancing, and qualitatively, because it is one way in which locals both internalize and express their border experiences and in which outsiders view and interpret border culture. The study of dance, movement, and the body can also provide one means of bridging the gap between those who study the literal border and those who use the border as a metaphor for the boundaries between ethnicities, genders, class, and other kinds of identities, because geopolitical borders can be a bodily experience just as gender, ethnic, and class identities are enacted by the body. This is what I wish to point out in my creation of the neologism *kinetopia*.

For all these reasons, dances have much to tell us about border identities. For instance, Vila notes that for many of his informants a sense of “outsiderness” was a part of their regional, border identity, since it was always being constructed in relation both to the other side of the border and to the perceived “center” of their own side of the border. In addition, the distinctions between insiders and outsiders are always blurred on the border, since these things depend on which side of the line one stands.⁹⁸ Border identities, what some scholars call hybrid identities, may also be marked by a sense of ambiguity—of belonging neither to this nation nor to that, identifying somewhat but not precisely with either. While in-betweenness may be an unsettling experience, it also has its positive side. Charles Keil finds that living well with ambiguity creates minds “shaped into a skeptical and inquiring mode of thought ideally suited to the formulation of [new] ideas.”⁹⁹ In the borderlands, some of those “new ideas” appear to surface in the form of dance.

As we have seen, the border as “contact zone” is a kinetopia that has spread far beyond the U.S.-Mexico borderlands region, reaching into the U.S. Midwest and even into virtual space, so that the borderscape can be conceived of as a kind of “transnational hyperspace” divorced from geography. At the same time, life in the actual borderlands still differs in some ways from life in those other areas, if only in degree, and thus we must consider whether cultural practices in the borderlands may have some distinctive qualities. The border is a zone where inhabitants are, if not constantly at least frequently, aware of the area’s conflicted history: they are reminded of it by the presence of the border patrol and the demand for documents, by violence like the border drug wars, and the militias self-appointed to keep out immigrants by any means necessary. At the other end of the spectrum, it is also a zone where people sometimes do make the effort to overcome boundaries in order to get along. Dance is one way people think through the conflicts of current border politics. Frequently, it is also a way people come together for enjoyment, in defiance of social and political boundaries. In doing so, they create kinetopias: zones of movement that, at best, may have utopian dimensions, as when they imagine a world in which multiple cultures can coexist peacefully and beautifully, even within the same body—here, the body itself is the contact zone. Studying or practicing border dance does not entail the omission or forgetting of the political and economic struggles that characterize the borderscape, struggles encapsulated in the simultaneously positive and negative symbol of the broken border. The processes of transculturation or borderization ensure that the traces of such struggles will always be present in border performance. But studying border dance also shows how important it is for many people to be able to forget, at least once in a while, and simply move.

Notes

1. Vince P. Marotta, “The Hybrid Self and the Ambivalence of Boundaries,” *Social Identities*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2008), 298; and Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Space,” in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Books, 1993), 137–169.
2. Simmel, “The Sociology of Space,” in *Simmel on Culture*, 143.
3. Cynthia L. Bejarano, *¿Qué onda? Urban Youth Culture and Border Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 23.
4. *Ibid.*, 35.
5. Craig Robertson, “Locating the Border,” *Social Identities*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2008), 447–448 and 454.
6. Yolanda Broyles-González, *Lydia Mendoza’s Life in Music: Norteño Tejano Legacies/La Historia de Lydia Mendoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100.
7. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).
8. In this chapter I write only of the U.S.-Mexico border, but my observations may be applicable to other border contexts precisely because many border areas share these qualities. I hope others may test my hypothesis on dances practiced in other politically charged border areas.

9. Américo Paredes, "The Problem of Identity in a Changing Culture: Popular Expressions of Culture Conflict Along the Lower Rio Grande Border," in *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, ed. Richard Bauman (Austin: University of Texas Center for Mexican-American Studies, 1993), 19.
10. *Ibid.*, 25.
11. Richard Bauman, "Introduction," in *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, xiv.
12. *Ibid.*, xv.
13. See Sydney Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense: Dance in Mexican-American Youth Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).
14. Bauman, "Introduction," in *Folklore and Culture*, xv. My description of quebradita as an act of resistance is based on my own conversations with dancers as well as in journalistic accounts of the dance, and it reflects some dancers' statements that they chose the dance as a way to emphasize the Mexican side of their identities in a time and place that not only did not value this identity, but was even attacking it through policy. Accepting this level of meaning, one based on dancers' personal experiences, does not, however, preclude other ways of understanding the dance. For instance, the fact that both NAFTA and California's Proposition 187 date to 1994 suggests that one cause of xenophobic government policies might be found in fears sparked by neoliberal policies. Thus, quebradita could be understood as a reaction to neoliberal restructuring. The problem with such an interpretation is that it takes things perhaps too far down the causal chain to be meaningful at the experiential level. Because this interpretation was not suggested by the interviews I conducted, further research would be required to make such a statement; in addition, people do not simply "react" unthinkingly to external stimuli but rather make choices based on their perceptions and interpretation of their environment. I therefore emphasize the resistance view of the dance here as the one which best upholds dancers' agency and best matches their experiences as reported to me.
15. Paredes, "The Problem of Identity in a Changing Culture," in *Folklore and Culture*, 41.
16. See Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), 121.
17. See Américo Paredes, *"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).
18. See Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, rev. ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2001 [1990]), 233.
19. Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border*, 86.
20. *Ibid.*, 95–99.
21. *Ibid.*, 80.
22. Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 167–197.
23. For cumbia norteña see Jesús Ramos-Kittrell's essay in this volume. For waila see Joan Titus's essay in this volume. For quebradita see Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*. For nor-tec see Alejandro L. Madrid, "Dancing with Desire: Cultural Embodiment in Tijuana's Nor-Tec Music and Dance," *Popular Music*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1996), 383–399.

24. It is perhaps worth examining here the hypothesis that “dance played but little part in Border folkways” of the nineteenth century and were a later European import that began with the polka, see Manuel Peña, “Ritual Structure in a Chicano Dance.” *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1980), 50—a hypothesis also supported by Américo Paredes. However, while the border area was sparsely populated prior to the polka, making social dances likely smaller-scale, perhaps infrequent and undocumented affairs, this does not necessarily mean that the dances of neighboring areas—like *tamborileros* from Tamaulipas, regional Mexican *sones*, or southern U.S. square dances—did not reach or were never practiced in the area. The problem may simply be one of definition. Although Anglos and mestizos may have infrequently performed social *bailes* in the nineteenth century, ritual *danzas* were certainly practiced by indigenous inhabitants.
25. Brenda M. Romero, “The *Matachines Danza* as Intercultural Discourse,” in *Dancing across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos*, eds. Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma Cantú, and Brenda Romero (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 186.
26. Norma E. Cantú, “The Semiotics of Land and Place: Matachines Dancing in Laredo, Texas,” in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero, 98.
27. *Ibid.*, 108.
28. Romero, “The *Matachines Danza* as Intercultural Discourse,” in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero, 201.
29. *Ibid.*, 188.
30. *Ibid.*, 198.
31. María Teresa Ceseña, “Creating Agency and Identity in *Danza Azteca*,” in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero, 88.
32. See Sandra Garner, “Aztec Dance, Transnational Movements: Conquest of a Different Sort,” *Journal of American Folklore*, No. 486 (2009), 414–437.
33. Renee de la Torre Castellanos, “The Zapopan Dancers: Reinventing an Indigenous Line of Descent,” in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero, 89.
34. A detailed description of these musical styles clearly does not fall within the scope of this paper. For, vals, etc., in Tejano music see Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). For these genres in norteño music see Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009). For rancheras see Yolanda Broyles-González, *Lydia Mendoza’s Life in Music*. For a brief general overview see Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 25–30. For a discussion of these forms and their employment in mariachi music see Daniel Sheehy, *Mariachi Music in America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
35. Part of this borderizing process can also be viewed in the numerous regional dance variations that exist around the border. For instance, some Arizona-Sonora area dancers call their way of dancing polka *corriditas*, a style that features a very close partner embrace with the woman’s leg sandwiched between her male partner’s, a feature that apparently influenced the later quebradita.

36. See Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 93–94.
37. A similar case might be found in the Balboa dance, still not researched, which arose in the 1920s–1930s in the Balboa Pavilion of Newport Beach, California (where my own grandparents danced, incidentally) and was a form of swing dance apparently influenced by Charleston, collegiate shag, rumba, and foxtrot.
38. La Chapelle, *Proud to be an Okie*, 106 and 148–149.
39. I find it hard to believe that this hugely popular dance style has received absolutely no scholarly attention, but this appears to be the case. The laughter the mere mention of the dance provokes even among otherwise serious scholars indicates that class-based views of what is “good” and “bad” (or interesting and uninteresting) dance may be to blame, and it is strongly reminiscent of middle-class reactions to the quebradita when I first researched the dance in the 1990s. However, even country line dancing deserves attention, perhaps particularly because of its lowbrow aesthetics, its working class and particularly “redneck” appeal, and its wide influence. The style has become a popular dance among certain parts of the working class even in former East Germany (another kind of border culture). There, it is but another in a long string of Western styles—including Native American powwow dancing—to be repopularized in this new context in which, for many, they were a symbol of freedom. The racial politics of the dance also merit further consideration. For instance, during line dancing’s heyday, white dance teachers sometimes went to great lengths to produce dances that would stand out without having to acknowledge their indebtedness to other racial groups (clearly, black-influenced disco dances like the Bus Stop must have played a role). For instance, the VHS tape of “country hip hop dancing,” recorded by Diane Horner in 1993, features only white dancers performing line dance steps with a pretty lame “running man” under the title of “Jammin,” see a clip at *SPIKE*, <http://www.spike.com/video/country-hip-hop/2695357>. These two brief examples of the dynamics of country line dancing demonstrate that the topic is a complex one that clearly merits study.
40. See Janet Sturman, “Movement Analysis as a Tool for Understanding Identity: Retentions, Borrowing, and Transformations in Native American *Waila*,” *The World of Music*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1997), 58–59. See also Joan Titus’s essay in this volume.
41. As yet no detailed study of cumbia dance styles exists, but to note some very general observations and to point out how the Arizona-Sonora region differs, cumbia norteña in California tends to be danced more in place, while in central Mexico, particularly Puebla (and among *poblanos* in New York) it is a couple dance with complicated turns similar to salsa but with more changes in the basic step, more hand movement, and a general feeling of greater weightiness corresponding to the heavier rhythmic feel of *cumbias sonideras*.
42. Madrid, “Dancing with Desire,” 384.
43. *Ibid.*, 389–390.
44. *Ibid.*, 394.

45. Anthony Macías, "From Pachuco Boogie to Latin Jazz: Mexican-Americans, Popular Music, and Urban Youth Culture in Los Angeles, 1940–1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan (2001), 114–115.
46. I note with regret the comparative absence of African-American border dances in this list: here they have mainly appeared as source materials, in that swing dance, jitterbug, lindy hop, Charleston, break dancing, rock, and hip hop have influenced many of the dances named here. The focus of African-American dance scholars on dances coming from the coasts or the South, as well as the comparatively low population of African-Americans on the border compared to those other regions, has perhaps caused scholars in this area to overlook the border as a locus of dance practice. Further research into African-American—and Asian-American—dancing in the Southwest may yield surprises, however. The creation of Butoh Ritual Mexicano, a dance style based on a modern Japanese form, by a return migrant from the United States offers one possible example, although one removed from the border area. See Shakina Nayfack, "¿Por qué estás aquí? Dancing through History, Identity, and The Politics of Place in Butoh Ritual Mexicano," in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero.
47. See Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*.
48. See Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*.
49. See Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *CARA, Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, exhibition catalog edited by Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wright Gallery, University of California, 1991).
50. I use the term "Mexican-American" advisedly, though not without reservations. I recognize that the term is problematic, in that some believe the combination of the two terms implies second-class citizenship or assimilation. I certainly do not wish to attach these connotations to my own writing, but felt obliged to use the term for two principal reasons. One reason for my use of this label is that most of the teenage quebradita dancers I interviewed did not self-identify as "Chicano" but rather as "Hispanic" or Mexican-American. As Sánchez-Tranquilino writes, a Mexican-American identity is often prior to a Chicano one, and these young people were by and large not yet politicized, although for many dancers the quebradita was one step along that road. Secondly, it is significant that both Chicanos and Mexicanos participated in quebradita in the 1990s, so I use "Mexican-American" to encompass both groups. No other term I have found is adequate for this purpose, least of all "Hispanic." While this word is used both officially and informally in much of the Southwest to refer to the same group, it clearly favors European ancestry over the indigenous or mestizo, and is therefore at odds with my description of this dance. Finally, "Mexican-American" is easily understood within the ambit of U.S. identity politics, where, linguistically at least, it is on an equal footing with similar terms, including African-American, Asian-American, Irish-American, or Anglo-American. See Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino, "Space, Power and Youth Culture: Mexican-American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles, 1972–1978," in *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity*, edited by Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 55–88.

51. See for example Joan Easley, "Strike Up the Banda: The Popular Mexican Dance Music Is Gaining Momentum With Young and Old, Who Turn Out in Cowboy Gear at Local Clubs and Private Parties To Do *La Quebradita*," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1993. Mimi Ko and David A. Avila, "Tecali Founder Uses Dance Club as Anti-Gang Measure for Youths," *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1993. And Diane Seo, "Dancing Away From Trouble: Some Youths Have Left Gangs In Favor of Clubs Devoted to *Banda* Music," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1994.
52. Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 66.
53. Examples of artists taking inspiration from the quebradita include the Mexican rock group Café Tacuba; see Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 203–204; and Hope Dillon, "Café Tacuba: Forging a New Mexican Identity," *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1997), 75–83; Mexico City salsa dancers Victor and Gaby (described in this article), and choreographer Alex Escalante. See Gia Kourlas, "Immigrant Song: Alex Escalante Shows his Mexican Roots to New York in the New Clandestino," *Time Out New York*, No. 654, April 9–15, 2008. <http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/dance/28351/immigrant-song> (accessed January 25, 2010). Various dance groups can periodically be found presenting quebradita as a "traditional Mexican dance." One Mexican youth group in London even enumerates three styles of quebradita: romantic, "traditional," and acrobatic, see http://mexicanlatinyouthgroup.piczo.com/*carnavaldelpueblo2008?cr=6&linkvar=000044 (accessed January 25, 2010).
54. See Guy Trebay, "Hip hop's New Moves," *New York Times*, November 20, 2009.
55. See Charles McGrath, "A Private Dance? Four Million Web Fans Say No," *New York Times*, July 8, 2008.
56. Kelefa Sanneh, "Outshining MTV: How Video Killed the Video Star," *New York Times*, August 31, 2006.
57. See Sydney Hutchinson, "Introduction," in *Dancing in Place: How Salseros Create Local Varieties of a Global Dance*, ed. Sydney Hutchinson (forthcoming).
58. See *Gil & Anke*, <http://www.gilyanke.com/htmleng/home.php> (accessed January 25, 2010).
59. See *Rhythm Identity Dance Academy*, <http://www.rhythm-id.com/index.html> (accessed January 25, 2010).
60. Press release from MasterCard International available at Yahoo Finance, <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/MasterCard-Launches-bw-3311839402.html?x=0&v=1> (accessed January 25, 2010). Commercial available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfTibJyuzTA> (accessed January 25, 2010).
61. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eZg_pxXz5Y (accessed on January 27, 2010). All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
62. Short for *paisano* or countrymen, this term suggests disdain for those Mexicans who no longer live in Mexico.
63. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HzglyvF5b8> (accessed January 27, 2010).
64. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPOuv9Lrus> (accessed January 27, 2010).

65. Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 184–186 and 196–197.
66. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpx189kzpa> (accessed January 27, 2010).
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Bejarano, *¿Qué onda? Urban Youth Culture and Border Identity*, 16.
70. Ibid., 33.
71. Ibid., 54.
72. Ibid., 37.
73. Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border*, 245.
74. John Gray quoted in John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 204.
75. Ceseña, “Creating Agency and Identity in *Danza Azteca*,” in *Dancing across Borders*, eds. Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero, 90.
76. José E. Limón, “Texas-Mexican Popular Music and Dancing: Some Notes on History and Symbolic Processes,” *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1983), 238.
77. See Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*.
78. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, translated by Harriet de Onís, introduction by Bronislaw Malinowski (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995 [1947]), 99.
79. Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 143–147.
80. Stuart Hall, “Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the Context of Globalization,” in *Creolite and Creolization*, eds. Okuwí Enweyor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Haje Cantz Publishers, 2003), 185–198.
81. As in Texas Mexican conjunto and orquesta genres. See Manuel Peña, *The Mexican-American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
82. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33–37.
83. Josh Kun, “The Aural Border,” *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2000), 15.
84. Alejandro Morales, “Dynamic Identities in Heterotopia,” *Bilingual Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1995), accessed online via Academic Search Complete, <http://www.ebscohost.com> (accessed January 27, 2010). I should note that while I have noticed some authors’ efforts to create the singular noun “heterotopos,” such a word corresponds neither to Foucault’s singular *hétérotopie* (pl. *hétérotopies*) or to the related singular terms “utopia” and “dystopia.” I therefore use “heterotopia” as a singular noun here, in spite of possible linguistic objections.
85. Foucault’s term.
86. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd. ed., edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1967]), 229–242. Also available online at <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> (accessed January 25, 2010).
87. Morales, “Dynamic Identities in Heterotopia.”
88. Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border*, 245.
89. Josh Kun, “The Aural Border,” *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2000), 16.

90. Ibid., 15.
91. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1–2.
92. I described its appearance in quebradita dancing in Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense*, 82–86.
93. Many observers would probably not find borders to be “perfect” places, as they frequently have to contend with problems such as environmental pollution, economic depression, militarization and violence. They do not even work “perfectly” at their intended function: that of dividing peoples and cultures. However, I put the word imperfection in scare quotes because, in spite of all the difficulties, borders can also be perfectly comfortable and stimulating places to live.
94. Kun, *Audiotopia*, 23.
95. A kinetopia need not only be found in dance, however. Other researchers might be able to apply the concept to more pedestrian movement styles, like the distinctive walking styles of border denizens such as pachucos and, later, cholos, or even the driving styles of lowrider owners.
96. Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border*, 5–6.
97. Pablo Vila, “Introduction: Border Ethnographies,” in *Ethnography at the Border*, ed. Pablo Vila (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), ix.
98. Ibid., xxi–xxii.
99. Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991[1966]), 195.

Narcocorridos

Narratives of a Cultural Persona and Power on the Border

MARK C. EDBERG ■

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the intense violence on the U.S.-Mexico border and elsewhere in Mexico connected to warring drug cartels, the spotlight has again been turned on the *narcocorridos* and related media that seem to thrive in the current environment. An online article in the *Washington Post* included video of a bar in Mexicali with patrons happily dancing while a small band enthusiastically crooned a rags-to-riches tale about the leader of the Sinaloa cartel.¹ The truth is, in this video and during the research I conducted on the border, when narcocorridos play, more often than not the performance is treated as a celebration.

Considering all the murder, mayhem, and brutality inherent to the real-life world of narcotrafficking, what would justify such a celebratory atmosphere?

The answer involves unpacking the complex and multilayered context feeding the near mythical characters featured in narcocorridos; the larger-than-life, primarily male narcotraffickers who come from otherwise obscure lives in the Sierra mountains, from the campo, from dusty villages just like many in their listening audience, yet who became brazen defiers of death and of all comers, to live a fabled life full of money, power, women, and in many cases, largesse for their own communities. This is a kind of life otherwise unimaginable for *campesinos* (peasants) or *maquiladora* (border industrial) workers who have little access to education and power through traditional routes, who could never walk into a restaurant with an entourage in tow and request any seat in the house. And, with respect to the historical politics of the border region, these are characters who have a bag of

tricks up their sleeves to foil the *migra* with all its trucks, walls, and officers. Perhaps the celebration, in this sense, is laughter at the craziness of it all.

With this in mind, this article is an attempt to engage in the unpacking process, to examine the relationship of the narcotraffickers represented in narcocorridos as populist, “cultural personas,” and to explore issues of power and social exclusion in the border region. Yet one cannot adequately capture the nature of the narcotrafficker persona by focusing just on those relationships, for the narcotrafficker is also a commodified persona that sells—a fact not lost on the media industry that markets CDs, ringtones, and movies; or among narcotraffickers themselves, who commission narcocorridos as advertisements to enshrine their reputation in the public memory. This paper is based in part on research I conducted in the U.S.-Mexico border region concerning the ways in which the narcotrafficker, as a persona, is constructed, disseminated, and connected with day-to-day practice through the medium of the narcocorrido. My original research—conducted in the late 1990s—focused on the context and nature of narcocorridos as performed via CDs and tapes, in film, and locally in cantinas, at concerts, and at parties. However, in the few years since completion of that research, narcocorridos as music have merged with the proliferation of other formats, which has altered to some degree the character and, arguably, the meaning of the genre—most specifically YouTube (e.g., the case of the shooting of singer Valentín Elizalde and the gruesome, widespread video of that shooting). In addition, updating Hobsbawm’s “social bandit,”² the narcotrafficker, narcocorridos, and associated media need to be understood together with other recent media portrayals of such bandits worldwide, from reggae fugitives to Veerappan in India.

Moreover, this research builds on a body of work that has examined the *corrido* tradition as well as narcocorridos.³ At the same time, my focus was not on the *corrido* or narcocorrido per se, but on the nature of the character represented in narcocorridos as contextualized within the popular imaginary—at least with respect to the listening community. Thus the research also builds on work in anthropology and other disciplines regarding the construction of public identities.

NARCOCORRIDOS AND CULTURAL PERSONAS

In this paper I use the term cultural persona to refer to a culturally shaped, flexible public representation that persists over time and is embodied as a person and iterations of that person.⁴ Cultural personas serve as both a “semiotic bundle” and as a prototype for how to act out those meanings in practice, all within the contextual references of a particularly figured world.⁵ Importantly, the subjective meaning(s) tied to cultural personas are often shaped by social position, whether based on class, gender, a constructed racial or ethnic category, national identity, imagined community, or in the case of narcocorridos, even market segment.

Narcocorridos, as noted, are narratives about drug traffickers, who are often represented as models, admired persons, or social bandits.⁶ Key to the role of these

narratives in constructing the narcotrafficker persona is the fact that, as songs, they are largely talked about, and framed, as corridos—historically “thick,” value-laden border ballads with a long history of recounting epic border-related themes of heroes who resisted the Texas Rangers, American authorities, or in some cases even central Mexican authorities.⁷ Classic corridos, such as “El corrido de Gregorio Cortez,” or the corridos about Joaquín Murrieta, for example, are tales of ordinary people who, in reaction to injustice or unfair circumstances, rose to heroic status through their exploits or their ability to overcome overwhelming odds. Other classic corridos are tales of tragedy, for example the melancholy laments of campesinos jailed for minor smuggling. While popular interpretations of narcocorridos are situated in current border contexts and cannot be reduced to these issues alone,⁸ the narcotrafficker persona clearly trades on a historical border persona and is clearly positioned; narcocorridos are most popular among the large rural, working-class and migrant populations on or near the border area, although that popularity has extended to Central and Latin America, as well as significant areas in the United States (especially for such well-known groups as Los Tigres del Norte or Los Tucanes de Tijuana). Like some gangsta rap, early reggae, and recent Bollywood representations of Indian bandits, narcocorridos often describe the exploits of, and situations faced by, those who are portrayed in some manner as outlaw heroes, or social bandits. As a basic presumption, the fact that these songs are in corrido form has significance with respect to their meaning and the meaning of the narcotrafficker persona they so often feature—even when the persona is commodified in the mass marketing of narcocorridos.

THE RESEARCH

The field research on which this paper is based occurred primarily in 1998 and 1999, stemming from an ongoing theoretical interest in cultural characters or personas that emerge from high-poverty settings and contexts of subalternity. The research questions were as follows: If corridos as a genre are songs about popular heroes, and narcocorridos are largely understood to be corridos (with some exceptions), then are narcotraffickers viewed as heroes? In what way? For whom? What, then, is the heroic construction of narcotraffickers that is presented in these narratives? To investigate these questions, I conducted interviews and observations with those who listen to narcocorridos (consumers) as well as those who produce them, under the assumption that the meanings commonly drawn from a given media product result from a synthesis of producer and consumer motives, goals and interpretive frameworks, within larger cultural and transcultural discourses. A broader question was this: How do narcocorridos shape and/or reflect common understandings of the narcotrafficker within a context of social stratification and historical issues of power and conflict across the U.S.-Mexico border?

More specifically, I conducted participant-observation, fifty-five individual interviews (youth and adults), and a number of focus groups on both sides of the border in El Paso, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico as well as in other border

locations (Douglas, Arizona, directly across from Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico) and in Los Angeles, California (where a number of small studios are located that record and produce narcocorridos—e.g., Cintas Acuarias—and where larger record companies such as EMI-Latin have offices). Finally, I conducted interviews with members of a *norteño* group that performs all along the border, and writes and performs corridos (including narcocorridos) as an important part of their repertoire. These interviews were conducted in Douglas, Arizona. The results of this research were analyzed together with a comparison of traditional corrido and contemporary (narcocorrido) portrayals of the heroic protagonist.

Before any direct fieldwork, however, I examined the form and narrative content of traditional corridos in comparison to narcocorridos, to assess how narcotraffickers as protagonists are represented compared to traditional corrido heroes (e.g., Gregorio Cortez, Pancho Villa). Of course the divide between traditional corrido and narcocorrido is arbitrary, and the case has certainly been made that narcocorridos are in fact corridos just like those about the *tequileros* (tequila smugglers) of the 1930s. That said, there were some differences, which I discuss elsewhere,⁹ but enough similarities so that a significant segment of listeners did understand, and speak of, narcocorridos as corridos. Both old and new corridos feature protagonists (primarily male) who are people of the country; both narratives involve often tragic confrontations between the protagonist and bigger forces (the police, etc.); both are interpretive storytelling; both use poetic style; both are referential with respect to place and context. Musically, both old and new corridos feature guitars and accordions (now drums as well), played in a waltz (i.e., 3/4 time) and polka (i.e., 2/4 time) styles. Thus the general understanding of how to situate narcotraffickers was at least shaped in some way by the general equivalence of meaning given to the old and new narrative formats, as well as similarities of musical performance.

POWER AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION: ONE CONTEXT FOR INTERPRETATION

A second and inevitable framework for interpretation concerns the political-economic context that shaped traditional corridos and continues, in a different form, to influence narcocorridos. The U.S.-Mexico border region is a social, cultural, and political field thick with the realities and symbols of socioeconomic disparity. In a region contested since before the Mexican-American War, there remains a juxtaposition of visible power exemplified by the infamous border wall, the ubiquitous presence of the border patrol, the drug-war-related military presence, and the relative wealth and proliferation of retail outlets on the U.S. side, set against the constant fluidity of the region—families living on both sides of the border, the daily cross-border traffic, the flow of immigrants and labor, and shared media and culture. On the Mexican side, there is the jarring co-existence of dusty, dirt-poor *colonias* (neighborhoods), and the proliferation of maquiladora factories, against the sequestered wealth of Mexican ruling families, the

sometimes-garish, gated, and festooned homes of narcotraffickers, and the glitzy PRONAF business district in violence-ridden Ciudad Juárez. The axis of disparity is by no means just U.S. vs. Mexican. I recall many pictures of vast wealth differences in Juárez—the scruffy young men playing soccer on a trash-strewn dirt field directly across from the large, walled compound of one of Juárez’s fabulously wealthy ruling families.

At the time I did my research, a common wage for ordinary maquiladora workers was about \$30/week (from personal interviews). What, for example, is a young boy to think, seeing adult members of his family riding the bus to work in the early morning and returning late every day, but earning barely enough to get by, living in a colonia with no electricity or perhaps no running water? Compare that to a narcotrafficker who speaks like they do and comes from a similar background, yet commands attention and respect, and can parade around in a motorcade of shiny black SUVs accompanied by bodyguards. It is a compelling fantasy.

Interpreting Narcocorridos

Beginning with the cultural background of corridos and narcocorridos, juxtaposed against the current social/economic context, one approach to interpreting narcocorridos and their protagonists is to understand them within two different subcontexts: as narratives of populist heroes (the “traditional” role), or as commodified, exploitative media product. Neither subcontext, of course, need be considered as exclusive of the other, since narcocorridos clearly draw from both.

1. NARCOTRAFFICKERS AS POPULIST HEROES

Over the course of interviews and observations conducted on the border, several patterns of interpretation emerged that generally supported the construction of narcocorridos as populist, heroic narratives. Situated in this context, narcocorridos incorporate a multiplicity of subthemes all tied to the manner in which they are understood to represent the populist construction.

Interpreting narcocorridos as reality.

Narcocorridos contain significant references to real-life events and circumstances understood by most listeners, from the gritty realities of drug production and trafficking, to the folk-argot used to describe tools of the trade—the AK-47, for example, is widely known as a *cuerno de chivo* (horn of the goat). Narcocorridos are replete with rural deictics and phrases, from specific names of people, ranches, and events—often by nicknames that are not known to “outsiders”—to euphemisms (many popularly known) for drugs and the condition of drugs. A corrido called “El toro bravo” (“The Brave Bull”) (Los Truenos de Sinaloa), for example, refers specifically to a narcotrafficker known as the fearless bull from the Los Cortijos ranch and contains a mid-verse *grito* (shout), “Arriba Sinaloa, Capamavel! The RV!” that is clearly directed to local listeners who would understand the last

two referents.¹⁰ A well-known corrido by Los Tucanes de Tijuana called “Mis tres animales” (“My Three Friends”) employs, with characteristic humor, iconic folk-terms for specific drugs: parakeet, rooster, and goat representing cocaine, marijuana, and heroin, respectively. In the corrido “Pacas de a kilo” (“Kilo Packs”) (Los Tigres del Norte), rural code words and phrases serve as double-entendres referring to the condition of marijuana: for example, “*ganado sin garrapatas*” literally means “cattle without ticks,” a code for “marijuana without seeds.” Moreover, while presented as an insider code of sorts, the meaning is also known to many in the listening community who are not themselves involved in the drug trade. This shared aspect of a purportedly “insider” code certainly suggests a broader complicity in at least some of the symbolic representations within narcocorridos, positioning the drug trade as a wry form of contestation vis-à-vis border power configurations. It also reflects what anthropologist Howard Campbell refers to as the “normality of drug trafficking on the border.”¹¹

That “normality” was evident during fieldwork. Interviews with several adults, for example, reflected the degree to which the growing of drug-related plants (opium poppies, marijuana) has for a long time been closely integrated into the life of some rural villages. For example: one respondent in El Paso, a man in his 60s, recalled that, even in the late 1940s, in his small village in Sinaloa, there was a man who grew opium poppies in between the rows of maize. The man would pay him and his friends a peso (a lot of money for them at the time) to take a razor blade and slice all the poppy bulbs so that the “milk” would run. The “milk” (as he described it) granulates after a day or two, and the man would later come by and collect the granulated poppy milk. Another respondent told of how, in traveling through small villages in northern Sonora, he saw that people often kept plastic bags of cocaine or marijuana in their houses as a resource to sell whenever necessary. Most people, he said, were well aware that the drug trade was illegal or otherwise disfavored, but it was so much a part of daily life that people remained involved. At the same time, it was a cutthroat and competitive business, so people kept guns around as well and were not hesitant to use them if necessary.

In addition, despite the celebrity status that permeates the media-hyped narcocorridos, their singers and protagonists, at another level the narcocorrido as a genre retains the basic storytelling function inherent in the corrido tradition. An itinerant norteño music group whom I interviewed in the border region (referred to in previous work by the pseudonym Plata Norte) talked about the common practice of people in the audience bringing them lyrics or tapes to turn into corridos—some of these were about local narcotraffickers. At least a few of these local traffickers may have indeed been Robin Hood (social bandits) figures for their communities, donating money to local churches and schools and thus worthy of a corrido. Plata Norte was in fact asked to write a corrido about a local trafficker whom group members knew, and whom they viewed as “a humble man, with a good heart, and loved by the community.” In addition, there is simply the multigenerational reality of smuggling on the border—whether it is drugs, tequila, or something more benign (a pattern that is common to most borders). Smuggling often occurs across generations, and there is a set of cultural understandings that go with it.¹² Walls or

no walls, the border is a liminal space within which order and chaos, legal and illegal vie for dominance.

Mass media marketing of narcocorridos has, however, muddied these waters. Youth interviewed for the study who lived in barrios or colonias where there was a high prevalence of drug trade activity viewed narcocorridos as a reflection of “how it is” on the streets, echoing the oft-heard comment about gangsta rap. The essence of “how it is” was said to reflect both the specifics of the drug trade narratives and the attitudes, character types, and environment of risk that is presented. For these listeners, narcocorridos reflected an “atmospheric of the street.” The music is even called “hardcore,” according to narcocorrido performers and producers interviewed during fieldwork in Los Angeles, site of many recording studios (from in-person interviews with representatives from two major media companies and one smaller, border-oriented one). Yet because of the ubiquitous media caricatures of narcotraffickers and the narco-world, the line between “reflecting (street) reality” and media representations of the reality that people “see” on the street can be difficult to assess.

Interpreting corridos as political statements.

Political undertones and overtones were present in a number of the corridos I reviewed, following the corrido tradition. In some interviews with listeners, the source of admiration for the narcotraffickers sung about in narcocorridos had to do specifically with narratives in which the narcotrafficker “defeated” or managed to transport their drugs past the police, border patrol (*migra*), or other authorities. In a well-known narcocorrido called “Las dos monjas” (“Two Nuns”) (Grupo Exterminador), two traffickers carrying cocaine and marijuana cross the border dressed as nuns. When border agents discover their cargo, the “nuns” pull out their guns and shoot them. In Ciudad Juárez, where I conducted much of the research, many narcocorridos had been written about Amado Carrillo Fuentes, head of the Juárez cartel until his death in 1997, who was called “Lord of the Skies” for his fleet of jets and purported ability to conduct radar jamming. Other corridos are more directly political. In “El general” (“The General”) (Los Tigres del Norte), the hypocrisy of the U.S. drug war is confronted directly:

*A diferentes países los certifican los gringos
No quieren que exista droga
Pues dicen que es un peligro
¿Díganme, quién certifica
A los Estados Unidos?*

*Para agarrar a los narcos
México ha sido derecho
Los gringos compran la coca
La pagan a cualquier precio
No quieren que exista droga
Pero se dan privilegio*

Different countries are certified by the gringo [American] government,
 And that government says it doesn't want drugs to exist
 The gringo government says drugs are dangerous
 But tell me, who certifies
 The United States?

Mexico has tried honestly and hard
 To apprehend the narcotraffickers
 The gringos buy the cocaine
 They'll pay any price for it
 They don't want drugs to exist
 But they give themselves a break

Interpreting corridos as heroic tales or allegories.

This is a key element in understanding the role and place of the narcotrafficker persona, again shaped by the cultural place of corridos in the popular imaginary. While drug trafficking is glorified, and traffickers pictured as models of power and daring, they also live in the constant presence of treachery, betrayal, and tragedy. Second, the nature of heroic status itself is ambiguous. Narcotraffickers are not always equated with historical archetypes such as Pancho Villa or Gregorio Cortéz, though “celebrity” narcotraffickers are often portrayed in mythical terms (as noted, Amado Carrillo Fuentes was called “Lord of the Skies”). Shifting and situated interpretation mitigates easy application of the heroic label. The heroic qualities attended to by particular listeners are contextual. Importantly in this respect, there is a narco-saint named Jesús Malverde and a shrine in his honor in Culiacán, Sinaloa—it is a shrine frequented both by traffickers and the poor, because the actual or composite Jesús Malverde is viewed by many as a Robin Hood, a people's bandit who was caught and executed in 1909. The adulation of Malverde as a folk-saint suggests one aspect of the narcotrafficker mythology that touches the common religious imaginary, perhaps in his capacity as a provider who is in some way doomed, who sacrifices—or is sacrificed—for the common people.

Interpreting narcocorridos as inevitable tragedy.

It is important to note that the corrido—and by extension those characters represented in its narratives—is a “marked genre” to start with because the corrido form itself, at least this genre of corrido, highlights misfortunes and/or death as part of the narrative structure through which the protagonist is represented, and interpreted, as a hero. This is a very interesting ontological element of corridos that may have some ties to ontological elements of other music/aesthetic genres that grow out of situations of concentrated or recurring poverty, where the life, the character, of the protagonist (in this case the narcotrafficker) is created, or at least defined, by his/her death. As such, death is part of the developmental process, and the “life” of the protagonist achieves a kind of completeness after death, as an ongoing iteration of a moral type. In “Mis tres animales,” Los Tucanes de Tijuana sing that “*Traigo cerquita la muerte, pero no me se rajar*” (Death is always near me,

but I am not giving in). Or, in “El gallo jugado” (“The Experienced Rooster”) (Los Cuacos del Norte), the corridista sings:

*Los que andan en el negocio
Nunca se deben confiar
Porque hasta el mejor amigo
Bien los puede traicionar
Y lo mandan al panteón
O acabas en el penal.*

Those who are in the business
Should never trust anyone,
because even your best friend
can betray you,
and either he'll be sent to the cemetery
or you'll end up in prison.

There are many cultural antecedents for this. Octavio Paz, writing on the role of death in Mexican culture, explained that “our deaths illuminate our lives.” And directly apposite to corridos, Paz speaks of death as a reflection, as a summation of life: “Tell me how you die and I will tell you who you are.”¹³ Thus corridos are often “tales of how someone died, as a way of saying who they were,” as well as conveying an ongoing message, like a historical-cultural chain letter, about how to be.

Interpreting corridos as moral lessons.

To the outsider, thinking of narcocorridos as moral lessons may seem unlikely, given the subject matter. But it is not uncommon for narcocorridos to contain mixed messages about the consequences of involvement in trafficking, or to use drug trafficking as a vehicle for messages about other themes. Members of Plata Norte said that some of the lyrics address moral issues that have meaning beyond their drug context. They gave me an example of a corrido about a man who was so involved in the drug business—a kind of workaholic—that he forgot to feed his children, and the corrido describes his children in the back of his truck eating cocaine because they were starving due to his neglect. It is a narcocorrido, but also a statement about being a responsible parent in this interpretation.

That narcocorridos may include a moral component is squarely in line with the historical nature of corridos as a genre. Moreover, since corridos and their moral messages were initially situated within the antagonistic U.S.-Mexico border relationship, the moral component overlaps with the political described earlier. Valenzuela's exegesis of narcocorridos and the roots of narcoculture underscore this point.¹⁴ As Madrid notes in his review, “Valenzuela shows that narcocorridos are not only descriptive but prescriptive. They report the reasons for entering the drug business and the deeds and adventures of drug dealers, but they also encode the values that would allow an individual to successfully escalate positions in this highly stratified world.”¹⁵ Indeed, there are some narcocorridos in which those

values do encompass a “righteous” rejection of hypocrisy from north of the border, and a sense of moral justification for the business (of drug selling) and all it entails. The signatory *Jefe de jefes* CD by Los Tigres del Norte is a good example. Most, however, do not rise to that level, but instead focus on the more narrow attributes of the protagonist as *valiente* (courageous) or the details of a conflict in which these attributes are manifested.

Interpreting corridos as jests.

Narcocorridos and narcotraffickers are also interpreted in the context of “intercultural jests,”¹⁶ in which the protagonists fool, trick, or best the opposition (e.g., American *migra* [border patrol], Mexican police if representing elite interests). “Las dos monjas,” mentioned earlier, falls in that category. Concurrent with its references to death (mentioned above), “Mis tres animales” does as well, particularly in its tongue-in-cheek comparison of drug trafficking to McDonald’s, the iconic capitalist enterprise:

*En California y Nevada
en Tejas y en Arizona
también allá en Chicago
tengo unas cuantas personas
que ven de mis animales
más que hamburguesas
en el McDonald’s.*

In California and Nevada,
In Texas and Arizona,
even out there in Chicago,
I have some people
Who sell my animals [drugs]
More than hamburgers
sold at McDonald’s

Several of the youth I interviewed said that they thought of narcocorrido lyrics as fun, or as funny, in the manner of cartoon action or pro-wrestling.¹⁷ The narcotrafficker character here is not interpreted as real, but as a fantasy and entertainment—though still drawing on resonant themes. Norteño musicians in Plata Norte said that they themselves listen to narcocorridos along with other norteño music, in part because “we get a kick out of the lyrics,” according to one member. And when I attended a large concert by well-known norteño group Los Tigres del Norte, the crowd responded with great enthusiasm when they played a set of narcocorridos. On stage, there was an exaggerated display of “gunshots” and sound. In one sense, there was clearly a sense of play involved in the performance—yet a substantial number of the audience were dressed the way narcotraffickers often dress, with boots, hats, silk shirts, and cellphones

(a look labeled as “chero” by many interview respondents—most likely a shortened form of *ranchero* [rancher]).

Interpreting narcocorridos as an image enhancer and source of power.

Because of the way they are often interpreted, the very act of singing, listening to, or being around narcocorridos has a collective emotional impact on those involved. Interview sources described narcocorridos as strong or powerful songs, in addition to being fun. Even more, it was said that playing narcocorridos helps in the self-creation of an image that is more powerful than the person “doing the creating” may actually be. Narcocorridos, said sources from Plata Norte (from personal interview), “portray you as an image either that you want others to believe or that you want to believe...” By having them around, and playing them, “other people will give you credit for being stronger than you are, more powerful than you are.” Thus, it is said that narcocorridos “make you braver, make you stronger.” In this way, they function like an “intoxicant,” an intoxicant of power. A gathering of men, listening to narcocorridos, along with drinking alcohol, will get “pumped up.” This aspect of narcocorridos is similar to the effect that corridos had as songs of the Mexican Revolution, and, for that matter, as songs of the Chicano movement in the United States. One source told me, for example, that when he was in prison, Latino inmates would sing corridos from the Chicano movement as a source of group solidarity and strength.

Interpreting narcocorridos as “country music” and/or lower-class music.

For many respondents, corridos (including narcocorridos) were clearly a regional signifier, an urban-rural signifier, and a class signifier. This was a source of pride for those who felt represented by these corridos and, not surprisingly, a source of negative imagery for those who perceived themselves as of a higher class. For rural norteño listeners, narcocorridos portray men from the hills or the *sierra* who can survive, who can take it, who refuse to give way to anyone. That image in itself is intermingled with portrayals of narcotraffickers. There is in some narcocorrido lyrics a great love expressed for this tough land and at times a pride in the marijuana-growing business, as a business that is of the hills and that has helped people survive and prosper (even if they are not members of the elite).

The obverse of the positive rural signification is the negative connotation attached by others to the same signification. Echoing an opinion heard from a number of adults, a middle-aged woman and mother of several children, who ran a small restaurant in downtown Juárez (from personal interview), said that narcocorridos, and corridos in general, are music that appeals to people with lower levels of education, or to maquiladora workers. She said that she loved the beautiful norteño romantic ballads, but as for corridos, “they [corrido singers] sing like they are squeezing their necks,” a reference to the reedy, thin vocal tone of untrained country singers. Moreover, executives I interviewed who manage a group of radio stations in Ciudad Juárez delineated each station’s audience by class—not surprisingly, the station that

played corridos/narcocorridos was unapologetically directed to what management viewed as a lower-class audience.

2. NARCOTRAFFICKERS AND MEDIA EXPLOITATION

The second major context for interpreting narcocorridos is directly related to their popularity as a *product* and as a lightning rod for controversy.

Narcocorridos as marketing tool.

There are also aspects of narcocorridos that trade on the heroic tradition, but foreground elements that are significantly different. First, narcocorridos are now big business, and the narcotrafficker persona is a hot commodity in itself. Interviews with small and large studios/producers demonstrated that corridos and other norteño music, once rejected by radio stations as “poor people’s music,” attracted their attention—and thereby that of the media producers—because of the underground popularity of narcocorridos and the play that is made of the narcotrafficker persona. After all, the most famous early narcocorrido singer, Chalino Sánchez, gained his early popularity by distributing tapes at flea markets in the Los Angeles area. In locations along the border, I constantly heard narcocorridos playing on car and truck stereos, and they were ubiquitous in small music/CD shops.

Thus, and this is important, the narcotrafficker persona is further constructed and amplified by the music-producing industry because it sells CDs/tapes. Here the narrative presentation of the narcotrafficker persona appears, I would argue, in its most shallow and sensationalized form, on ads, CD covers, etc., and the focus is primarily on the “in your face” or “outrageous” element of the persona, though there is sometimes the “social bandit” element involved. One such tape that I purchased on the border was labeled *Puros corridos perrones* (Pure badass corridos), followed by *Somos cocodrilos...y que!* (We are cokeheads... so what!). Another in the same *Puros corridos perrones* series was called *Listos pa' cualquier ruido...!* (Ready for whatever trouble), while yet another tape/CD was headlined with the following phrase, *De peones a reyes* (From rags to riches), and showed narcotraffickers around a table, drinking and (presumably) doing business. In this way, there are many parallels to gangsta rap, and, in fact, the further construction of the persona via the music industry draws (by their own admission) from the marketing and construction of the gangsta rap image.

Narcotraffickers themselves, seeing the power of their caricature as a marketing tool in the media, often commission norteño groups to write corridos about themselves, as a kind of advertisement, and as a creation of self through the commodified narcotrafficker persona (which, as noted, includes social bandit and other socially positive components). I saw this during a visit to a small studio that produced widely distributed CD narcocorrido compilations that focused on the exaggerated narcotrafficker image. Some of these were commissioned and recorded by norteño bands hired for that purpose. More ironic was the “bad boy” CD art, featuring glaring narcotrafficker archetypes leaning against black, tinted-windowed

trucks, brandishing AK-47s or other weapons. Apparently, some of these cover scenes were photographed in front of the studio, located in a small building in a Long Beach, California, neighborhood—but the actual setting was replaced by other backdrops to represent more appropriate locations.

In a more recent development, narcocorridos, like most other pop music, have been disseminated in tandem with MySpace, YouTube and other Internet-oriented productions, and have thus merged with a broader media milieu that arguably dilutes, to some degree, the corrido-narcocorrido connection. While narcocorridos in a YouTube format are sometimes just band performances (which can simply be seen as a performance like any other), other times they are presented as soundtracks to a video of something else, including violent and bloody executions, interrogations, and graphic displays of bodies. It is in this latter case where they could be viewed as taking on a different function than the “social or moral tales” or “editorialized news” that has been understood as a defining characteristic of the genre.

Narcocorridos as “threat channel.”

As one example of the new media evolution of the corrido, narcocorridos disseminated via YouTube are now used as a means of broadcasting threats. Where corridos and narcocorridos, as noted, have been narratives *about* hero or narcotrafficker protagonists, they have not typically been direct statements or messages from one person to another.

Such is the case, for example, of the graphic YouTube video accompanying the late banda and corrido singer Valentín Elizalde’s “A mis enemigos” (“To my Enemies”), which is a narcocorrido that is explicit in its challenge and insults, sung by Elizalde (who was said to be a friend of the Sinaloa cartel) and directed to the Gulf cartel. Elizalde sang that corrido during a concert in Reynosa, Tamaulipas,—in the heart of Gulf cartel territory—and was gunned down (with his driver and manager) right after the show (in late 2006), although the evidence is not clear whether he was shot for that reason or that reason alone.

The lyrics he sang are explicit. For example (the English is a loose translation):

*Al que no le vino el saco
Pídalo a su medida
Conmigo no andan jugando
Pa'que se arriesgan la vida
Traigo una super patada
Y los traigo ya en la mira*

*Para hablar a mis espaldas
Pare eso se pintan solos
Por que no me hablan de frente
Acaso temen al mono
Ya saben con quien se meten
Vengan a rifar la suerte*

To him who never got his
 I demand they make it right
 With me there is no playing around
 For this they risk their life
 I carry a “super kick”
 And I already have you in my [gun] sights

To talk behind my back
 For that they betray themselves
 Because they don't say it to my face
 Maybe they're afraid of the monkey
 They know who they're dealing with
 So come on and take your chances!

While there are indeed a few verses elsewhere in this corrido that touch on the traditional corrido-like ruminations about home and the loneliness of life under dangerous conditions, the essence of the corrido as a whole is reflected in these lyrics. It is not “news,” but a person-to-person or group-to-group challenge.

And for the moment, as the cartel wars in Mexico continue, narcocorridos have increasingly appeared in this context—sometimes even as part of “threat broadcasts” that specifically name an intended victim. This may, however, simply be a temporary phenomenon associated with the current drug violence and in that sense may not represent an enduring change in the genre.

NARCOCORRIDOS AND TRAFFICKERS: THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON

The narcotraffickers and their narrative vehicle, narcocorridos, clearly function together as a discursive channel for the creation, re-creation and dissemination of a packed, polysemic cultural character. However, it is also clear that the narcotrafficker persona and its vehicle touch on a kind of cross-cultural persona that seems to me near-universal in borders—borders considered in the broader sense as divides or liminal spaces between not just nations but also class and other social divisions. In this sense, there is a clear connection to the universality of Hobsbawm's social bandit. As I wrote in the prologue to a previous book,¹⁸ the American people's bard Woody Guthrie once asked, “Why do people set down and write great songs and ballads about their outlaws...and never about governors, mayors or police chiefs?” In answering his own question, he said that an outlaw is someone “disgusted with trying to live decent in the rich man's system,” who tries to “whip the world down to his size,” only to find that he cannot because the world is much bigger than he is. Yet he tries all the same, even if he “goes down shooting.” This, Guthrie wrote, stood in contrast to politicians who “shoot the bull and the hot air, but they don't try their best to make the world better,” and so people don't “waste any pencil lead” on politicians, except to criticize them.¹⁹

The compelling nature of such oppositional characters, whether caricatured, exploited or not, has a universal appeal. Veerappan, the Indian bandit and Robin Hood, was only captured after thirty years of eluding the police (eluding them with ample help from people in his home territory, the Sathyamangalam forest in South Central India, in the state of Tamil Nadu). He was reputed to have been motivated in part by revenge against police and other authorities for their treatment of the local population, and his character has spawned movies, songs, ringtones, and more. Like narcotraffickers, he had significant influence on local government officials, through bribes, through regular communication, and at times through threats. It is virtually *de rigeur* that reggae, particularly early reggae, is full of tales about Jamaicans from marginalized, high-poverty areas like Trenchtown in Kingston, who ran against the law, or in the case of Bob Marley's famous "I Shot the Sheriff," who engaged in violence against the police as a result of unjust treatment. This is highly reminiscent of the prototypical "El corrido de Gregorio Cortez." Some early gangsta rap (e.g., Ice T, Public Enemy) combined political critique and the discourse of hardcore urban life, before the genre became dominated by artifice and exaggeration for marketing purposes. Given the role that piracy has assumed in former fishing villages on the Somali coast, it would be surprising if there were not already a litany of songs and narratives celebrating the heroic exploits of recent Somali pirates.

Yet there is something nearly like a law or principle in the axiomatic movement of narratives that originate with the subaltern—at that point, typically genuine reflections in varying ways of tangible, meaningful circumstances—to the broader mass media and an appeal that is based on a simulacrum, a mere style, or even as a hood ornament for the play of rebellion where rebellion has no real meaning. Call it the "rock 'n' roll transition." That said, there seems to be enough power in the social bandit persona that it remains recognizable far from its originating circumstances. The "narcocorrido's narcotrafficker" would not make good product, so to speak, if this were not the case.

Notes

1. Travis Fox and William Booth, "Mexico at War: Narcocorridos and Nightlife in Mexicali," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2009.
2. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969).
3. See among others Américo Paredes, "The Mexican Corrido: Its Rise and Fall," in *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*, ed. by Richard Bauman (Austin: Center for Mexican-American Studies, 1993); Américo Paredes, "*With His Pistol in His Hand*": A Border Ballad and Its Hero. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); John H. McDowell, *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Helena Simonett, "Narcocorridos: An Emerging Micromusic of Nuevo L.A.," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2001); Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); María Herrera-Sobek, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); María Herrera-Sobek, "The Theme of Drug Smuggling in the Mexican Corrido," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, Vol. 7, No. 4

- (1979); José Manuel Valenzuela, *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en Mexico* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 2003); and Elijah Wald, *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns and Guerrillas* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).
4. See Mark Edberg, "The Narcotrafficker in Representation and Practice: A Cultural Persona from the Mexican Border," *Ethos. Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2004). For "person exemplars" see Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture and the Problem of Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
 5. Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
 6. See Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 14–16.
 7. See Américo Paredes, "The Mexican Corrido: Its Rise and Fall," in *Folklore and Culture*, ed. Bauman; Paredes, "With His Pistol in His Hand"; and Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
 8. See Mark Edberg, *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).
 9. See Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*. For example, with these loose form guidelines: Having an introductory reference to the performance; setting, place, date; verbal exchange with narrative detail; and a farewell, closing or *despedida*.
 10. Not even my local research collaborators at the border were able to adequately decode this, shrugging their shoulders and responding that it must mean something very local.
 11. Howard Campbell, "Drug Trafficking Stories: Everyday Forms of Narco-Folklore on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (2005), 327.
 12. For example, famed drug kingpin Pablo Acosta from Ojinaga, Mexico, came from a long family line of smugglers, as described in Terence E. Poppa, *Drug Lord: The Life and Death of a Mexican Kingpin* (New York: Pharos Books, 1990).
 13. Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 54.
 14. José Manuel Valenzuela, *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en Mexico* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 2003).
 15. Alejandro L. Madrid, "Review of *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en México*," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 49, No. 2, (2005), 319.
 16. See Paredes, "The Mexican Corrido."
 17. We may refer to the sense of Barthes's pro-wrestlers. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972).
 18. Edberg, *El Narcotraficante*.
 19. Transcribed from an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. titled "This Land is Your Land: The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie," viewed summer 2000.

PART TWO

Nationalisms

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Mariachi Reimaginings

Encounters with Technology, Aesthetics, and Identity

DONALD HENRIQUES ■

From the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, the voice of the singing *charro* (Mexican cowboy) and the instrumental sounds of the mariachi filled the jukeboxes, airwaves, and movie theaters of the Americas. Transnational radio networks led by Radio XEW carried these sounds to audiences throughout the hemisphere as the *comedia ranchera* (ranch play) film genre made cultural icons of charro singer/actors Tito Guízar, Jorge Negrete, and Pedro Infante. During the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema (from approximately 1935 to 1955) the *canción ranchera* became the signature musical genre of the *comedia ranchera* through on-screen performances and elaborate scenes that featured the sound and image of the singing charro and his mariachi. Performance practices and repertoires that emerged during this period still resonate with contemporary audiences and signify the extent to which the aesthetic foundations for current mariachi practices are historically linked to the era of the 1930s through 1950s.

This chapter examines the history of transnational electronic media practices, aesthetic ideals, and notions of identity that were critical in the development of the modern mariachi. A conceptual framework based on the notion of *reimaginings* is evoked here in an effort to consider the cultural, political, social, and economic interests and processes that unevenly converged within contexts of production and their subsequent impact on mariachi as a musical tradition. This approach is intended to highlight ongoing political, economic, social, and cultural processes that initiate, mediate, and respond to shifts in technology and aesthetics. Contemporary mariachi performance models—shaped by cultural histories, political ideologies, and transnational economics—were selectively transmitted through the sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and films of the Golden Age. The reimagining framework opens a conceptual space for considering interactions

between and among cultural producers, intermediaries, and receivers within transnational power flows. By considering the participation of individuals, groups, and corporations in these processes, attention can be focused on the types of influences that effect the construction of cultural products.

The borderlands region of the American Southwest has contributed more to the development of the U.S. mariachi movement than any other region. It was in the borderland states of Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico that interest in preserving and expanding mariachi as an expression of Mexican and Chicano identity gained its footing in the mid-1970s. Presently, the level of performance, especially among young mariachis, has never been higher and can be attributed to the sustained forty-year effort by community leaders, musicians, and cultural organizations. This chapter highlights ideas, actions, and practices that helped shape today's contemporary mariachi sound. The section that follows summarizes some aspects of the U.S. mariachi movement and its significance in the borderlands of the Southwest. Particular developments are emphasized in order to highlight relationships with media practices and aesthetic notions that emerged from the era of the 1930s through 1950s.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MARIACHI IN THE U.S. BORDERLANDS

For nearly forty years, the borderlands region has been at the forefront of the U.S. mariachi movement. Mariachi public school programs and large-scale events such as student workshops, competitions, and performances by major artists, are examples that indicate the high levels of performance and community interest that mariachis and their audiences share in the U.S. borderlands. Mariachi programs in public schools and universities not only reflect the academic and artistic ambitions of students, their families, and teachers, but also the political and social advances that emerged following the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the struggle for civil rights.

Mariachi has acquired special status in the U.S. borderlands as a cultural symbol of high social value that is connected with notions of Chicano identity. Through the efforts of civic and cultural leaders, as well as individual musicians and aficionados, mariachi has become deeply intertwined into the social and cultural lives of young people in parts of the American Southwest. Mariachi in the borderlands is experienced through a variety of traditional social/cultural contexts (birthday celebrations, *quinceñeras*, weddings, etc.) as well as in ways that are different from more localized expressions such as *conjunto/norteño*—partly as a result of mariachi's distinction as *the* global sound emblem of Mexico as well as an acknowledgment of music's symbolic value for U.S.-Mexican communities in the American Southwest.

Stylistic developments that were generated in the borderlands have had a considerable impact on the overall U.S. mariachi movement. Some innovations, such as adding a drum set or accordion to the standard mariachi ensemble,

have been limited while other innovations, such as singing in English, have had a more significant influence on the tradition. This practice of incorporating songs from American pop repertoires began in the 1980s. Mariachi arrangements of standards like “New York, New York,” became especially popular with high school groups. A current example that extends the limits of this type of practice is The Bronx, a Los Angeles punk rock band that recently released a recording of original songs sung in English and performed in mariachi style.¹ In many ways however, the most far-reaching development to emerge from the U.S. borderlands linked mariachi to aesthetic models and methods of instruction that were consistent with those of the European art music tradition. These connections were reinforced by professional mariachis and instructors with formal music training and transmitted through the teaching of mariachi—a trend that has been especially evident at large-scale events known as “mariachi conferences.”²

An innovation that coincided with the mariachi conference movement of the early 1980s was the emergence of the “show mariachi”—an elite strand of the tradition that displayed a virtuosity and aesthetic sensibility closely identified with art (classical) music. Groups of this type formed affiliations with educational/cultural institutions throughout the Southwest as mariachi festivals with student workshops and competitions gained in popularity. In recent years, show mariachis have performed frequently with symphony orchestras at festivals and on subscription series “pops” concerts. This mixing of mariachi with orchestra indicates an aesthetic sensibility (shared among many performers and aficionados) that emphasizes vocal and instrumental virtuosity and communicates the musical attributes of mariachi as an “art.” In terms of social value, some mariachi practitioners also see this linkage of mariachi with art music as a way to influence attitudes, particularly among non-Latinos, and enhance the cultural value of the tradition.

The aesthetic models from the Golden Age are continually reinvested through live performances, mariachi competitions, and the teaching of the tradition. The contemporary literature on mariachi however does not adequately address the confluence of transnational media practices, aesthetics, and notions of identity that impacted the tradition beginning in the 1920s. Early twentieth-century sound technologies and transnational economic practices played an important role in the development of the modern mariachi. Sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and films were the electronic media forms that not only standardized the tradition, but also created the aesthetic signatures of voices and instruments that continue to have an impact on contemporary musicians. As the operatic voices of Guízar, Negrete, and Infante and the instrumental precision of popular groups such as Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán became the aesthetic standard, traditional repertoires and performance practices were reimagined to accommodate a new conceptualization of the mariachi sound for a modern audience.

Allá en el rancho grande (*Over at the Big Ranch*) in 1936 was the international success that propelled Mexico to a position of leadership in film production in Latin America. The setting of the film, plot, and the title song combined

to reference the society and culture of Mexico's rural western region—the area commonly identified as the birthplace of mariachi.³ *Allá en el rancho grande* was the first in a series of western, ranch-themed films that were especially popular with audiences throughout Latin America, as well as in Spain, and the United States. In Texas, movie distributors were well aware that receipts from the western charro films were better than any other Mexican-produced movie genre at that time.⁴ As more of the popular ranch-themed films were produced in the early 1940s, scenes of the singing charro with an expanded mariachi became common and film directors exploited the opportunity to perform the featured song, which was usually also the title of the film—a practice taken from Hollywood. And, in what appears to have been a simultaneous and seamless pairing of the singing charro with mariachi, their union soon became standard and accepted as traditional practice.

The radio broadcasts and films of the Golden Age signaled a transformation in the sound and image of mariachi; yet this dramatic aesthetic shift had less to do with the past and tradition and more with transnational media processes and constructions of identity. In order to fulfill these new aesthetic goals, mariachi performance practices gradually adapted and changed in style and substance by selectively echoing the local while forging a new, modern sound transmitted by the electronic media to national and international audiences.



Figure 5.1 Film poster for Tito Guízar's *Allá en el rancho grande*. Courtesy of the Agrasanchez Film Archive.

As a cultural product, mariachi has been shaped by practices and ideologies related to transnational electronic media industries, politics, and culture. In order to approach the complex relationships between entities and ideas it is necessary to consider the ways in which practices, ideologies, and identity intertwine in the formation of the cultural product. In this approach, technology, aesthetics, and cultural practice intersect at important contact points that contributed to the form and production of the modern mariachi.

MARIACHI (TRANS)NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Cultural Production

In *Transforming Modernity* (1993), anthropologist Néstor García Canclini outlines the significance of social relations in cultural production and links economic practices with symbolic value. As representations, cultural products are imbued with meanings that are the result of complex and nuanced notions of tradition, ownership, and artistic process.⁵ The study of culture brings into focus the impact of social relations on the processes of production and highlights the extent to which cultural products exemplify the intersection of ideas, interests, and practices. Representation and the “staging” of culture and traditions, along with the interactions of subjects in aesthetic processes, indicate ways in which the social and cultural worlds coincide and interact within the economy of cultural production. The conceptualization of aesthetics as a significant part of this process (and not relegated to the mythical realms of the “beautiful” or the “spiritual”) opens the discourse to an examination of the ways in which performance practices exemplify social/cultural negotiations and the political economy of cultural production.

The emergence of twentieth-century popular culture was linked to developments in sound and broadcast technologies. Canclini notes that the “popular” is constructed through “the diffusing and integrating actions of the culture industry” and also concludes that as an industry it is “more interested in constructing and renewing the *simultaneous* contact between broadcasters and receivers than in the formation of historical memory.”⁶ The electronic media industries provide pathways for sounds and (moving) images through processes that must continually reconnect in order to fulfill the needs of modern capitalism. Through these conduits of communication, contact is maintained between cultural producers, intermediaries, and receivers; however, the structure of the message represents the broader participation of political ideologies and economic practices. In addition, since reception of the message also has the potential for considerable variability, the relationship between “broadcasters” and “receivers” is in a continuous state of subtle, dynamic change.

Mariachi as a form of cultural production has been linked to rural, urban, and transnational electronic media processes. In its media-produced configuration mariachi bears little resemblance to its rural past, yet historical meanings are

continuously reinvested and rearticulated. In the *comedia ranchera* films of the 1940s, storylines, landscapes, and on-screen performances infused notions of nostalgia in idealized representations of rural social and cultural lives. Urban middle-class moviegoers in Mexico, only twenty years removed from the Revolution, flocked to theaters in Mexico City and Guadalajara to see the ranch-themed films beginning in the late 1930s. Groups such as Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán granted an aura of authenticity to these film performances and, as a result, seemingly connected the “real” with the “reimagined.” Songwriters and composers in particular contributed to the process of mariachi cultural production through the creation of original works that evoked rural sounds. Featured songs valorized the nation, the countryside and “the people.” In this way the media-produced mariachi represented a refashioning of musical traits that used representative sounds of the tradition for a musical evocation of the rural past performed in the cinematic present.

In the U.S. borderlands, audiences from the Rio Grande Valley to Los Angeles enthusiastically embraced Mexican cinema in large numbers. In *Mexican Movies in the United States* (2006), Rogelio Agrasánchez Jr. provides a detailed account of the films, theaters, and audiences involved in Mexican cinema. In the border region Mexican-produced films attracted large audiences in the 1930s and movie going became a regular family activity.⁷ The *comedia ranchera* films were especially appealing since the vast majority of audiences had family ties to rural Mexico. For most, the nostalgia-infused ranchera film genre was not about the reimagining of an idealized prerevolutionary Mexico, but about the personal stories and identifications with rural evocations that related to movie goers’ experiences.⁸

The relationship of mariachi to postrevolutionary national identity had ideological connections with social, cultural, and political discourses that intensified in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s. The concept of *mestizaje* was at the center of ideologies that sought to define and shape national identity in the aftermath of the Revolution. Music and the visual arts were prominent in the effort to formulate and use symbols that were believed to be emblematic of the “nation.”⁹ Radio, in particular, played a significant role in government efforts to instill a sense of national culture among the masses through educational arts and music programs. *Indigenismo*, a sociopolitical as well as an arts movement that valorized indigenous identity, and *hispanismo*, an ideology that looked to Spain as the cultural “motherland” for Mexico, provided the political backdrop for discourses of cultural nationalism that vied for supremacy during the postrevolutionary period.

Tito Guízar, the fair-skinned charro with the voice of an opera star, exemplified an aesthetic link with conservative hispanismo ideology. As the lead character in the first *comedia ranchera*, Guízar’s voice mirrored hispanista preference for Spanish/European cultural influence in Mexico. Released during the era of *indigenismo* and the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), some intellectuals and scholars have analyzed *Allá en el rancho grande* as a critical response to the policies of the Cárdenas administration. The Cárdenas era was by all accounts the most liberal of the postrevolutionary period, particularly with regard to

indigenous issues and efforts at land reform. As film critic Aurelio de los Reyes noted: “*La crítica al gobierno implícita en el argumento de Allá en el rancho grande se hacía desde el punto de vista conservador y tradicional. Era una crítica hábilmente envuelta en el ropaje de las costumbres y de las canciones.*”¹⁰ [Author’s translation] (The criticism of the government implicit in the screenplay of *Allá en el rancho grande* was made from a conservative and traditional point of view. It was a criticism that was skillfully enveloped in the style of the customs and the songs). If *Allá en el rancho grande* was a disguised critique of the government, then the effort proved to be quite profitable. *Allá en el rancho grande* was not only a box office success, but was the first Mexican film to be internationally recognized receiving an award at the Venice International Film Festival in 1938.¹¹

The hispanismo perspective on mestizaje devalued indigenous identity in favor of Spanish heritage and the tenets of Catholicism, social class hierarchies, and language.¹² In the 1940s, the resonance of hispanismo with the *comedia ranchera* film genre was also reflected in the conservative political turn in the Mexican government as evidenced by the presidential elections of Manuel Camacho in 1940 and Miguel Alemán in 1946. The *comedia ranchera* itself also changed in the 1940s as Jorge Negrete replaced Tito Guízar and the charro films became more expansive with larger casts and more scenes featuring the vocal talents of the singing charro and his mariachi. In general, storylines enhanced the social stature of the charro, displayed his Catholic identity, and along with expected doses of machismo and romanticism, emphasized his self-confidence, loyalty, patriotism, and a willingness to fight for “right.” The classic charro character never backed down, was resourceful, and would always be there to protect his country, his way of life, and the woman he loved.

The characters portrayed in the typical *comedia ranchera* (the macho charro, the patriarchal *hacendado*, the controlling mother, etc.) were drawn from popular theater and provided an entertaining mix that producers felt would appeal to general audiences.¹³ Once the popularity of this film genre was realized, more were produced as quickly as possible—usually in a manner of months. *Allá en el rancho grande* has been critiqued as a film that perpetuated stereotypes in order to be successful with international audiences. Gender roles and the societal structure associated with prerevolutionary hacienda life emphasized conservative values with the *hacendado* and charro characters employed as metaphors for a paternalistic society.¹⁴

As a cultural product, the *comedia ranchera* genre valorized rural life primarily for urban audiences. The western region and specifically the area of *Los altos de Jalisco* (Jalisco’s highlands) was well known for its hispanista tendencies. The Cristero Rebellion of the late 1920s that enveloped the western states was an armed response to the regulating of religious activities by the government. This revolt demonstrated the intensity of antigovernment sentiments held by the predominately Catholic rural population in parts of the western region and resulted in the deaths of nearly ninety thousand people. Hispanista writers and intellectuals portrayed the area as an enclave of pure Spanish heritage that had been preserved since the colonial period.¹⁵ The people and region of Los altos provided

film producers and screen writers with a rich backdrop for movies that resonated with hispanista ideals. By tying the character of the light-skinned singing charro to the strong Catholic identity of the region, as well as to the reputation of the inhabitants as people of strength, film producers and movie studio executives created a representation of *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) viewed through the hispanista lens.

The *comedia ranchera* formula continued to be popular well into the 1950s, primarily driven by the star power of singing charros Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante. Political conservatism continued, especially with the onset of World War II and the interests of the U.S. to keep Mexico, as well as the rest of Latin America, within the Allied sphere of influence. The charro figure in the 1940s was utilized beyond the *comedia ranchera* in films of the western variety that emphasized a more serious tone.¹⁶ As a national symbol, the charro grew in stature and became ubiquitous in Mexican popular culture. As other charro figures emerged including José Alfredo Jiménez, Miguel Aceves Mejía, and Javier Solís in the 1950s, along with Vicente Fernández and Antonio Aguilar in the 1960s, the social and cultural meanings changed. However, the merging of the charro with mariachi and the *canción ranchera* created an enduring and powerful symbol of identity for Spanish-speaking audiences throughout the world.

Tradition

“Tradition” is an overarching principle that exerts considerable influence over music practitioners and their audiences. As a cultural construct, tradition “has little to do with the persistence of old forms, but more with the ways in which forms and values are linked together.”¹⁷ In mariachi, references to the past are encountered through styles of dress, musical genres, methods of instruction, and performance practices. Varied interpretations of the meanings associated with a tradition are a normal part of the reimagining process and formulated within broad social/cultural contexts. The value of a particular aspect or characteristic within a tradition is generally tied to perceptions of what is allowable in terms of continuity, break, or blending. Decisions on the limits of a tradition are linked to social/cultural trends and processes that interweave with (or divert from) personal experience, expectations, and broader notions of identity.

In the nineteenth century, musical performance in rural life extended primarily to civic and religious celebrations, social gatherings, and family entertainment. It was not uncommon for musical groups to consist of (at least in part) family members from different generations. Gaspar Vargas founded Mariachi Vargas in 1898 and during the course of the twentieth century the group became the most famous mariachi in the world. Although no blood relative of Gaspar Vargas currently performs in the group (his son Silvestre died in 1985), publicity materials and album titles over the years focus on the notion of “generations” to describe the history of the ensemble.¹⁸ This organizing frame implies continuity as well as a sense of family and fits neatly under a common conception of tradition.¹⁹

Innovation is necessary for a tradition to survive, however it can also be a source of controversy for practitioners, aficionados, media critics, and audiences. Natividad “Nati” Cano, an important figure in mariachi education, stressed the importance of tradition at a 2004 master class in Tucson, Arizona. Maestro Cano cautioned the students not to venture far from established performance practices, the traditional repertory or style of dress. These remarks resonate with other comments he has made regarding the need to remain faithful to the “things that are classic” and the limits of tradition.²⁰

The artistic lines between innovating and breaking with tradition can be quite narrow and easily blurred. However, within the reimagining process conceptual spaces emerge whereby the stakeholders in a particular tradition may find common ground. For example, in 1969 Nati Cano changed the social relations of mariachi performance at his Los Angeles restaurant by having the musicians perform a predetermined set of selections on a stage in the middle of the room. This concert-style format contrasted with the normal practice of strolling mariachis that played requests for a per-song fee. Maestro Cano’s concert-style performance furthered his desire for audiences to appreciate the artistic value of mariachi and led to the emergence of the show mariachi. In this case, Nati Cano’s vision of a concert-style mariachi performance adhered to the notion of remaining faithful to “things that are classic,” while at the same time it altered the trajectory of the mariachi tradition by changing the social relations of performance.

The introduction of mariachi competitions has also had a considerable impact on the notion of tradition. The technical and musical demands of mariachi competitions have pushed the level of virtuosity to an aesthetic standard that is more closely associated with art music than mariachi’s rural roots. Mariachi competitions have been common in Texas for many years and have typically been an extension of mariachi conferences. Examples are the annual San Antonio Mariachi Extravaganza where the panel of judges is normally composed of the members of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán; and in 2008, the University Interscholastic League (UIL), an organization created by the University of Texas at Austin to provide extracurricular academic, athletic, and music contests, finally added mariachi to its list of ensembles eligible for official statewide music competitions.²¹ The nature of formalized music competitions invites new sets of criteria onto mariachi performance—the impact of which potentially imposes standards that influence the perception of what constitutes traditional performance.

Tradition is an important concept that connects the processes of cultural production and identity with repertory and performance practices. As part of the mariachi historical memory, tradition is not only communicated by musicians, but also through the electronic media’s simultaneous contact with audiences.²² Sounds and images express a variety of meanings that shift and change through processes of cultural production. Tradition, as a cultural construct, is an aspect of the reimagining process that influences musical production and reception. Encounters between tradition and technology are also important factors in the reimagining process as cultural production links with transnational economic practices. As the modern mariachi emerged in the 1930s and early 1940s, sound

and image converged on new pathways provided by transnational record labels, radio broadcast networks, and films.

REIMAGINING SOUND AND MOVING IMAGES

Reimagining suggests a dynamic process whereby individuals, groups, institutions, corporations, and governments participate (however inequitably) in creating, defining, articulating, and transforming cultural forms. As a process, reimagining also encompasses ideas and actions related to traversing aesthetic boundaries, creating and sustaining authenticity, and the remapping of tradition. The circulation of cultural expressions and products demands socioeconomic interactions in aesthetic processes that simultaneously alter and link expressions through cultural production. The process of reimagining implies an ongoing dialogue between and among cultural producers, intermediaries, and receivers as echoes of the past are reformed in the present, to articulate shifts in identity constructions.

The record, radio, and film industries became interdependent beginning in the late 1930s, especially as sound films grew increasingly popular. The following sections highlight moments in the social and cultural histories of the record, radio, and film industries as they relate to the reimagining process in the construction of the modern mariachi beginning in the late 1930s. The trajectory outlined here suggests ways in which the electronic media interacted with the processes of modernity to promote and project mariachi as a popular music. Each electronic medium represents a different perspective on the reimagining process as mariachi encountered these diverse modes of cultural production.

Sound Recordings

The emergence of the sound commodity brought new possibilities to the concept of the musical experience. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sound recording and reproduction technologies altered the economics of listening and musical performance. Sound recordings were marketed as “re-creations” in order to direct listeners into this aesthetically imagined process. Consumers were instructed to visualize the musical performance and to perceive the phonograph itself as a musical instrument.²³ The listening experience allowed for a sense of ownership and identification with the music that was in turn tied to the repeatability of the sound product and the assembly of personal record collections. Through this selective process, record labels, their intermediaries, and consumers reified repertoires and performance practices of rural expressions in the early twentieth century. And, in conjunction with transnational economic conditions and practices, cultural expressions that were considered representative attained a level of authenticity that overshadowed lesser known genres. As cultural expressions became popular, the diversity of rural genres changed (or diminished) in the

imagination of urban consumers as the electronic media focused on the reproduction of “the authentic.”

In the early twentieth century, the major U.S. transnational sound-recording companies were Edison, Victor, and Columbia. Advancements in sound technologies led to an enormous number of recordings on wax cylinders and discs that featured operatic arias, marches, and popular art songs.²⁴ Major labels dispatched recording teams to selected regions in the U.S. and throughout the world to locate and record musical expressions of local communities—a practice that included Spanish-language songs recorded in Mexico City as well as San Antonio, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.²⁵

From 1902 to 1910, Edison, Victor, and Columbia were active in Mexico along with smaller labels Zonophone and Odeón.²⁶ During the period of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), U.S. transnational record companies ceased operations in Mexico, however they would return in 1921.²⁷ Edison, the first company to market the phonograph, began portable recording operations in Mexico City in 1905 and in that same year, a group of musicians from Cocula in the state of Jalisco were recorded.²⁸ This group was brought to Mexico City by a wealthy landowner to perform at the birthday celebration of President Porfirio Díaz.²⁹ The two-minute wax cylinder recordings of Cuarteto Coculense are believed to be the earliest known mariachi recordings with Victor and Columbia also releasing recordings of Cuarteto Coculense in 1908.³⁰ Early twentieth-century recording technologies were limited in terms of recording time and sound quality. The mariachi sound as a cultural product took shape through these commercial recordings as specific genres were imbued with a level of authenticity that granted them representational status for the tradition.

The repertory for the Edison, Victor, and Columbia recordings consisted solely of the *son abajeño* (*son* from the lowlands): a music and dance genre of the Mexican regional *son* complex.³¹ The musical signature of this regional repertory was composed of distinctive musical instruments, rhythmic interplay, vocal and instrumental styles, and numerous genre variants. The recorded sounds from this period are in stark contrast to the mariachi sound that would eventually emerge in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As rural populations moved to the cities, so did their musical expressions. For rural populations from Mexico’s western region, another Cocula mariachi would carry the sounds from the rancho to Mexico City and forge new contexts of performance in the urban landscape.

Cirilo Marmolejo and his group Mariachi Coculense de Cirilo Marmolejo are credited with establishing the urban mariachi tradition in Mexico City. After moving to the capital, the group began playing in plazas and restaurants including El Tenampa, a restaurant that featured Jaliscan cuisine.³² In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the group recorded for Victor Records and these selections were released on 78 rpm records.³³ The moderate tempos and rhythmic groove heard in these recordings display a distinctive dance-like quality—a characteristic that would disappear in the post-1940 era of mariachi sound recordings. In addition, the singing voices of Mariachi Coculense indicated that mariachi vocal performance practice still adhered to an untrained vocal aesthetic in the early to

mid-1930s—an approach that vanished once the singing charro character became attached to the mariachi during the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema.

The sound recordings of the early twentieth century are important examples of a type of mariachi sound that was in existence since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The mass migrations to Mexico City in particular were in response to the devastation of local agrarian economies during the revolutionary period. The new social spaces and contexts for performance gradually moved the tradition toward new genres, but for a brief period (prior to the influence of commercial radio), the sounds of rural life still echoed in the city.

Recorded examples by Cuarteto Coculense and Mariachi Coculense de Cirilo Marmolejo inform our current understanding of the early twentieth-century mariachi sound. However, these two groups from the area of Cocula represent a particular version of mariachi that was transplanted in the mid-1920s and transformed through radio and films in the 1930s and 1940s. Rural mariachi forms continued in the countryside and are still performed today. Studies indicate that noncommercialized forms of mariachi exist and remain an important part of local culture for contemporary rural indigenous/mestizo communities in Mexico. A recent study on the Cora indigenous group in the state of Nayarit shows that indigenous mariachi performance is practiced at patronal festivals (celebrations in honor of a particular Catholic saint) in both religious rituals and social contexts.³⁴ This type of mariachi ensemble may include the *raweri* (a type of indigenous violin) and *tambora* (drum) common in Jalisco and Nayarit along with the vihuela and harp.³⁵ As part of a discussion on the development of the mariachi sound it is important to realize that the form and sound of the mariachi recognized throughout the world as a sound symbol of Mexico is one particular version of a still vibrant and complex rural tradition.

In the early history of sound recordings, opera was one of the most recorded genres. Opera stars were the celebrities of their day and the purchase of a sound recording was a daily routine for listeners of a higher social standing. The *bel canto* (literally “beautiful singing”) style was prominent during this period and a continuation of nineteenth-century musical style by singers steeped in the technique. In its most classic form, *bel canto* can best be described as effortless with regard to the singing of expansive lines along with a flexibility of voice that could subtly shift within dynamic ranges. Skilled practitioners of *bel canto* technique could easily cover a wide vocal range while remaining in complete control of articulations and vocal quality.

In mariachi, the *bel canto* style of singing first became evident through the voice of Tito Guízar. An experienced radio singer, Guízar was cast as the first singing charro by director Fernando de Fuentes. As the popular music industry emerged through commercial radio in the early 1930s, a trained singing voice was preferred on radio. In this way, as mariachi became absorbed into the popular music industry, it also became part of its economic and cultural practices. The casting of Guízar was a critical step in the development of the modern mariachi sound. And when it came to choosing a singing charro successor, an operatic *bel canto* quality (although this time through the baritone voice of Jorge Negrete) was again the preferred vocal sound.

The combination of sound recordings and radio defined the mariachi sound of the early twentieth century. With the advent of radio, the concept of an audience was extended beyond the living room or concert hall to listeners in other countries and time zones. As stations gained in electrical power and merged to form radio networks, local communities of listeners were conceptualized as potential consumers by transnational corporations that extended their reach to the entire Western hemisphere. The radio broadcast was the primary form of electronic communication in the 1930s. At the same time, an emergent popular music industry was becoming deeply intertwined with the commercial interests of radio. As mariachi became integrated into the popular music industry, radio broadcast networks transmitted a new form of the tradition throughout Latin America and beyond.

Radio

Canclini's notion of simultaneous contact reinforces the dynamic meaning of reimagining; that is, a conceptual two-way street where "broadcasters" and "receivers" are connected by continuously reenergized pathways. Live musical performance formats on radio especially from the late 1930s through 1950s provide the best example of this electronic coupling. The concept of the radio show with a live studio audience engendered simultaneous contact between listeners (both in the studio and over the airwaves), with stations, networks, and corporate sponsors. And, while the formation of historical memory was not the primary interest of the electronic media as noted by Canclini, the sense of "community" generated by the electronic media experience reshaped historical memory by facilitating connections between ideas, traditions, and identity within a social process of reimagining.

The radio broadcast was the first form of wireless mass communication and allowed for the crossing of geographic as well as social and class boundaries. The radio broadcast as a kind of exercise in "public listening," is a social activity that promotes a sense of community (simultaneously real and imagined) among audiences that share particular interests. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s, radio was utilized by the Obregón government as a tool for communicating to large segments of the population. As part of the project of cultural nationalism, the education branch of the government embarked on a project that focused on instilling a sense of national culture through radio programs.³⁶ Musical performances that included Mexican art, folk, and popular musics within a single program transcended the traditional barriers associated with musical categories.³⁷ In addition, this type of programming allowed for the public conceptualization of "Mexican music" to include symphonies as well as *sones*. The cultural value debate that typically granted works associated with the category of art music a position of higher authority was negated in favor of a nationalist ideal. This practice ignored historically constituted notions of taste and social class in order to present "Mexican music" without barriers; however, this also resulted in the imposition of

intellectual and elite notions of national identity upon the lower classes. The state use of radio in the project of cultural nationalism would have been incomplete without the support of business interests and commercial radio that linked the variety show format of “Mexican music” to the sale of household goods produced by Mexican and U.S. transnational corporations.

In 1922, the Obregón government granted its first commercial radio licenses.³⁸ Radio station CYL, founded by Raúl Azcárraga in partnership with Félix Palavicini (owner of the Mexico City newspaper *El Universal*) “broadcast only on Tuesdays and Fridays from nine to eleven pm, a careful selection of classical music, with Spanish singers and members of schools of music.”³⁹ In addition to his partnership with *El Universal*, Raúl Azcárraga (with the help of his brother Emilio, a distributor of RCA phonographs) obtained licensing for the sale of RCA radio receivers in Mexico City.⁴⁰

The newspaper ownership of radio stations was based on a U.S. model that linked print media with this new form of mass communication; however, this was not the only form of commercial radio capital. Radio CYB owned by El Buen Tono, a cigarette and cigar producing company that dated back to the era of Porfirio Díaz, entered the radio market in the 1920s.⁴¹ This station, whose call letters were later changed to “XEB” in 1929 became known as “La B Grande,” the second most important station in Mexico from the 1930s through 1950s. Agustín Lara, Pedro Infante, and Los Panchos were but a few of the well-known artists who performed regularly on “La B Grande.”⁴²

The formation of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in 1919 and the concept of the radio network signaled the intended expansion of U.S. consumer-based companies into Mexico and Latin America. As radio stations grew in power and scope, radio networks became the source through which U.S. transnationals NBC and CBS accessed the rest of the Western hemisphere. Radio XEW, started by Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, was key to U.S. transnational interests as well as to aspiring singers and musicians who performed in its studios and contributed to the station’s title as “The Cathedral of Radio.”

Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta forged connections with U.S. transnational corporations and created an empire built on new electronic media technologies of the twentieth century.⁴³ Born in Tampico, Tamaulipas, Azcárraga lived in the border town of Piedras Negras in the state of Coahuila and was educated in Texas. A businessman with no previous experience in broadcast technology, Azcárraga started out as a distributor of RCA radio receivers. In 1923 he obtained the rights to distribute phonographs for the Victor Talking Machine Company in Mexico.⁴⁴ In 1930, Azcárraga launched Radio XEW and within five years the station went from 5,000 watts of transmission power to 250,000.⁴⁵ During the mid-1930s, ninety-five programs were broadcast per day with time lengths ranging from four to twenty-eight minutes and by 1938, XEW achieved global status with listeners in Hawaii, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and England.⁴⁶

XEW was a major force in the popularization of Mexican music. Given his affiliations with Victor Records and RCA, Azcárraga was at the forefront of media music production in Mexico. Azcárraga’s ties to RCA led to the linking of XEW



Figure 5.2 Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta. Courtesy of the Agrasanchez Film Archive.

with the NBC radio network in 1934, and by 1938 he had added a “competitor” station (XEQ) that he promptly affiliated with the CBS radio network. His virtual monopoly on commercial radio in Mexico included fourteen stations in the NBC network and seventeen stations in the CBS network.⁴⁷ Within just four years, Azcárraga was affiliated with the two largest U.S. radio networks—a collaboration that fueled his eventual media empire in Latin America.

As commercial stations multiplied, transnational webs of political, economic, and cultural interests converged in the radio show format. In commercial radio, time was commodified as national, transnational, and international corporations vied for access to a community of listeners. As radio shows were developed around the marketing of household and everyday products, music became the key through which U.S. transnationals unlocked their vision of expanding markets and wrapped their capitalist dreams around the voice of the singing charro and his mariachi. And, while radio broadcast technology was significant in the merging of economic, political, and social interests in mariachi as a national and international popular music, the reimagining of mariachi was intensified even further through the bonding of the voice and image exemplified by the movie experience.

The radio show was a common format began in the 1930s and involved the sale of airtime for product marketing. Musical styles (produced live or pre-recorded) were selected based on their appeal to a particular audience of potential consumers. The music and performers thereby became conceptually linked with a

particular product; for example U.S. manufacturer Colgate-Palmolive was a popular sponsor of radio shows that marketed household products. Shows usually followed a regular, weekly schedule and were hosted by a radio personality or recognized performer. *La hora íntima de Agustín Lara*, a popular show on XEW, promoted products targeted to a largely female audience at specific intervals during the broadcast.⁴⁸ In this way, large transnational corporations not only shaped the listening experience for specific audiences, but through the assemblage of repertoires, also linked products with particular performers and radio personalities.

Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta was the most powerful media entrepreneur in twentieth century Mexico with monopolies in various aspects of the media business including radio, recording, film production, movie theaters, and television markets. XEW was a radio concert hall for the performers of Mexican popular music who appeared on live broadcasts as well as on corporate-sponsored radio shows. Azcárraga was able to groom future stars of Mexican popular music in ways no one else could at that time. His media business holdings intertwined with all aspects of the popular music industry and he used them, particularly RCA Victor and the radio networks, as training for aspiring singer/actors. Singing charros Tito Gúizar and Jorge Negrete benefited from Azcárraga's business-savvy connections in the U.S. radio market with their own shows CBS and NBC respectively. By the end of the 1930s, the path was clear for the future singing charro superstars—success in radio would lead to success in the movies.

The voice of the singing charro was in stark contrast to the aesthetic origins of mariachi. However, as noted by Canclini, “what matters to the market and the media is not the popular, but popularity.”⁴⁹ Although the singing voice transmitted by commercial radio delivered a sound aesthetic that may have reflected the nineteenth century more than the twentieth, the sound appealed to the sensibilities and expectations of urban audiences. The global reach of XEW was unparalleled in the hemisphere and while radio continued to be an important media outlet, the movies would have the greatest impact on the development of the modern mariachi.

Film

In 1930, a small group of entrepreneurs determined to jumpstart the Mexican film industry went to Hollywood in order to purchase equipment, hire Mexican actors, and a director. Upon their return, *Santa*, the first Mexican-produced sound film went into production.⁵⁰ *Santa* was a melodrama based on a 1903 novel by Federico Gamboa that tells the story of a young girl who falls in love with a military officer, is seduced and later abandoned. She is forced out of her home, works as a prostitute and, in the end, dies alone. An earlier silent movie version of this story was made in 1918. After the 1931 release, subsequent versions appeared in 1943 and 1968.⁵¹

Sensing the financial potential of the Spanish-speaking market in Latin America, Hollywood producers hired their own actors and writers from Spain as

well as various parts of Latin America to produce its own Spanish-language films. Notable personalities who worked in Hollywood were Lupita Tovar (the star of *Santa*), Tito Guízar, Cuban bandleader Xavier Cugat, and the well-known Argentine tango singer Carlos Gardel.⁵² Peak production totaled sixty-three films in 1930 and forty-eight in 1931.⁵³ Unfortunately for Hollywood, these movies were not well received by the Spanish-speaking public. One reason was that Hollywood producers cast actors without regard for accent or dialect. Within the context of these films, there was a credibility problem when “an Argentine had a Mexican brother and a Catalan sister.”⁵⁴ While Hollywood producers may not have been able to tell the difference, Spanish-speaking audiences did and these films came to an abrupt end.

The *comedia ranchera* film genre has its roots in nineteenth-century stories and novels about ranch culture that were published in books and magazines. The first ranch-themed films *El caporal* (*The Foreman*) and *En la hacienda* (*In the Hacienda*) were released in 1921. Miguel Contreras Torres, the author and director of *El caporal*, was born in Morelia, the son of a *hacendado*.⁵⁵ *El caporal* was an autobiographical account with nationalist overtones meant to valorize the life he remembered on the hacienda.⁵⁶ The second film, *En la hacienda*, was a rural drama based on a zarzuela by Federico Carlos Kegel of Jalisco. It was a love story set against the backdrop of peasant exploitation and believed to be a response to the agrarian reforms of the Obregón administration.⁵⁷

Santa (1931) was the first sound film produced in Mexico and featured music by Agustín Lara. Although it was not specifically a ranch-themed film, *Santa* holds the distinction as the first film to include a mariachi performance. In 1932, *Mano a mano* (*Hand to Hand*) was the film that signaled the coming of the *comedia ranchera* genre. Set in the western region and the rural life of the hacienda, *Mano a mano* included a *charreada* (rodeo), horse race, card game, and cockfight scenes—stereotypical examples of rural cultural life that would be part of the *comedia ranchera* formula. *Mano a mano* did not have any featured songs; however, at the end of the film Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos sang “*Las mañanitas*.”⁵⁸

Music was the single-most important element in the *comedia ranchera* that set it apart from other cinematic forms. Songs and large-scale production scenes were designed to feature the singing charro and the main characters. *Tríos románticos* were common in the *comedia ranchera* and performed in *serenata* as well as *fiesta* scenes. In general, their smooth interpretations lent a sophisticated, urban character that offset the rural associations projected by the mariachi. Rich vocal and instrumental harmonies not only provided a stark contrast but also symbolized a modern, contemporary aesthetic within the context of the *comedia ranchera*.

Tríos began appearing in *comedia ranchera* films in the 1930s. Tríos provided the singing charro the opportunity to sing other Latin American genres such as the *bolero* in order to expand his appeal to a wide range of listeners. Trío Murciélagos, Trío Tariácuri, and Trío Calaveras were the main groups that performed in films from this period. In *comedia rancheras* of the 1940s, tríos often

appeared with mariachis in the large-scale production scenes. In film, however, the sound of the mariachi was dominated by brass-heavy orchestrated arrangements with little or no sound attributed to the on-screen musicians themselves.

The variety of musical genres that appeared in the *comedia ranchera* crossed folk and popular music boundaries. Tríos and their repertory of romantic works were quite popular from the late 1930s through 1950s. The traditional *son jalisciense*, the music and dance genre identified with the state of Jalisco, was used sparingly in the movies and was most often heard in fiesta or *charreada* scenes. The mariachi most associated with the era of the Golden Age was Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, a group that has remained at the forefront of mariachi performance to the present day.

The singing charro films and Hollywood's singing cowboy appeared at nearly the same time in the 1930s. In 1935, one year before *Allá en el rancho grande*, Gene Autry received his first starring role in *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*.⁵⁹ While there appears to have been no direct link between the singing charro movies and those of the Hollywood singing cowboy, Peter Stanfield cites a 1939 report by cinema managers regarding the characteristics needed for a successful cowboy movie. The responses identified horsemanship, songs, comedy, action, and a "sensible story as the necessary ingredients."⁶⁰ Although the charro and U.S. cowboy films shared some common elements and the Mexican film industry modeled Hollywood in many respects, the cultural meanings and nationalist overtones associated with the charro films were not reflected in the U.S. cowboy movies of the same period.

The movie business had the single most important impact on mariachi as a result of the blending of sound and image within the figure of the singing charro.



Figure 5.3 Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. Courtesy of the Agrasanchez Film Archive.

The musical repertory associated with the charro became part of this new form of the mariachi tradition. Performance and performance practices changed significantly as a result of this new aesthetic model that emerged by way of encounters with electronic media industries, political ideologies, and processes of cultural production.

REIMAGINING PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

In a 2005 interview with Rubén Fuentes, composer, musical director, and arranger for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, I asked about his life and musical experiences prior to joining Mariachi Vargas in 1944. Expecting to hear about his years as a young mariachi performing at fiestas and celebrations near his home in Ciudad Guzmán in the state of Jalisco, I was surprised when the Maestro replied that he had no experience in mariachi prior to becoming a member of Mariachi Vargas. And, that Silvestre Vargas hired him because of his conservatory training, as well as his ability to write musical arrangements and conduct rehearsals. During the making of films he consulted frequently with Manuel Esperón (a composer of numerous mariachi classics) in order to make any necessary adjustments in the musical arrangements. Following that he would rehearse the ensemble, record the selection, and finally move to the soundstage to simulate the performance with the actors—a process that was repeated continually for six to seven days a week during the height of Negrete and Infante's popularity in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶¹

This response by Maestro Fuentes outlines a process of music production that was employed in the 1940s when demand for the *comedia ranchera* was extremely high. As with any type of industrialized production process, a time-conscious, systematic approach was critical in order for the studio to make a profit. Music notation, a tool foreign to mariachi performance prior to this era, became a necessary part of this process. The fact that Silvestre Vargas hired Rubén Fuentes because of his formal music training and experience highlights the transformation of mariachi that was generated through standardized movie business practices.

The musical categories of art, folk, and popular music are conceptually messy and are bound to twentieth-century notions of legitimacy and social/cultural value with definitions that are less than satisfying. The literate history of art music with its identifiable composers and associations with European artistic trends has historically been granted a high position on the scale of aesthetic value by industrialized societies. Early twentieth-century intellectuals and writers valorized folk music for traits that were perceived as representative of preindustrialized societies; these included “natural” (untrained) musicians, oral/aural musical transmissions, and vast repertoires of music designed for daily life experience. As a category, “popular music” held an ambiguous position with regard to aesthetic values due to its capitalist origins and the perception that industrial processes of production indicated not just a product of inferior artistic quality, but of little cultural value.

The mariachi as a “national” ensemble however had its conceptual beginnings in the nationalist *orquestas típicas* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶² The mid-nineteenth century version of the *orquesta típica* was an ad hoc ensemble that included wind as well as string instruments. The elite version that emerged near the end of the nineteenth century took on a nationalist character and repertory through the *jarabe tapatío* as well as other dance genres.⁶³ *Orquestas típicas* traveled extensively and were popular throughout the U.S. Southwest. The repertory of European dance genres such as the polka and waltz, along with the use of wind and string instruments raises the possibility of a connection with the modern mariachi.⁶⁴ Similarly, the nationalist *orquestas típicas* also dressed in the *traje de charro*—an indication that this style of performance dress was already considered a folkloric costume by the end of the nineteenth century. In the early *comedia ranchera* films the musicians did not dress in the *traje de charro*; however, that changed with charro superstar Jorge Negrete in *¡Ay Jalisco... no te rajes!* (1941).

The singing voice of the charro that was heard in movie theaters in the early 1940s presented a striking contradiction in terms of musical aesthetics. Although the example of the *orquestas típicas* suggests the possibility of how mestizo music might have acquired both art and folk influences, this does not extend to the voice. The operatic vocal style effused European romanticism in contrast to the sound of the mariachi voice up to that time. As mentioned earlier, the mid-1930s mariachi sound did not suggest an imminent marriage of mariachi with an operatic tenor voice.⁶⁵ A brief biographical review on Tito Guízar may give an indication as to how opera found its way to the rancho.

Tito Guízar started singing at a young age and studied with José Pierson, a noted vocal coach in Mexico City.⁶⁶ In 1929, on the advice of Emilio Azcárraga Viduarreta, Guízar moved to New York City to record songs by Agustín Lara for Victor Records. While in New York, he studied with Tito Schipa of the Metropolitan Opera and continued to work with him intermittently for approximately eight years.⁶⁷ Schipa, an Italian lyric tenor in the *bel canto* tradition, not only sang at the Met, but also recorded on Victor “Red Seal,” the label’s most prestigious line. In a 1995 interview, Guízar credited Schipa with advising him to leave his opera dreams behind and remain in popular music.⁶⁸ As a result, Tito Guízar became an international star and in 1937, after the success of *Allá en el rancho grande*, he performed at Carnegie Hall—billed as “The Singing Idol of the Americas.”⁶⁹ This concert by Guízar not only marked a milestone for him as a performer, but was also the first time that a Mexican national had headlined Carnegie Hall.⁷⁰ The format of the concert blended Guízar’s operatic voice with his newly found singing charro stardom. In the first half he sang selections from the *Barber of Seville* and in the second, he put on his *traje de charro* and sang songs while accompanying himself on guitar.⁷¹

Although Tito Guízar would continue to appear in films, radio broadcasts, make records, and perform live, he would not repeat the international success of *Allá en el rancho grande*. In the early 1940s a new voice and charro figure emerged, one that would eclipse Guízar’s version and become the most celebrated singing charro of the 1940s, Jorge Negrete.



Figure 5.4 Movie poster for Jorge Negrete's *¡Ay Jalisco... no te rajes!* Courtesy of the Agrasanchez Film Archive.

Jorge Negrete's charro portrayals carried the *comedia ranchera* film genre to new heights of popularity in the 1940s. With *¡Ay Jalisco... no te rajes!* in 1941, Negrete emerged as the dominant figure in Mexican cinema, a position that he would hold until his death in 1953. His vocal aesthetic reflected years of training and promises of opera stardom, however as with Guízar, he was destined to remain a singer of popular songs. Negrete's voice projected a sense of machismo that Guízar's tenor could not and may have been the reason Guízar's reign as a singing charro movie star was cut short. In terms of physical skills, Negrete's training in the military served him well. He could ride a horse and handle a gun, two critical skills not to be overlooked when auditioning for a lead charro role. In the late 1920s, Negrete studied with the same vocal coach as Guízar, José Pierson and, not surprisingly, after auditioning to sing on XEW, Emilio Azcárraga arranged for him to have his own radio show on NBC in New York City.⁷² Negrete performed with Ramón Armengod, another aspiring singer/actor of the era, on a show titled "The Mexican Caballeros."⁷³ In addition to working in radio, Negrete continued to perform live at *Yumuri*, a Latin cabaret located in Times Square.⁷⁴

Jorge Negrete's vocal qualities, on-screen persona, and physical skills contributed to his success as a singing charro superstar. His baritone voice and acting style created the type of charro that film directors wanted for the 1940s *comedia ranchera*; a macho, self-confident figure with a voice and on-screen presence that appealed to a wide range of audiences. The demands of the *comedia ranchera*

required Negrete to not only be believable in action-drama scenes, but equally capable in comedic scenes. The comedic ingredient was extended to the lead charro character in the *comedia ranchera* of the 1940s. This not only increased the on-screen exposure for Negrete during the course of the film, but also opened the door to films that were designed to exploit the comedic potential of the charro character as in *Jalisco canta en Sevilla* (1949).

In *comedia ranchera* films, the charro character required a singing voice that could express love of country and personal strength along with qualities of romanticism and sophistication. Both Guízar and Negrete were singers first and actors second. The quality of the charro singing voice as a sound symbol for *la patria* (the fatherland) was an important element in the link with nationalist ideals during the postrevolutionary period. The layering of the operatic voice over the sound of the mariachi emphasized the aesthetic representation of the nation as embodied in the voice and figure of the singing charro. And although the popularity of the *comedia ranchera* film genre had faded considerably by the 1960s, Negrete's singing style and films of the Golden Age remained iconic aesthetic models and reemerged during the U.S. mariachi renaissance of the 1970s.

CONCLUSION

Mariachi as an ensemble and a repertory traverses aesthetic boundaries related to the musical categories of art, folk, and popular musics. In the twentieth century, aesthetic models changed as new influences entered into the tradition through record, radio, and film production. As the modern mariachi emerged in the 1940s, light-skinned singer/actors with voices more suited to the concert hall than the cantina projected a sound and image that was linked to processes of production associated with the transnational electronic media industries.

A hallmark of the tradition since the 1960s has been the flexibility of the mariachi sound and the ability of musicians to perform a wide variety of genres. In the last twenty years, mariachis in Texas and California, in particular, have stretched the limits of the tradition. Performing U.S. pop music in mariachi style created an initial stir among traditionalists; however, this practice has become commonplace particularly with high school and college/university groups. Singing songs in English and performing from big band, country, and hip hop repertoires has not replaced the traditional repertory, and, in some cases, energized listeners and aficionados. These types of innovations reflect the musical skills of contemporary mariachis and the willingness of current audiences to accept some nontraditional aspects with regard to live performance.

The mariachi repertory has changed considerably since the Golden Age; however, certain aspects of performance practice and style remain for musicians and audiences with a desire to stay faithful to the "things that are classic."⁷⁵ Non-mariachi singers like Plácido Domingo and Luis Miguel have made successful mariachi recordings.⁷⁶ In addition to mariachi with symphony orchestras, some practitioners have taken the art music mariachi relationship a step further with a

blended notion of opera and mariachi called “operachi” (one-or two-act operas in mariachi style) as well as the singing of zarzuela with mariachi accompaniment. These developments indicate an interest in mariachi within art music/opera/musical theater circles. The combined musical and dramatic elements also demonstrate how certain aspects of the tradition may change, yet remain rooted in the aesthetic norms associated with the singing charro and mariachi performance practices of the late 1930s through 1950s.

The singing charros of the Golden Age have become revered icons of the tradition. Through sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and films, the voice and image of the singing charro and his mariachi became a symbol of postrevolutionary identity that was broadcast to national and international audiences. As an ensemble and a repertory, mariachi is embedded in the cultural histories of Mexico and the United States. And while the tradition will shift and change in response to transnational economic, social, cultural and political conditions, the meanings attached to the images and musical sounds of mariachi will continue to be shaped and reshaped by the processes of cultural production.

Notes

1. *Mariachi el Bronx*, Swami Records, CD (2009).
2. The first mariachi conference was held in San Antonio, Texas, in 1979 with Mariachi Vargas as the featured group. In the 1980s, annual conferences began in Tucson, Fresno, and Albuquerque. These conferences allow students of any age the opportunity to learn from the best mariachis in the world.
3. For discussions on mariachi history see J. Arturo Chamorro Escalante, *Mariachi antiguo, jarabe y son: símbolos compartidos y tradición musical en las identidades jaliscienses* (Zapopan: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2000); Jesús Jáuregui, *El mariachi símbolo musical de México* (Mexico City: Banpaís, 1990); Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, *Mitote, fandango y mariacheros* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1992); Rafael Hermes, *Origen e historia del mariachi* (Mexico City: Editorial Katún, 1982); and Antonio Villacis Sosa and Francisco Franchillard Ch. *De Cocula es el Mariachi: 1545–1995, 450 años de música coculense* (Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultura, 1995).
4. Rogelio Agrasánchez Jr., *Mexican Music in the United States: A History of the Films, Theaters, and Audiences, 1920–1960* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 18.
5. See Néstor García Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, translated by Lidia Lozano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).
6. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, translated by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995 [1990]), 187–188.
7. See Agrasánchez Jr., *Mexican Music in the United States*, 12.
8. *Ibid.*, 115–116.
9. Thomas Turino, “Nationalism and Latin American Music: Selected Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations,” *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2003), 175.

10. Aurelio de los Reyes, *Medio siglo de cine mexicano (1896–1947)* (Mexico City: Editorial Trillas, 1987), 148.
11. *Ibid.*, 152.
12. Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange: Los sueños imperiales de la derecha española y México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 17.
13. Joanne Hershfield, “Screening the Nation,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 270.
14. *Ibid.*
15. José Orozco, “‘Esos Altos de Jalisco!’: Emigration and the Idea of *Alteño* Exceptionalism, 1926–1952,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University (1998), 13.
16. *Soy puro mexicano* (1942) starring Pedro Armendáriz is an example of this type of charro character.
17. Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10.
18. For an interview with Silvestre Vargas see J. Angel Chávez Najjar, “De Tecalitlán los sonos: entrevista al maestro Silvestre Vargas V.,” http://www.mariachi.com.mx/entrevistas_SilvestreVargas.htm (accessed January 30, 2010).
19. This information appears to have been written for promotional purposes. Sample recordings that used “generations” in the title are: *La Fiesta del Mariachi, Cuarta Generación* (Fourth Generation), 1994, Philips 522923-2 (1994); and *5ta. Generación* (Fifth Generation), RF-103 (2002).
20. Natividad “Nati” Cano quoted in Dan Sheehy, *Mariachi Music in America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 79.
21. Jennifer Radcliffe, “Mariachi Added to Statewide UIL Competitions,” *Houston Chronicle*, January 25, 2008, <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story/mpl/metropolitan/5487389.html>.
22. See García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*.
23. Steve J. Wurtzler, *Electric Sounds: Technological Change and the Rise of the Corporate Mass Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 136–137.
24. Lists of available recordings reveal a variety of musical styles and ensembles. For an informative listing see *Victor Records Catalog, May 1916*. Camden, New Jersey, The Victor Talking Machine Company.
25. For an overview of recording activities see Richard K. Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
26. Jesús Flores y Escalante and Pablo Dueñas Herrera, *Cirilo Marmolejo: historia del mariachi en la Ciudad de México* (México: Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Fonográficos, 1994), 63.
27. Pablo Dueñas Herrera, *Bolero: historia documental del bolero mexicano* (Mexico City: Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Fonográficos, 1990), 218.
28. Flores Escalante and Dueñas Herrera, *Cirilo Marmolejo*, 39.
29. Jonathan Clark, “Cuarteto Coculense: The Very First Mariachi Recordings 1908–1909,” liner notes in *Mexico’s Pioneer Mariachis, vol. 4*. Arhoolie Folklyric, CD 7036, (1998).
30. *Ibid.*

31. The Mexican *son* complex refers to the diverse genres of regional music and dance repertoires evident throughout Mexico. In addition to the *son jalisciense*, two of the other most widely recognized examples of the *son* complex include *son jarocho* and *son huasteco*.
32. Flores Escalante and Dueñas Herrera, *Cirilo Marmolejo*, 24.
33. *Ibid.*, 61.
34. Jáuregui, *El mariachi símbolo musical de México*, 32.
35. J. Arturo Chamorro, *Mariachi antiguo, jarabe y son: símbolos compartidos y tradición musical en las identidades jaliscienses* (Zapopan: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2000), 37.
36. The station was under the control of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) or ministry of education. José Vasconcelos was the first director of the SEP (1921–1924) and instrumental in forwarding a nationalist agenda.
37. Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920–1950* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000), 46–48.
38. Elizabeth Fox, “Latin American Broadcasting,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 10, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 523.
39. Felipe León López, “Radio Educación en la Historia Política y Cultural de México,” in *Una historia hecha en sonidos. Radio Educación: la innovación en el cuadrante* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2005), 34. <http://www.sep.gov> (accessed April 8, 2006).
40. *Ibid.*
41. Robert M. Buffington and William E. French, “The Culture of Modernity,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 420–421.
42. Gabriel Sosa Plata, “La B grande celebra 75 años,” *Radio World*. (February 3, 1999). <http://www.radiomexicana.com> (accessed April 8, 2006).
43. Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta built a financial empire that also included hotels and movie theaters. His early involvement in television, led to what is currently known as Televisa. His son Emilio Azcárraga Milmo nicknamed “El Tigre” took over following his father’s death in 1973. Azcárraga Milmo died in 1997.
44. Pablo Arredondo Ramírez and Enrique E. Sánchez Ruiz, *Comunicación social, poder y democracia en México* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1986), 102.
45. Enrique Rosado, “La Catedral de la Radio: XEW 70 Aniversario,” *Somos Uno*. No. 199 (2000), 19.
46. Fernando Mejía Barquera, *La industria de la radio y la televisión y la política del estado mexicano (1920–1960)*, vol. 1 (México: Fundación Manuel Buendía, 1989), 52.
47. Arredondo Ramírez and Sánchez Ruiz, *Comunicación social*, 102.
48. This information is based on my own research at the XEW Radio Archive in Mexico City (2006).
49. García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 187.
50. Carl J. Mora, *Reflections of a Society, 1896–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 34–35.

51. Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, vol. 1 (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992), 49–50.
52. John King, “Latin American Cinema,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 10, ed. Bethell, 463.
53. *Ibid.*, 464.
54. *Ibid.*
55. García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, 56.
56. de los Reyes, *Medio siglo de cine mexicano*, 90.
57. *Ibid.*, 84–85.
58. Lorenzo Barcelata was a composer, actor, and musician. Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos also included Ernesto Cortázar, lyricist for the composer Manuel Esperón. This trio also made recordings and toured in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.
59. Bill C. Monroe, *Country Music, U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 143.
60. Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 93.
61. Rubén Fuentes, personal interview, Mexico City, January 18, 2006.
62. Manuel Peña, *The Mexican-American Orquesta: Music, Culture and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 81–84.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*
65. Listen to “Mariachi Coculense ‘Rodríguez’ de Cirilo Marmolejo (1926–1936),” *Mexico’s Pioneer Mariachis, vol. 1*. Arhoolie Folklyric, CD 7011 (1993).
66. Enrique Serna, *Jorge el bueno: la vida de Jorge Negrete* (Mexico City: Clío, 1993), 28.
67. Amelia Camarena and Alejandro Salazar, “Tiempos de gloria en voz de un trovador,” *Somos Uno*, No. 201 (2000), 71.
68. Esther Gallardo, “Tito Guízar: de la música clásica a la ranchera,” *Esto*, December 27, 1995.
69. Héctor Argente, “Tierna historia de un rancho enamorado,” *Somos Uno*, No. 201 (2000), 61.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Saúl Ramos Navas, “Tito Guízar lanza ‘Mis recuerdos del Carnellie Hall,’” *El Universal*, November 16, 1995.
72. Serna, *Jorge el bueno*, 29.
73. *Ibid.*, 36.
74. See “Especial Jorge Negrete,” *Cine Confidencial*, No. 4 (1999), 8.
75. Sheehy, *Mariachi Music in America*, 79.
76. *100 years of Mariachi*, Plácido Domingo, EMI Latin, CD (1999). *México en la piel*, Luis Miguel, Warner Music Latina, CD (2004).

“This Is Our *Música*, Guy!”:

Tejanos and Ethno/Regional Musical Nationalism

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This chapter explores the recent emergence of a species of Mexican-American ethno-nationalism in Texas, one significantly keyed on popular music. In addition to the music itself, the essay also draws on a range of data, including fieldwork and Internet communications. Such an emergence is not without precedents in Texas history, precedents also linked to music. The end of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846–47 brought the imposition of a capitalist and racist Anglo-American domination over the historically Mexican area of southern Texas. In time, this new social order led to an ethno-nationalist rebellion in 1915–16 in a seditious, armed movement directed against oppressive Anglo occupation of southern Texas; a seditious movement with supportive transnational connections to the Republic of Mexico during its own revolutionary moment.¹ As Américo Paredes and others have shown us, such an American domination brought forth a folk balladry—the epic heroic corrido—which articulated Mexican-American ethno-nationalist sentiments.² Indeed, the 1915–16 uprising produced its own ballad, “El corrido de los sedicios.”³

However, as Benjamin Johnson argues, the violent and indiscriminate repression of this insurrection may have led to another kind of repression or at least an attenuation of such ethno-nationalist sentiments among Mexican-Americans in Texas, which is not to say that they disappeared altogether. Rather, their articulation was less intense and more indirect, at least on the surface, as Mexican-Americans in their public roles shifted the hyphen toward the “American” side of their identity. To be sure, the Chicano movement of the 1960s in Texas might be construed as yet another ethno-nationalist movement, except that it was largely confined to an already small college and university population, and it was certainly not anywhere close to the majority of this population. The movement also brought forth its own

music celebrating Mexican-American culture, critiquing a continuing Anglo-American repression.⁴ Yet, by another logic its literal size may not have mattered as much as its continuing influence among Mexican-American college-educated elites, especially when such elites experienced an upward social mobility in the later twentieth century, a mobility that can only be fully appreciated in relationship to Mexican immigration, as we shall see later. These factors, in conjunction with a distinctive history of Mexican-American popular music, bring us to the primary subject of these pages, the resurgence of a new *Tejano* ethno-nationalism. However, this new and musically centered ethno-nationalism can not be seen apart from a more general Texas ethno-nationalism as well, a paradoxical relationship.

TEXANS AND TEJANOS

On April 15, 2009, Rick Perry, the Republican governor of Texas, suggested that the state of Texas might legally secede from the United States, a spectacle of a speech witnessed by the nation, and—in these globalized days—possibly by an undoubtedly mystified world. An aspirant to the 2012 Republican presidential nomination, Perry offered this tidbit on the occasion of a Texas version of the national “tea-party” right-wing rallies held on April 15 opposing President Obama’s federal stimulus plan and Obama’s policies in general. The governor suggested that such a right of secession was written into the agreement with the United States that brought Texas into the union in 1845.⁵ This argument was quickly shot down by Professor Sanford Levinson of the University of Texas Law School who co-edited, *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion, 1803–1898*, an important book discussing the legal issues concerning the incorporation of Texas into the union. It is painfully clear that the governor was being far more mythological than legal or historical.⁶

For my purposes, however, the governor’s comment again underscored that Texas was, at one time, an independent republic (1836–1848), and as a result of this and other factors, such as its size, Anglo-Texas has always been given to a sharp and mythological exceptionalism, indeed a regional ethno-nationalism. As Governor Perry said in his remarks to the aforementioned tea-party: “Texas is a very unique place, and we’re a pretty independent lot to boot.”⁷ It can even affect the many recent arrivals to the state. As a popular bumper sticker says: “I wasn’t born in Texas, but I got here as fast as I could.”

Such ethno-regionalist nationalist sentiment is only too well known among many Anglo-Texans; perhaps with its primal origins in the master symbol of the Alamo and the heroic, predominantly Anglo-Texan, military confrontation with a “foreign” Mexican army.⁸ But, as Flores also reminds us, the resident Mexican population of Texas plays a significant role as one kind of “other”—a foil—to such Anglo ethno-nationalism. That is, the enhanced sense of being a Texan was created in sharp difference to the rest of the United States, but also took its difference from the racialized and stigmatized presence of people of Mexican origin in the state, especially in southern Texas.⁹ But as we know only too well, such stigmatization

and “othering” can in turn produce its own countervailing ethno-nationalism (witness the endless examples around the world even in the twenty-first century). A version of such Texan ethno-nationalism can occur among Mexican-Americans as well, although in paradoxical fashion. That is, while premised on a stigmatized Mexican-American historical identity, it is simultaneously keyed on being a modern Texan, a seeming contradiction given ongoing marked differences in culture and language. Such a contradiction would seem to be resolved by the term *Tejano*, but also by geography, for this distinctive identity is rooted and sited in Texas, but in the hugely predominant Mexican-American southern part of the state, extending roughly from lines drawn between Corpus Christi and San Antonio, and San Antonio and Del Rio with San Antonio, thus functioning as a quasi-cultural capital for the region. But such a regionalism is also produced by history, because this area was substantially settled by the Spanish in the eighteenth century, becoming a Mexican province in 1821. Yet in recent times, this distinctive identity sometimes overlaps with that of Anglo-Texan in complicated ways—to think oneself a Tejano in a historically oppressive Texas is often an exercise in ambivalence and irony with a dash of muted affirmation. The distinguished South Texas writer Rolando Hinojosa offers a poetic vision of this particular relationship, as the Mexican-American speaker in his poem contemplates his return to Texas after serving in the Korean War:

Home to Texas, our Texas
 Hell and heaven on earth
 And land of our fathers.¹⁰

As I have already suggested, one might say that such an ironical, muted and yet critical, regionally based Tejano ethno-nationalism opposed to Anglo-Texas has existed at least since the early years of the twentieth century, which has been articulated in a variety of social genres and practices—as John M. Gonzalez most recently demonstrated in *Border Renaissance*.¹¹

Of late, however, this low-key and ironical Mexican-American “sense of place,” to use another Hinojosa construction, appears to be changing for reasons and in ways that I wish to explore critically in this essay by focusing on musical culture.¹² In the twenty-first century, we are witnessing a sharpened, unambivalent sense of Tejano ethno-nationalism, at least in some influential quarters, that has found a genre of popular music—indeed, called Tejano music—as a key site for its articulation, (although other expressive forms have also come into play). While this enhanced musical phenomenon appears to have its origin point in and around 2006, it is based on a Texan musical history of much longer standing that bears reviewing.

TEJANO MUSICAL HISTORY

Any discussion of such a subject must begin with the (already noted) classic work of Américo Paredes on the nineteenth century border corrido of Greater Mexico

with its South Texas origins, which continues to inform Tejanomusic in distanced but sometimes quite direct ways.¹³ But the folk genre of the greater Mexican corrido also maintained an ambivalent relationship to electronic mass media communication. It was also not intended for dancing, as Paredes notes: “The dance played but little part in Border folkways...”¹⁴ By contrast, it might be said that Tejano music wholly exploits such modes of communication and has done so since the appearance of two major precursory forms, *conjunto* and *orquesta*. Here we are indebted to the outstanding work of ethnomusicologist, Manuel Peña. It is he who has substantially identified and analyzed these two significant and overlapping musical strands which then combine into the full flourishing of contemporary Tejano music proper although the latter has not escaped his notice. In *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto* (1985), Peña tells the history of conjunto music in the first half of the twentieth century, a music centered on the button accordion with supporting guitar and percussion instrumentation and typically playing a Spanish-language polka-centered repertoire. The lyrics sometimes cover traditional Mexican songs, like the popular *rancheras* of singers such as José Alfredo Jiménez, but also include original homegrown compositions. Such a repertoire is intended for recording and for radio and sometimes television airplay but also for popular commercial dances.¹⁵ Such mass media dissemination and commercialized dancing are also true for the second strand, what Peña calls *orquesta* music, based on a version of American “big band” music from the first half of the twentieth century, but again, like the conjunto, centering on Spanish-language polka dancing.¹⁶ Throughout, Peña, in neo-Marxist terms, also argues that these two strands are tied to a class cleavage in Texas Mexican-American society: conjunto speaking to and of the working class and *orquesta* corresponding to an emerging middle class, both over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. But for Peña, these two strands seem to blend and merge in yet a third distinctive formation that makes its appearance in the mid-1960s and in a continually transforming fashion still seems to hold sway in the Mexican-American population.¹⁷ We arrive then at Tejano music as a distinctive social musical genre built on the previous two strands of conjunto and *orquesta* music.

TEJANOMUSIC

The Tejano sound combines instrumental and musical elements of the two strands just discussed, but adds more, and it reflects the greater participation of a far more acculturated baby boomer generation in a wide range of predominantly American forms of popular music. The forms include jazz, R&B, country and, of course, rock ‘n’ roll, while maintaining a distinctively Mexicano core, especially since most of the lyrics continue to be sung largely in Spanish and the resilient and omnipresent polka continues as the dominant musical and dancing genre. Not to be missed in this mix is the influence of the Chicano political and cultural movement of the 1960s—ethno-nationalist at its core—which resulted in a momentary identification of the style as *La Onda Chicana*, although Tejano became the better known label.

Perhaps the quintessential moment of Tejano's emergence was marked by the album called *Para la gente* by the arguably best band of this genre, Little Joe y La Familia. Both the album's title and the band's name echo Chicano movement cultural thematics of *familia* (family) and *la gente* (the people), referents for the movement's constituents and sites for social progress, although these concerns were generally not taken up by the many other bands of Tejano music.

Of much greater importance is the hybrid musicality that came to mark not only this album but, I would argue, the music as a whole and it still does so today. As a professional musician, it is worth quoting Peña at length on this style:

Para la gente was the first LP by any tejano group to exploit what I earlier called a "compound" form of bimusicality—where styles identifiable as Mexican ranchero and those identifiable as sophisticated American swing-jazz were yoked together within the same musical piece to create, in effect, a hybrid or synthetic music in a relation homologous to compound bilingualism. Several of the tunes prominently displayed "intrasentential code-switching" between ranchero and sophisticated.¹⁸

But one tune on the album was particularly compelling in these terms as Peña continues:

For example, the most arresting piece on the album, the polca-ranchera. "Las nubes," opens with an instrumental introduction (two trumpets, trombone, two saxophones, plus rhythm section of electric guitar, electric bass, Hammond organ, and trap-drums) marked by a strong ranchero flavor. Very shortly, however, a totally unexpected string ensemble joins the horns, creating a lush orchestral effect that threatens constantly to dissolve the basic ranchero style. Later, after the duet of Little Joe and his brother Johnny finishes singing the chorus, a *legato*, almost *andante* interlude, featuring the violins in rich harmonic clusters, contrasts dramatically with the *allegrocon brio* that dominates the vocal sections. At the end of the string interlude, a shrill guitar note abruptly ushers in a saxophone duet in the harmonic stereotype of the ranchero style, parallel thirds, before Little Joe and Johnny reprise the chorus. Meanwhile, the horn *obligatos* inserted between the vocal phrases maintain a steady barrage of jazz-oriented licks in what amounts to a constant code-switching between a Mexican and an American musical "language" (ranchero and swing-jazz).¹⁹

I might add that the lyrics of the song also spoke to Chicano movement concerns because the song's speaker laments his/her fallen social condition even as *s/* he takes inspiration from the uplifting rain that falls from "Las nubes" (The Clouds) and concludes by urging his/her community to exert personal discipline and vision ostensibly toward collective social progress. But I must reiterate that, notwithstanding the political inflections of Little Joe and La Familia, most of the Tejano groups that came to share this style did not necessarily or openly identify,

if at all, with the Chicano movement; although, by virtue of the music and its audiences, Tejano performers became participants in a subtle and implied continuation of the low-key ethno-nationalism that has constituted Tejano identity in the twentieth century, even as the Chicano movement faded from the scene. The Tejano music scene continues today though and includes some of the older bands, such as Little Joe, but new groups as well. It seems that it is not the widespread phenomenon that it was in the last half of the twentieth century; however, in the last three years, the music has experienced an ideologically driven impetus that may possibly change its status.

THE EMERGENCE OF TEJANISMO

Quite recently, a new permutation in the history of Mexican-Americans in Texas has become quite evident—although the extent of its size and social reach cannot be clearly determined because it is very much still in progress. Based on turn-out at rallies and meetings that I have attended, as well as the number of people subscribing to Tejano list serves, my best estimate is that it may number several thousand living in the state but with some participation of Tejanos living elsewhere. A statewide social scientific survey on this subject remains to be done. I shall call this *Tejanismo*—exploiting the “*ismo*” or “*ism*” in English to mark this phenomenon as a sharply articulated and discursive ideological formation hitherto unseen in this history, and one that has taken up Tejano music as one, but not the only one, of its ideologized subjects. Other distinctive *Tejanismo* efforts include museum activity, genealogical societies, conferences, historical/archaeological site reconstruction, and revisionist historiography, and, of course, the inevitable Websites.²⁰

Before turning to musical activity, by way of context, let me say just a few words about a protracted and eventually successful campaign to have the state of Texas erect a monument on the state capitol grounds dedicated to Tejano history. According to an online article by Julian Aguilar, the monument, to be designed and executed by Laredo, Texas, sculptor, Armando Hinojosa, “will include a series of statues and plaques... that tell the story of the Tejanos and the Spanish-Mexican legacy through time.”²¹ And, according to McAllen, Texas, physician Cayetano Barrera, a prime mover for the project, “the monument will be the largest of 32 statues and monuments on the 22-acre capitol grounds.” Dr. Barrera continues: “I don’t think Texas can survive as a viable historical state without admitting there were Tejanos here.” The article concludes by noting that: “Other key players in making the Tejano monument a reality have been Renato Ramirez, president of International Bank of Commerce (IBC), Richard Sanchez, a former staff member in Flores’ Capitol office and Eddie Aldrete, IBC’s public policy officer. IBC is itself a major financial supporter of the project.”²² Dan Arellano, another key player in this monumental effort comments:

VICTORY IS AT HAND!!! Victory for our children and grandchildren who now will have a monument honoring their ancestors. Now when children

visit the capital grounds there will be something else to be proud of. This victory is for everyone, and especially for this great State of Texas.²³

Mr. Arellano goes further:

Now! It's good time to organize a TEJANO DAY IN THE USA. We should ask Austin Tejanos to host a GIANT Party on the day the Tejano Monument is dedicated. Why TEJANO USA? BECAUSE THERE ARE TEJANOS(AS) ALL OVER THE USA AND THE WORLD. QUE MAS ???²⁴

And later, "*Y que vivan los Tejanos!*"²⁵

TEJANISMO AND MUSIC

Advocacy for monuments was paralleled by advocacy for music. Beginning around 2005 a group of Mexican-American, mostly male, Tejano individuals, largely well-educated and largely of the professional class, took up the cause of Tejano music in public forums and with great force. Much like the aforementioned monument activists, and with some overlap, they also included elected officials, attorneys, artists, real estate agents, doctors, college professors, public sector professionals, and professional Tejano musicians. Social movements often require an initiating trigger and though less confrontational, this musical movement had one too. I offer a running ethnographic report, one in which I played some part as participant as well as observer.

Until recently, Gonzalo Barrientos of Austin, Texas, was a state senator in the Texas legislature representing the Austin area. He was an early Chicano movement activist and an iconic figure in Mexican-American activism in Texas to the present day. Legislators are often approached by constituents for help in resolving a myriad of problems. Barrientos was no different, except that elected representatives are usually asked to assist in practical issues ranging from settling a traffic ticket to stopping the construction of a major freeway intersection that will result in the demolition of Mexican-American homes. To be approached on a question of aesthetics and politics is a somewhat different matter, especially when such an issue took on an international dimension, although some materiality was involved here as well. In 2005, a small group of Tejano musicians led by Ruben Ramos, the great front man and leader of the famous Austin-based Tejano band The Mexican Revolution, approached Barrientos with a complaint: to wit that Tejano music was getting diminishing play time on the several Spanish-language radio stations in the Austin/San Antonio/Central Texas area, a perception substantiated by Cathy Ragland's work on this same dynamic in Washington state.²⁶ As it happens, this Tejano state senator was a great aficionado of the music, so he took on the task with great gusto, which principally involved a series of meetings with the owners of radio stations and a number of press conferences. According to Barrientos, in these private negotiations, they ultimately did not prevail with the radio stations,

but the incident did have the effect of joining the music to the broader Tejanismo movement in which I played an inadvertent role.²⁷

At about the same time that Ruben Ramos was meeting with Barrientos, I also spoke with Ramos on another musical matter (see note 13). In that conversation, and obviously knowing that I was a faculty member and the director of the Center for Mexican-American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Texas at Austin, Ramos asked me what would be the chances of CMAS sponsoring him and other Tejano musicians to play at our UT-Austin Performing Arts Center, a premiere venue for national and international performance artists. An audacious suggestion given the history of Mexican-American exclusion from such venues; but, precisely because of that history, I was initially intrigued and then joined the effort, especially since CMAS offers a very robust schedule of public programming for the general public. With the able assistance of two graduate student musicians, Estevan Azcona and Alex Chavez, our great public programs coordinator, Dolores García, herself a Tejano music devotee, organized this concert featuring not only Ruben Ramos but also the legendary Sunny Ozuna and the Sunliners, and Little Joe and La Familia. Together with a small academic symposium the concert took place with great success in April 2006 and featured a speaking role for State Senator Barrientos, who used the occasion to call for the strengthening and promotion of Tejano music, making explicit reference to the issue with the radio stations.

That issue continued to gather momentum, broadening until it led to the formation of a group called Tejano Pride, which in 2006 created a Website where the following appeared:

In 2006 Tejano Pride representatives visited and met with Tejano musicians, promoters, independent Tejano radio stations owners, managers, Tejano music Club Owners, Tejano Music Organizations, Tejano Music shop and store owners, last but not least Tejano Music radio station D.J.'s. The most important message and request given to each of the above was on behalf of the thousands of Tejanos, who have faithfully supported Tejano Music *thru the thick and thin of its existence*. We asked for a very simply yet most important thing for Tejanos. Mainly the recognition of thousands of Tejanos and Tejanas in Tejas and other States, who have consistently stood by, supported and through their individual efforts kept Tejano music alive.²⁸

This effort soon led to the creation of the Tejano Music Association to promote and disseminate the music, including bumper stickers, T-shirts, more concerts, intensified CD sales publicity, dance classes, as well as the foregrounding of an all-Tejano radio station in San Antonio, Texas, and perhaps even more important, the creation of an annual Tejano music conference and dance. On August 21 and 22, 2009, I attended the 2009 conference and dance, which did indeed foreground Tejano music including Joe Bravo and Augustin Ramirez,²⁹ but also traditional conjunto artists such as Mingo Saldivar and new practioners of the innovative accordion style indebted to Esteban Jordan whose “effects—like phase shifters, fuzzboxes and echoplexes”—gave rise to the label that Jordan hates to this day: “the

Jimi Hendrix of the accordion."³⁰ By all accounts, including some very fine dancing, these were very successful events, and it was there that I heard one Tejano say to a friend, in Tejano, English-dominant code-switch: "This is our *música*, guy!"

THE CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF TEJANISMO

The precise sociological and cultural origins of this new Tejano movement, including its music, are not yet fully clear; but one can point to the possible confluence of a number of larger sociological and cultural factors beginning with the age range of its participants and their personal histories. In brief, my observations and interviews clearly suggest that some, if not many of them, are in their late forties to early sixties. For the most part, they are from working class or lower middle class backgrounds, even as they are also the products of higher education, with their formative academic years from the late sixties through the early nineties. The "first-in-the-family-to-go-college" is not unusual here. This chronology broaches three other key factors that may be contributing to this formation. First, many of these participants had some direct or secondary experience in their respective colleges and universities with the Texas version of the Chicano movement that continued, if in attenuated form, well into the 1980s. Second, and perhaps even more important, this experience was also augmented by their formal or informal education in Mexican-American studies focused on Texas. My interview data clearly suggest that in most of these cases, these subjects have been exposed to a particular historical model of Anglo-Mexican relations in Texas that has tended to dominate Mexican-American studies scholarship (and therefore teaching) in the state with a primary site at the University of Texas at Austin.³¹ Distilled, the model offers the following basic plot: An older, established Spanish-Mexican society developed primarily in southern Texas from 1749–1848. This society was usurped and dominated by newly arriving Anglos from 1848 to the 1960s, and the long-time resident Tejanos experienced downward mobility and became the working-class for Anglo agricultural development of southern Texas. Such phenomenon was accompanied by a continuing state of acculturation mixed with conflict from the 1920s to the 1960s. The Texas version of the Chicano movement was a significant phenomenon that brought us through the period from the early 1970s to the present, as participants in the movement but also products of higher education came to maturity even as they continued to participate in Mexican-American civic and political life.

Their college education added an important factor, namely the professionalization of this generation, i.e., teachers, doctors, attorneys, professors, politicians, etc., and hence their marked upward mobility from their working or lower middle class backgrounds. Yet such mobility does not appear to have impaired their ongoing cultural participation in what I have been calling a low-key sense of being Tejano, a relatively unarticulated yet perceptible and palpable sentiment, one having much to do with their decision to continue to live and work in Texas, often southern Texas, although the Austin/San Antonio corridor has also emerged as a primary settlement site.³²

This background may be seen as a kind of platform for the appearance of Tejanismo. For example, the college-level literacy in the communications that I have cited thus far; or the relative economic freedom to fashion such communications through computers; as well as being able to travel to conferences, stay in hotels, etc., were made possible by the middle, and in some cases upper middle, class status of these cultural brokers.

However, I suggest that there were at least four potential “trigger” factors generating the forcefully articulated Tejanismo that concerns us. At the broadest level, one might consider the growing sense of globalization and what has been called “border theory”—the permeability of postmodern experiences in everyday life, beyond the realm of intellectual inquiry; experiences that can simultaneously be exhilarating but also dislocating. Is the ideologically and experientially turn to Tejanismo a sharpened articulation of the “regional” against such a sense of dislocation? Still at a more general level, are we seeing an effect of the now much pervasive gender border crossing? As one participant put it in Tejano code-switch: “*Ahora* the boys and the girls *están todos* confused!” For I am struck by the male dominance of this movement, including the musical groups themselves; and we should not forget that polka dancing is very much dominated by the male lead.³³ Third, to what degree is Tejanismo congruent with the growing ascendancy of Tejanos in the political sphere, with South Texas an intensely “blue” Democratic region in an otherwise “red” Republican (and Anglo) state? Indeed, with demography in favor of Mexican-Americans, this blue region is much discussed as the launching base for an eventual return of Texas to the Democrats. It was no coincidence that the annual Tejano music conference that I attended in August was held in close conjunction with a reunion of Chicano movement activists, most now working in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Tejano music has also now become instrumental (no pun intended) in progressive Democratic, Mexican-American political campaigns in South Texas.³⁴ But finally, in much less “progressive” terms, and returning to globalization and border crossings, it would appear that intensifying Mexican immigration may also be generating a counter-reaction in Tejanismo. Of considerable importance is the historical model of Anglo-Mexican relations in Texas noted earlier, which, it may be critically said, largely leaves out massive Mexican immigration to southern Texas after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 or marks such immigrants as an Other to “native” Tejanos. Américo Paredes, the progenitor of such Tejano studies offered the unfortunate term *fuereños* (foreigners) to demarcate such immigrants.³⁵ As David Gutierrez has clearly demonstrated, the nexus between resident Mexican-Americans and recent Mexican immigrants has always been a site of tension and ambivalence in the twentieth and now the twenty-first century.³⁶

The marked difference in musical styles between Tejano music and various forms associated with Mexican immigrants, such as *banda*, *tropical*, but also the more kindred *norteño*, has become a key element in this counter-reaction. Manuel Peña, a student of Paredes and the foremost scholar-intellectual of Tejano music in all of its variations, had this to say about Tejanos, immigrants, and music:

Meanwhile, contributing to the decline of conjunto in Texas has been the heavy influx of undocumented Mexican workers... [who] ...have no particular allegiance to conjunto music. On the contrary, it is through their unwavering support of *grupos tropicales*—or *grupos cumbieros*...that the latter have become so prevalent in Texas...More to the point, these have posed a substantial threat to the economic health of conjunto by encroaching deeply into the crucial public-ballroom dance circuit.³⁷

While, in 1985, Peña is speaking specifically about conjunto music, there is no doubt that the advocates for Tejano music see the very same threat to their particular musical style in the face of Mexican immigration.

Dan Arellano, one of the key leaders in this new movement, sharply and unambiguously articulated this immigration question, as well as several other factors, that in extended form can serve as a conclusion to this section.

At a recent press conference with Senator Gonzalo Barrientos, I realized how the rift between the recently arrived Mexican immigrant and the old time Tejano community had widened and deepened. Aside from being Americans of Mexican descent, we have little in common. We speak, read and think in English while they do not. Other than the desire to fulfill the American dream we are far apart socially, politically and economically. The irony is that, although these issues separate us, what has become the number one concern is the music. According to Senator Barrientos there are seven Spanish radio stations here in Austin all catering to the immigrant market while ignoring the majority Tejano community. The majority of the new immigrants are the dishwashers, construction workers, gardeners, day laborers, etc. The Tejanos are the Senators, Congressmen, Doctors, Lawyers, Professors, PhD's, Realtors and Authors that also participate in the political process. Although I know that the Hispanic community is divided in many issues, I believe this grass roots effort, led by Senator Barrientos and Leonard Davila, will unite the Mexican-American community and I see it as a growing organization with economic and political clout.³⁸

Here we have as clear statement as is possible on this issue. Mexican-Americans are socially and culturally not Mexican immigrants (they are superior in their social achievement) yet "they" dominate the radio waves, a dominance injurious to Tejano music, but in some larger sense injurious to the hard-won presence of Tejanos in Texas. But perhaps inadvertently, Arellano notes what might be a central issue in this controversy as he says of Tejanos vs. immigrants: "We speak, read and think in English while they do not." It is clear that English-language assimilation is rapidly underway for all persons of Mexican origin except for recent immigrants.³⁹ There are two important implications here. Recent Mexican immigrants continue to be a large market for Spanish-language stations that understandably will play the Spanish-language music immigrants like, and over time Mexican-Americans are

losing the Spanish-language skills they need to listen to and understand most Tejano music lyrics.

Such a linguistic problem may also be compounded by a reluctance and/or inability among younger Mexican-American musicians to take up Tejano music, especially when such young aspiring musicians now have many other musical options available to them. A musician speaks directly to this latter issue:

I've been a Tejano musician for over 25 years. The reason we don't have a lot of Tejano musicians is because the musicians now are content in playing I-IV-V chords. Very basic music. 15 to twenty years ago when musicians took pride in how well they played took music theory and learned their major and minor scales. I cannot believe that musicians play simple chords and take pride in what they play, when we as Tejano musicians can play extended chords and cannot find a decent place to play. We didn't take one step back, we took 10 steps back. It's pretty pitiful the kind of music we have to listen to on our Spanish station. All I can say is Simple Music for Simple People. I'm ashamed to call myself a Tejano musician because when people hear that they think I play like Intocable or Duelo. I'd like to hear these bands try to play Latin Breed or a Little Joe song. They can't do it because they can't play any jazz chords. I can go on but I think I've said enough and if you are a young musician, pleeeeeease take the time to learn your instrument.⁴⁰

It is perhaps an acute sense of cultural crisis that accounts in large part for the stridency of the defenders of Tejano music. For example, consider this encompassing statement from the aforementioned Little Joe of La Familia, the archetypal figure of Tejano music, who addressed a major rally during Go Tejano Day at the Houston Rodeo on March 9, 2008. In his statement, after acknowledging the presence of Senator Mario Gallegos, Ret. Senator Gonzalo Barrientos, County Commissioner Sylvia Garcia, and Tejano musicians Ruben Ramos and Roberto Pulido, Little Joe affirms that the event was “a total display of *nuestra cultura*, *nuestra tradicion* [sic], *nuestra gente* and *nuestra familia*, all bound and united by the love for *nuestra musica* [sic]!! *Musica* [sic] *Chicana/Tejana!*” Such an ethnonationalistic statement further confirms the power of Tejano music as a source of regional and ethnic pride and a unique vehicle for the formation of discourses about Mexican-American and Tejano identity.⁴¹ Yet, as these statements clearly demonstrate, identity is also being forged in a hostile relationship to the presence and music of recent Mexican immigrants. As Ragland notes in her work on Mexican immigrant *norteña* music, beginning in the 1970s:

[A]ttitudes toward Mexican immigrants grew hostile...many Chicanos and Tejanos sought to distance themselves from this new “Mexican” population...During this period, *norteña* emerged as the popular music associated with this growing and doubly-marginalized community. While Texas-Mexican conjunto [but also Tejano] became detached from the migrating Mexican and the increasingly “Mexicanized” border community, *norteña* emerged as a distinct genre with its own style.⁴²

CONCEPTUAL CONCLUSION

In his seminal work on ethnicity and nationalism, Anthony D. Smith astutely notes that ethno-nationalisms do not begin as mass movements—although they may end there. Rather their origin point often lies within a nexus between the intellectuals and the intelligentsia of such an ethnicity. For Smith “to be an intellectual is to engage in a type of mental activity, manifest a state of being and personality type, and have a special kind of outlook and mode of discourse, without thought for its practical consequences or for personal gain.”⁴³ On the other hand, although also college or university educated, a member of the intelligentsia has a “vocation” and engages “in a certain kind of occupation in order to gain a livelihood; [lives off] one’s education, and become[s] a member of a particular ‘guild’ or profession and accept[s] its codes of conduct.”⁴⁴ It is the intelligentsia who applies the ideas and images of the intellectuals to the everyday world, including the world of politics as well as sociocultural relations such as ethno-regional nationalisms. “Everywhere,” Smith says, “it is the rising professional intelligentsia who lend to the historicist vision of the educators [intellectuals] a broad social significance and push it toward political fulfillment.”⁴⁵ But such movements of course gain their impetus from historical grievances usually against a dominant and imperial Other and are “...based upon the reality or myth of unique cultural ties, which serve to demarcate a population from neighbors and rulers.”⁴⁶

I suggest that such a nexus may have occurred between the intellectuals of what I am now calling Tejano Studies, who originated with Américo Paredes, and whose ideas were carried out, as it were, by a rising Tejano intelligentsia, an upwardly mobile group, so clearly demarcated in Arellano’s earlier quote. It is probably not a coincidence that this movement started in Austin, Texas, both the formative and important site of Tejano Studies and also a city with significant numbers of intelligentsia from all parts of Texas, who have chosen to settle in this very attractive city (also “the live music capital of the world”) after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin. But yet another important site for such graduates from UT-Austin is nearby San Antonio where some of these actors produce an annual conjunto music festival and others are also involved in the radio station battles. For this intelligentsia, “unique cultural ties” and their practical articulation have become musical in character and, as such, a type of “musical nationalism.” These musical nationalisms have been defined by Thomas Turino as “musical styles, activities and discourses that are explicitly a part of nationalist political movements and programs,”⁴⁷ a position echoed by Philip Bohlman with respect to folk music when he says that ideologization “invests more meaning and symbolism in folk music than it might otherwise convey.”⁴⁸

Yet, such nationalistic musical processes, more often than not, have been more examined with respect to the way that they, again in Smith’s words, “demarcate a population” from “rulers” or dominant racial, class, and/or gendered forces where the demarcated population is in a subaltern position. But in comparison to Mexican immigrants, this is an upwardly mobile intelligentsia and wholly fluent in Anglo culture. Thus such ethno-nationalism and its associated music can also demarcate

a group not only from “rulers,” as Smith says, but also from “neighbors.” It is quite clear that, in the hands of the intelligentsia, Tejano music is now playing this latter role with respect to their Mexican immigrant “neighbors,” thus in some sense reproducing the racial and class dominance of the larger Anglo society against the most vulnerable sector in American society, the Mexican immigrant.⁴⁹

With this process very much still in progress, perhaps it may be possible for yet other intellectuals to reintervene and offer a more salutary and transnationally dynamic model of greater Mexican music and society that will realign Tejano music with its neighbors in a more fruitful and progressive relationship.

Notes

1. See Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
2. Américo Paredes, *“With His Pistol in His Hand”: A Border Ballad and its Hero*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).
3. Richard R. Flores, “The *Corrido* and the Emergence of Texas-Mexican Social Identity,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 105 (1994), 166–182.
4. See Steven César Azcona, “Movements in Chicano Music: Performing Culture, Performing Politics, 1965–1979,” Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin (2008).
5. See Gardner W. Selby and Jason Embry, “Perry Stands by Secession Comments,” *Austin American-Statesman* <http://www.statesman.com/news/content/region/legislature/stories/04/17/0417gop.html> (accessed January 18, 2010).
6. See Sanford Levinson and Bartholomew H. Sparrow, eds., *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion, 1803–1898* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).
7. See “Governor Says Texans May Want to Secede from Union but Probably Won’t,” <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/04/15/governor-says-texans-want-secede-union-probably-wont> (accessed July 2, 2010).
8. Richard R. Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
9. See Arnolde de Leon, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821–1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).
10. Rolando Hinojosa, *Korean Love Songs* (Berkeley: Editorial Justa Publications, 1978), 86.
11. See John M. Gonzalez, *Border Renaissance: The Texas Centennial and the Emergence of Mexican-American Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). At the most basic level, this sense of difference is expressed in the continuation of ethnic slurs for Anglos (*gringo*, *gabacho*, *bolillo*, etc.) and in the propensity for Mexican-Americans to refer to themselves as *mexicanos* or *Tejanos* when speaking in Spanish even though they may be third, fourth or fifth generation in Texas.
12. Hinojosa, *Korean Love Songs*, 18.
13. See Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*. “El corrido de Gregorio Cortez” is arguably the most famous of Greater Mexican corridos and the subject of Paredes’ 1958 study. In another paper in progress, I discuss the Tejano music

revival of this corrido in polka dance form by the Tejano band, Ruben Ramos and the Mexican Revolution.

14. Ibid., 14.
15. See Manuel Peña, *The Texas Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
16. Manuel Peña, *The Mexican-American Orquesta: Music, Culture and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
17. Manuel Peña, *Musica Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).
18. Ibid., 168.
19. Ibid.
20. See for example <http://www.TexasTejano.com>.
21. Julian Aguilar, “Perry to Sign Tejano Monument Legislation into Law Friday,” *Rio Grande Guardian*, May 29, 2009 at <http://www.riograndeguardian.com/> (accessed January 18, 2010).
22. Ibid.
23. Dan Arellano, electronic communication, April 16, 2009.
24. Ibid.
25. Dan Arellano, electronic communication, April 22, 2009.
26. Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), ix.
27. Gonzalo Barrientos, personal conversation, March 12, 2006.
28. <http://www.tejanopride.com/tpradiopromo06.htm> (accessed January 18, 2010).
29. For Joe Bravo see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POfULoDPs1A> (accessed January 18, 2010). For Augustin Ramirez see <http://www.artistdirect.com/nad/store/artist/album/0,,2612918,00.html> (accessed January 18, 2010).
30. John Burnett, “The Corrido of the World’s Best Accordionist,” <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104845790> (accessed January 18, 2010).
31. See Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*; Peña, *The Texas Mexican Conjunto*; José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Richard R. Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
32. Robert Gonzalez, (not his real name), for example, is originally from a small south Texas town (Pearsall) from a middle-class background (father is a long-haul truck driver; mother is a teacher) but whose combined income in a small town made for a comfortable living. As in many such small south Texas towns, Gonzalez grew up alongside Anglos but in a racially divided existence. With hard work and the assistance of Mexican-American teachers, he entered and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in the 1970s with a B.A. (double major in Government and Mexican-American Studies) and a law degree and then settled in Austin in a successful law practice with three other Mexican-American attorneys. He is an ardent Tejano music fan from his high school dancing days in Pearsall.
33. See Limón, *Dancing with the Devil*.
34. See Margaret Dorsey, *Pachangas: Borderlands Music, U.S. Politics, and Transnational Marketing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
35. Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, 13.

36. See David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican-Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).
37. Peña, *The Texas Mexican Conjunto*, 160.
38. Arellano, electronic communication, November 2007.
39. See Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, "English Usage among Hispanics in the United States," <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=82> (accessed July 2, 2010).
40. http://blogs.chron.com/handstamp/archives/2008/01/following_the_g.html (accessed September 19, 2009).
41. <http://vivetejano.org/gotejanoday/?p=26> (accessed September 19, 2009).
42. Ragland, *Música Norteña*, 25.
43. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 109.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 108.
46. Ibid., 13.
47. Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13–14.
48. Philip Vilas Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 135.
49. None of this is to say that other Tejanos may not be wholly sympathetic to the plight (and the music) of Mexican immigrants. Again, it is difficult to judge both the scope and endurance of this new Tejano ethno-nationalism.

PART THREE

Indigeneity and Modernity

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Re-localized Rap and its Representation of the *Hombre digno*

HELENA SIMONETT ■

In his classic work *Hybrid Cultures*, Néstor García Canclini proposes to see the positive side of globalization as facilitating new openings for the reception and interpretation of cultural products; he also suggests to understand deterritorialization as a transformation of locality into a more complex cultural space that is not limited by specific geographic territories or conventional social relations. Thus, deterritorialization does not impoverish cultural interaction but rather brings about an immediate reterritorialization or “re-localization of old and new symbolic productions.”¹ Celebratory narratives of transformed and reappropriated Western pop forms, as Steven Feld remarks, “imagine a natural tenacity of the past resounding in possibilities for an amplified present, one of ‘endlessly creative conversation’ between ‘local roots and international pop culture.’”² Seen through this celebratory lens, the homogenizing tendencies of global (that is, U.S. pop) culture are compensated by the pluralization of local reworkings of the massified products of the global music industry. However, as Christopher Dennis has convincingly illustrated in the case of Afro-Colombian hip hop, for the members of these communities, globalization is “a vicious circle” because it “thirsts for cultural diversity as a commodity that capitalists hope to exploit.”³ Moreover, rap outside the United States articulates counter-hegemonic discourses and oppositional social critique, often criticizing U.S. cultural imperialism, while “the flow of consumption of rap music within the popular music industry continues to proceed hegemonically, from the USA to the rest of the world.”⁴ Far from being a new phenomenon, globalization is just one more instance in the relentless and

increasingly accelerated expansion of capitalism in which the so-called advanced or First World exports cultural goods to the developing or Third World in exchange for natural goods—in which those living in the central economies are “always in search of new markets and new raw materials, manpower and consumers, in pursuit of furthering accumulation of economic and cultural capital.”⁵

This is nowhere more obvious than where my study is located: in the northern part of the state of Sinaloa at the northwestern coast of Mexico, about 700 kilometers or 450 miles south of the U.S. border. Since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the Sinaloan export-oriented fruit and vegetable industry has grown steadily. Indeed, a large share of the products harvested by the highly technified, Mexican and foreign-owned, agribusinesses that thrive on the irrigated land between the mountain-skirts of the Sierra Madre Occidental and the shores of the Gulf of California are exported to the United States, and to a lesser extent to Europe, Canada, and Japan. Sinaloa also supplies one-third of all vegetables sold in Mexico. The intensified agricultural production attracts thousands of seasonal laborers from other parts of Mexico who join the local work force, many of whom are drafted from indigenous communities. However, it is impossible to distinguish the indigenous people from the landless mestizo peasants that work together on the fields as *jornaleros* (day workers).⁶ They both suffer equally under deplorable working conditions, mounting misery, and excruciating poverty. What constitutes indigenous identity is not visual, and it is certainly not public: it emerges from indigenous traditional beliefs, values, and cultural practices. Indigenous people not only experience globalization at work, it also affects the spiritual life that constitutes their communal identity. Increased dependence on a cash economy is taking a toll on cultural practices, in particular on the time-intense and costly traditional ceremonies such as curing rituals, wakes, burials, and the folk-Catholic calendrical festivities such as *semana santa* (Holy Week) that leads up to Easter, patron saint's days, and Christmas, all celebrated with *pascola* and deer dance music.⁷ During the past decades, the traditional *cargo* system that regulates civil-religious responsibilities has been gradually losing its role as the primary means through which individuals gain status, prestige, and political and religious influence within their communities.⁸ For the impoverished native *jornaleros*, the sponsoring of a *fiesta* (religious celebration) however is not just simply beyond reach, but the increasing emphasis on monetary principles has come to compete with devotional values.

Yet, as a response to what Edward H. Spicer has called “a process of tribal disintegration” or “national incorporation,”⁹ indigenous people have created and hold on to a dynamic symbolic ceremonial system based on ancient beliefs and music practices that clearly sets them apart from the surrounding mestizo population. The mestizos, on the other hand, ever more seek entrance into the dramatic events associated with *semana santa*, the *fiesta grande*. Non-Indians acquire *judío* (Pharisee) attires consisting of diabolic, furry masks, white cotton garbs, and an array of accessories to join the carnivalesque processions. In recent years, the mass media have discovered the *semana santa* celebrations of San Miguel Zapotitlán, a village located just twenty kilometers north of Los Mochis, the commercial center



Figure 7.1 Billboard promoting investment in agriculture in the Fuerte Valley, northern Sinaloa (Photo: Helena Simonett, 2008).

of the Fuerte Valley in northern Sinaloa. Journalists and TV reporters from Mexico City and elsewhere arrive in the village to “document” the visually appealing event, thereby exploiting it as a *México desconocido*, or the unknown, exotic Mexico. An estimated half or more of the participating masked Pharisees are mestizos. Local mestizo entrepreneurs cash in on the indigenous sacred ceremonies by running an amusement park adjacent to the indigenous church and by selling everything from beer to plastic knick-knacks. The native Yoremem (pl. of Yoreme) living in and around the village have developed little effective measures to protect their traditions. Heated debates in Yoreme language about how to safeguard their customs do take place during the festivities at the *ramada*, the traditional gathering place of the indigenous community, but to the outside observer, the *ramada* is “off-stage” and the “hidden transcript” unintelligible—to use James C. Scott’s terminology from his book on the arts of everyday resistance.¹⁰ For the mestizos, the seemingly passive response of the Yoremem to non-Indian encroachment is just one more sign of their alleged indifference.

Mexico’s northwestern region has always been a space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power. While Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of “contact zones”¹¹ refers primarily to spaces of concrete colonial encounters, many of the characteristics of the colonial frontier perpetuate today. Indigenous Mexicans indeed live in what Walter Dignolo in his seminal book *Local Histories/Global Designs* has defined as a space of colonial difference—a “space where *local* histories inventing and implementing

global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored.”¹² Like other powerless who feign deference as a tool of resistance, we may interpret Yoreme conduct as a new survival strategy in today’s global age—comparable to natives’ active response to European Christianization efforts that resulted in these syncretic ceremonies. In the past, indigenous people have used religion as a tool to adapt to the changing natural, economic, political, and social environments. Ceremonials in particular have helped them to maintain cooperative relationships and idiosyncratic customs and values.¹³ But today’s burning questions are, how will indigenous people continue to negotiate their cultural identity in the face of an ever accelerating globalization? How can they defend their fragile soundscape against the acoustic encroachment of ever more potent high-watt sound systems? How will they deal with the displacement that global modernity brings to them? To clarify, I’m referring here to a globalization that doesn’t necessarily mean physical mobility, but a globalization whose “cultural impact is in the transformation of localities themselves.”¹⁴ For instance, a few years ago, some young Yoremem began to purchase cheap mobile phones on which they are able to download globally circulating music styles in MP3 format. A symbol for today’s mobile world, the phones facilitate a seemingly confined ethnic group living on the margins of modern Mexico to “enter modernity” with ease—to borrow from García Canclini’s book title. Nevertheless, participating in such transnational practices does not keep people from “localized dwelling.”¹⁵ I would argue that in spite of the intensification of global interconnectedness the links between cultural experience and territorial location are still strong. Yoremem continue to self-consciously defend their traditional beliefs, values, and cultural practices.

Global modernity has challenged the persistent idea of culture as tied to fixed localities.¹⁶ Similarly, the rapid traffic in global sound, facilitated by a burgeoning neoliberal economy and an increased flux of goods and peoples across borders questions fixed musical identities and styles bound to specific social groups or cultural areas. The Yoremensamble CD project,¹⁷ analyzed later, indeed illuminates claims of identity in light of today’s deterritorialization and re-localization processes. The album contains five tracks ranging from pop jazz and a mix of new age/tropical/jazz to rap with more or less direct references to Yoreme music. Because the CD project was conceived and realized by mestizo musicians who were sponsored by a grant of CONACULTA’s National Program for Municipal Cultural Development¹⁸ and not an ensemble of *Yoreme* musicians (as suggested by the group’s name Yoremensamble), I am also interested in questions of representation, musical messages of repression within the local context, and the way the contested relationship between the indigenous and mestizo population that goes back to colonial times is being reframed in the Yoremensamble CD project.

For centuries, Mexico’s centralist elite has regarded the country’s vast northern and northwestern regions as uncultivated and belittled *norteños* (inhabitants of northern Mexico) as *nacos* (unsophisticated) and *agringados* (gringoized). Indeed, geographically on the edge of the viceroyalty, the struggle for independence with its ideas of a common national identity touched the North and Northwest less than any other region of Mexico. With the end of the Spanish dominance in

1821, the Northwest began to build strong ties with merchants from Europe and the United States.¹⁹ The new borderline, drawn in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexico war, redefined citizenship but not cultural belonging. As I will argue later, artists in the borderlands have long gravitated toward the North—also due to their distance from Mexico’s hegemonic center, the capital of Mexico City. The general perception of the borderland as “a vague or uncertain condition that is not quite one thing or the other” (quoted from Merriam-Webster’s dictionary) remains popular in sayings such as “*ni de aquí, ni de allá*” (whether from here nor from there), but it is a perception that is certainly challenged by the contributions to this volume.

The central issues with which this chapter grapples involve the construction of musical identities that cross borders—identities that are at the same time transnational and local; with the re-localization or “indigenization” of global cultural practices such as rap; and with the appropriation of indigenous cultural practices based on a shared sense of marginalization and peripheralization. Based on ethnographic research among Yoreme communities, interviews with Yoremensamble members, and an analysis of the music and song lyrics, I will illuminate the complexity of the issues involved.

TERRITORIALIZATION, DETERRITORIALIZATION, AND RETERRITORIALIZATION

Rapper Javier Pérez Espinosa, nicknamed “El Elote Bárbaro” (The Barbarous Corncob),²⁰ has called the Sinaloan Yoreme a proud and jealous people who, much like the Yaqui of Sonora, shield their culture from foreign eyes and ears. He was told that “Yoreme” actually meant “hombre digno” or “dignified man”—a rendition that he and his fellow musicians used as title for their CD.²¹ The Yoremensamble project was not his brainchild nor was the choice of the original music that they sampled for his rap piece. Pérez, considering himself at age thirty-four a *veterano* (veteran), had performed with the other musicians of the project before and, like them, had been involved in his home city’s small alternative music scene for many years. Los Mochis is a young and economically bustling commercial city of 350,000 inhabitants, and there seems to be quite some money around stemming from the flourishing narcotics business of the region.²² Pérez, who currently makes a living as radio commentator and programmer, remembers that a decade ago there existed something one could call a “modest rock/hybrid music scene” although it was difficult to organize events in an environment that didn’t recognize this kind of youth culture as “authentic Mexican.” Paradoxically, as Pérez suggests, “people here are afraid of rap music but they aren’t afraid of *narcocorridos*”²³—ballads that cherish the life style of the drug traffickers. Indeed, in the early 2000s Los Mochis experienced a surge in norteño groups; hundreds of adolescents, *galanes* (dandies) and *estudiantes arrancherados* (students gone country) picked up the button accordion, bass, and guitar to play simple romantic *ranchera* songs and *corridos* in private as well as public spheres. The popularity of this kind of “rural-rooted,” local sound stands in sharp contrast to the progressive urban, cosmopolitan sounds of the

twenty-some alternative and hardcore musicians who try to carve out a space of their own. In recent years, musicians like Pérez discovered virtual spaces such as MySpace as an ideal means to connect to a global community of music fans. Marginalized at home, MySpace facilitates a sense of belonging to a global subculture. But while it is less time and energy consuming to post one's music on the Internet than organizing live events in a culturally hostile environment, this kind of individualized and virtual dissemination has further dispersed the small local hip hop and alternative scene that once existed.

Pérez claims that there is no *rap local* (local rap) in Los Mochis and that rap in Mexico is “a David battling with forty Goliaths”—the Goliaths being the Mexican state and the major labels that refuse to promote a subversive music form. Mexico's strong nationalist culture policy has long tried to prevent foreign, in particular American, pop genres to gain significant ground on the national popular culture stage. Nationalistic radio laws issued in the 1930s and 1940s by the Mexican government privileged certain popular cultural forms in order to ensure that the medium would disseminate a uniquely Mexican culture and thereby promote a sense of national solidarity. Broadcast regulation had cultural consequences as it provided fertile ground for the construction and dissemination of a Mexican national culture.²⁴ This kind of “state paternalism” continued into the second half of the century. One only has to remember how quickly and violently the authori-



Figure 7.2 Javier Pérez with his *cholo* “homeboy” alter-ego mascot in the Los Mochis radio studio where he works as commentator and programmer (Photo: Helena Simonett, 2009).

tarian Mexican government suppressed the sixties youth movement that, like elsewhere in the world, was associated with U.S. rock music.²⁵ Despite a rising homegrown (American-oriented and American-influenced) youth culture in the 1970s and 1980s, Mexico's centralized culture industry was not seriously challenged until Mexico's economic transformation and political opening of the 1990s, which brought with it a proliferation of new channels of communication and new dynamics of formal and informal exchange among Mexicans on both sides of the northern border.

Rap music in Mexico began in the early 1990s under the influence of American and U.S.-Latin hip hop. As rock before, rap was promptly denounced as an instrument of American imperialism and remains largely an underground phenomenon tied to a few large cities, although some of Mexico's homegrown hip hop artists have meanwhile gained international recognition: the metal-rap group Control Machete hailing from Monterrey, for example, and Molotov, a punk-rap group from Mexico City. The controversial Molotov was censored and banned from the airwaves during its earlier career when it accused the Mexican government and the police of corruption. Like the rap born in the inner cities and ghettos of the United States, Mexican rap music is audacious and angry: it is a music of protest that speaks to the frustrations of marginalized youths and a music that defines the spirit and the look of a new generation of Mexican youth.

But Javier Pérez sees his own music as “conscious rap” rather than as “protest music” because “here in Mexico,” he says, “they don't listens if you protest, they only fight you.” Unnoticed by the international market, local artists such as Pérez have found a voice in rap to address issues of immediate social relevance. Rather than trying to imitate the Latino gang culture of Los Angeles with vengeful lyrics and a hardcore hip hop sound, some local rappers, sensitized by their own subaltern position, stand up for the disenfranchised people around them. By employing local musical languages and interacting with other musicians, they redefine rap music as a truly “glocal” genre. Moreover, as Tony Mitchell has observed in *Global Noise*, local currents of “hip-hop indigenizations” have taken place all over the world that call for a rethinking of the genre as the exclusive voice of urban African-American youth.²⁶ In her article on Japanese hip hop culture, Nina Cornyetz argues that global hip hop has erased many of the origins of the genre while constantly being “remade regionally through its interaction with variant social, political, ideological, and other contexts.”²⁷ Seen in the contexts of its geographic place, the particular colonial history of this border region, the musical borrowing in the samples, and the interaction between the involved musicians, the rap piece on the Yoremensamble album becomes highly interesting. So let me add some observations to explain.

Although growing up in close proximity—Los Mochis is surrounded by *ejidos*, communal village holdings—mestizos hardly know anything about the Yoremem beyond some popular understanding of “the Indian.” As an educated urban mestizo, Pérez is aware of many of the problems the region's indigenous population faces, but his knowledge about their culture is mostly second-hand: he is, for example, acquainted with the merrymaking of the *judíos* as practiced in San Miguel Zapotitlán during *semana santa*. But the *judío* he knows most

closely is mestizo, not Yoreme. Thus, when rapping about Yoreme pride in their culture, Pérez projects his own experiences upon the Yoreme world—experiences made in “contact zones” such as the Easter ceremonies where Yoreme and mestizo meet.

There are several misconceptions conveyed in the rap lyrics—some of which were pointed out to me by Yoreme listeners—that call for a deeper look at Yoreme culture. The folk enactments of Easter ceremonies in northwestern Mexico go back to the teachings of the Jesuit missionaries in the early years of the conquest.²⁸ But with many of the introduced rituals, the indigenous people discreetly subverted the European texts in performances that encoded their own visions of Western dichotomies such as believers/nonbelievers, conquerors/conquered, and good/evil imposed on them. In a Christian reading, Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection is seen as a victory of the Christians over the infidels. By teaching the Amerindians about the defeat of the enemies of Christianity by means of the dramatization of Christ’s passion, missionaries projected their own historical religious battles onto the New World. In their view, the indigenous were the Jews that needed to be converted and baptized. The native vision, however, is more ambiguous because indigenous people don’t see and have never seen themselves as nonbelievers.²⁹ In fact, the rude character and shameless behavior of the *judíos* (in the dramatization) clearly point to the mestizos, not to themselves. In this context, the Yoremem employ their own term for the non-indigenous Other: “*yori*,” meaning “the one who doesn’t respect.”

Yoreme spiritual investment in the Lenten-Easter dramatization is fundamentally different from mestizos’ carnivalesque involvement, for those who take on the Pharisee role do this to fulfill a three-year or even life-time *manda* (promise or vow) to Jesus, Mother Mary, or the saints. Because Yoremem regard both ceremonial and physical forms of labor as a self-punishment, the ones wearing the *judío* mask have to endure physical adversities as well as the danger of the ritually evil mask.³⁰ They are not allowed to speak or remove the mask for eating or drinking; they perform actions in reverse, mock and threaten the spectators with lewd pantomime and wooden sticks; but they also promptly carry out their traditional duties in a series of rituals. Victor Turner, in his classic book *The Ritual Process*, has observed that the liminality of status reversal in rituals involves mockery and inversion, and makes possible a new position from where to examine sociopolitical structure. “The masking of the weak in aggressive strength”³¹ is part of a ritual status reversal that temporarily allows indigenous people to assume mestizo personality and power.

On the other hand, however, as Crumrine concludes from his ethnographic work among the Mayo (Mayo-Yoreme) of southern Sonora, indigenous people also identify with the *judíos* because as Pharisees they “suffer like Christ did during the last weeks and hours of his life. In suffering, they both become like Christ and confess because of their ultimate destruction of him, as well as for the transgressions of all the pueblo membership during the preceding year. Through suffering and confession comes purity and resurrection—the return to life of Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.”³²



Figure 7.3 *Judíos* guarding the captured Jesus in the indigenous church of San Miguel Zapotitlán during *semana santa* (Photo: Helena Simonett, 2007).



Figure 7.4 Group of carnivaleque *judíos* during *semana santa* in the municipality of Ahome (Photo: Helena Simonett, 2007).

The permissible behavioral extravagances of the *judíos* has attracted a growing number of mestizos who flock to the ceremonial centers such as San Miguel Zapotitlán to partake in the revelry. Under the anonymity of the mask, mestizos succeed to temporarily enter a longed-for symbolic *communitas*. In popular (mestizo) imagination, the *judíos'* lewdness is an expression of indigenous people's "naturalness" and "open morality"—as opposed to their own normative moral system that inhibits sexually explicit behavior in public.³³ In San Miguel Zapotitlán and elsewhere in northern Sinaloa, the *judíos* in their sacrilegious way often imitate and ridicule the ceremonial *pascola* and deer dancers.³⁴ Thus, having observed the *judíos'* play in San Miguel and the outskirts of Los Mochis, Pérez raps that "the Pharisee dances *pascola* from his heart to the sound of *tenábaris* [leg rattles, Castillianized word] and *tambor* [drum]" and that "*tambor* and guitar resound with pride forever." This, of course, simplifies the complex and conflicted interaction between indigenous and mestizos who participate in the very same custom, but it justly connects the Catholic calendric ceremony of the Lent season to the indigenous ceremonial system, which relies on the *pascola* dancers as mediators between the two opposite worlds of the orderly pueblo, as introduced by the missionaries, and the wilderness of the ancestral *monte* (thorn shrub covered mountain).

In Yoreme ceremonies, *pascolas* and *venado* (deer dancer) always appear together, with the former dancing to the music provided by the harp and violins and by the flute-and-drum, and the latter dancing to the deer songs.³⁵ Dancers supply several percussive elements to their respective music or ensemble produced by a kind of a *sistrum* (a wooden hand rattle with metal discs on movable crossbars that produces a sound ranging from a soft tinkling to a loud jangling) used by the *pascolas* when dancing to the flute-and-drum and by a pair of hand-held gourd rattles used by the deer dancer, as well as idiophones worn on the body such as the above mentioned leg rattles (*tenabarim*) made of cocoons filled with pebbles, brass bells attached to a belt worn by the *pascolas* and deer hoof belt rattles worn by the *venado*. The guitar mentioned by the rapper is neither part of Yoreme ceremonial music nor the *judío* custom. The instrument is only used by *matachines* musicians, in combination with violins, during Catholic observations such as Advent and to venerate Our Lady or specific saints. The *matachines* dance groups are not very elaborate among the Yoreme communities, but their dance choreography clearly associates them with the "orderly pueblo" and, hence, the (folk Catholic) church.³⁶

Members of marginalized ethnic groups often play a role in popular myth and imaginary as representatives of universal human values. Emerging from an interest in Mexican identity, the early twentieth-century *indigenismo* (Indigenist) movement, a nationalist ideology emphasizing the value of Mexico's indigenous heritage, reconceptualized the "Indian" as "noble" representatives (thus the translation of Yoreme as *hombre digno*).³⁷ Javier Pérez's rap lyrics in many ways reflect this view. The Yoreme is the noble man, "*obra de tierra y sol, amigo del monte*" (work of earth and sun, friend of the mountain) who, machete in his hand, walks in his *huarache* sandals to provide his family with the fruits of the mountain.



Figure 7.5 Traditional Yoreme housing (Photo: Helena Simonett, 2009).

Indian identity is seen as firmly rooted in natural attachments (*monte, tierra*) and in local traditions (*costumbres*); and as such, it is symbolized by the *huaraches* (sandals) in which, according to Pérez, the Yoreme “strides the urban streets.” For the mestizo, wearing cheap footwear such as the *huaraches* crafted with soles made from recycled tires is an indicator of poverty and hence shame. The reason for Yoremem to walk in *huaraches*, however, is not as much an economic consideration as it is an ideological one.³⁸ Although Pérez recognizes the pride to wear *huaraches*, the reaction of a Yoreme musician for whom I played the CD during a field stay in the outskirts of Guasave was markedly harsh. He quickly pointed out that he would walk in his sandals and modest cloths wherever he pleased because it was proper for a Yoreme to do so. Similarly, there is a clear distinction between mestizo and Yoreme use and meaning of money. While Pérez raps that for the Yoreme “money is for diversion, not for tradition” (“*sus monedas son por diversión, no por tradición*”), Crumrine’s observation still holds true today: “In contrast [to mestizo and our understanding of money], Mayos believe that control of much money relates to a pact made with powers which strike fear in most Mayos. In fact, for Mayos, money should be used as an investment in the fiesta economy and not for personal material gain” or entertainment and *diversión*.³⁹ Indigenous people gain social prestige through accumulating symbolic capital—money of course helps to do so. Material poverty in the Yoreme view is not an embarrassment. Rather, it is an obligation toward one’s own community to give freely what one can spare. Not everyone who is poor is indigenous, but certainly no one who is wealthy qualifies as indigenous. Poverty continues to be a

(self-ascribed) marker of indigenesness. The idea that wealth, however little, is distributed to the community by means of elaborate ceremonies is certainly perplexing to anyone accustomed to capitalism.

SOUNDING IDENTITIES, PLACE, AND SPACE

As it becomes clear from the above analysis, much of my critique is based on the thorny issues of identity and ethnicity; of the distinction between indigenous and mestizo, of insider and outsider, of “ours” and “theirs,” of “authentic” and “fake.” Since Fredrik Barth’s seminal thirty-page introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was published forty years ago, our understanding of ethnic identity and interaction has been re-examined and re-evaluated many times, but his basic assumptions that these concepts are dynamic and subject to modulation have not changed. The postmodern argument, though, that identities are fluid, shifting and malleable, and that one is free to choose one’s own identity is overstated. Identities are not disposable tactical and strategic resources. Rather, identities are socially made because every individual “will confront a dense sphere of relationships with others, and in the background will stand the collectivity.”⁴⁰ Thus, notions of sameness and difference only emerge through identification with larger collectivities. While for indigenous people, such as the Yoreme, identity is not a disposable strategic resource but one deeply rooted in participatory ceremonial life, mestizos seem to enjoy a privilege to engage an “Indio identity” whenever they please to do so⁴¹—whether this happens during the semana santa celebration or by calling oneself “Yoremensamble.”

The initial and enduring anthropological focus on “the sense of rootedness in place” as a necessity for identity formation has shifted over the last decades to take into account “the sense of displacement” and to look at place as a site of power struggles. In *Senses of Place*, Steven Feld and Keith Basso claim that “displacement is not less the source of powerful attachments than are experiences of profound rootedness.”⁴² And to quote Clifford Geertz from the same volume: “For all the uprooting, the homelessness, the migrations, forced and voluntary, the dislocations of traditional relationships, the struggles over homelands, borders, rights of recognition, for all the destructions of familiar landscapes and the manufacturings of new ones, and for all the loss of local stabilities and local originalities, the sense of place, and of the specificities of place, seems, however tense and darkened, barely diminished in the modern world.”⁴³

As borders reveal their porosity and temporal fragility, the experience of place as a basic referent of identity is indeed destabilized. On the other hand, people’s search and need for plurality, diversity, particularity and the local counteract the disengagement of identity from land or region. However elusive boundaries may be in today’s globalized world, however vague identity and however contested and contestable authenticity may be, people still invest much energy into defining themselves (and others) in those terms.⁴⁴

This rap piece, then, is not as much about the Yoreme people as it is about the rapper Javier Pérez and his peer musicians; about how they map their experiences

of their own marginal positions as rapper and as jazz and rock musicians in northwestern Mexico onto the Yoreme community. According to Pérez, the other musicians had already recorded the music in its rough form when he was invited to the recording studio. It didn't take him more than two hours to craft the lyrics. The questions he asked himself—"What do I know about the Yoremem? How do they live? What is their social status?"—reflect Pérez's social consciousness and heightened awareness of peripherality. As an educated person, he is also open toward the so-called *cuestión indígena*, the "Indian problem"—a highly contested subject matter that has been related to an indigenismo conception which identifies the native people with "one's own" as well as with "the primitive."⁴⁵ Pérez is not free of these ideologies that have shaped not only Mexican politics and academia but also a popular understanding of the country's multiracial society. By rethinking the Self in terms of the Other, by switching back and forth between rapping in first and third person, Pérez identifies with "the Indian in himself" and, thus, blurs the difference between the Self and the Other (that is, the Yoreme community). Since the Other is constitutive to one's own identity, identity is always relational. As such, it necessarily emerges as a continually contested domain.

But maybe more striking than what the rap lyrics are able to show us is the music itself. The rap piece alludes to the popular norteña polka "Flor de capomo" ("Water Lily Flower"),⁴⁶ registered in the names of the Yaqui musicians José and Alejo Molina Palma, originally with words in Yaqui (a language related to Mayo-Yoreme) and Spanish. The tuneful polka is a love song made popular in the 1980s by the renowned norteño ensembles Los Cadetes de Linares (de Alfredo Guerrero) and Carlos y José.⁴⁷ Listeners from northwestern Mexico will recognize the melodic phrase that is sampled on a synthesizer imitating the original melody instrument, the acoustic button accordion. Except for this melodic phrase and the reference of the capomo flower to a female (a beautiful girl and indigenous women, respectively), the songs have nothing in common. Pérez's rap style draws from West-Coast rap—a style he grew familiar with since his early teenage years in the late 1980s when an older brother who worked in Tijuana supplied him with audio cassettes of rap music recorded at club performances (mix-tapes) in the border city. The shows in Tijuana's discotheques were primarily aimed at entertaining youths from the United States and thus played the latest U.S. pop music. Before the era of digital recording, shared MP3 playlists, and MySpace, mix-tapes were a highly visible element of youth culture. For Pérez and other Mexican youths outside the centers of production, the Tijuana mix-tapes of bootlegged hip hop tracks were a treasure that connected them to a world beyond the border. While for U.S. youths Tijuana symbolized the utopian longing for absolute freedom and liberty from social constraints, for Mexican youths the border city signified a gateway to the kind of freedom promised by modernity. Though the English lyrics of the rap music Pérez heard on the cassettes were unintelligible to him, the driving music with its beat and repetition attracted his attention.

Writing on hip hop in Japanese, Ian Condry remarks that the kind of language choices in hip hop around the world are "embedded in a wider range of language politics and associated with a wider range of social positions, thereby

providing new opportunities for emcees to ‘flip the script’ in ways that cannot even be imagined in English.”⁴⁸ Since Spanish (unlike Japanese) is an accented language, it is ideal for producing punctuated rhythms. Pérez thus never saw the need to rap in English, and he developed a style of his own that goes beyond any straightforward appropriation of a U.S. musical and cultural idiom. Although hip hop scholars in the United States still tend to highlight rap’s African and/or African-American aesthetic and performatic aspects while largely ignoring the music’s global appropriation outside the African diaspora,⁴⁹ it is nowadays commonly understood that as hip hop circulates around the world, it becomes a vehicle for disenfranchised youth to articulate their own local needs and concerns. Academic discussions have helped to establish and reinforce a general notion of rap music as resistance and as challenge to oppressive hierarchies. Despite the fact that hip hop circulates as a commodity marketed by highly centralized transnational industries, it is this belief in rap music as a form of cultural resistance that lingers in debates about global hip hop and its power to give rise to ethnic and geographic identities. As Mitchell points out, global “hip hop practices also become vehicles for reconstructing the ‘roots’ of local histories.”⁵⁰ Yet, to celebrate the product of these re-localizing dynamics as “indigenized hip hop” (Mitchell) is rather misleading, particularly in the context of a country such as Mexico where indigenous people continue to struggle for more autonomy and the right to define their own cultural identity.

Javier Pérez calls rap “a universal music” and senses a belonging to a global subculture—more so nowadays through his MySpace site—but his music is about where he lives; it is about urban northern Sinaloa. In this sense, his musical identity is a transcultural one: it embraces a cosmopolitan side, but also a side of local affiliation. Wolfgang Welsch argues that the concept of transculturality allows for nuances of identity not encompassed by the sweeping notion of globalization.⁵¹ Transculturality emphasizes the multidimensionality of identities in late modernity. Difference, as Welsch says, needs to be refigured not in terms of distinct or isolated categories, but rather in terms of transcultural networks.

Josh Kun, on the other hand, encourages us to think of music “in terms of the differences it contains, the differences it makes audible, not the unities or harmonies it can be used to fabricate.”⁵² The Yoremensamble project was conceived of as bringing the two worlds of cosmopolitan and indigenous music making together—*una verdadera fusión musical* (a true musical fusion)—but in the end, the integration of various syncretized elements of indigenous music did not change the core of rap, jazz, and pop-rock music. The main obstacle for the Yoremensamble members to produce “a true musical fusion” was their own musical skills and aesthetics: trained in a variety of Western music forms they were ill-prepared for grasping the intricacies of indigenous music and music making. Only at one moment during a face-to-face encounter in the recording studio did they capture a glimpse of what it may mean to the Yoremem. Despite of that transcendental moment, arranger Francisco Olivas, guitarist Juan Manuel Soto, and percussionist Fernando Parra (the latter two were the initiators of the Yoremensamble project) felt that indigenous music needed “to be modernized,”

“to be actualized.” To the Yoreme musicians I interviewed, however, this idea was utterly absurd.⁵³ Why should their music be “updated”? And what was meant by “updating” indigenous music? Why ought the indigenous *cubbau* drum join Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian drums in mambo and samba rhythms? Yoreme reaction to the CD oscillated between “what a noise” and “sounds alright,” between outright aversion and casual indifference. Some listeners found themselves grossly misrepresented in the rap lyrics, others (particularly the younger teenagers) identified with the overall message of oppression and marginalization. But none of them could imagine him/herself making this kind of music. The reason for this lack of imagination or vision is of both economic and epistemological nature. Sheer poverty prevents indigenous people access to items of mass consumption. What are everyday products for others—including the urban poor—is out of reach for the children of jornaleros, many of whom live in makeshift huts without amenities such as power and running water. As individuals and as a group, Yoreme continue to self-consciously view themselves as a distinct community whose identity is not negotiable or changeable at will.⁵⁴ Musical production, thus, is necessarily confined to the traditional ceremonial music of pascola and venado even though musical consumption of the youth may increasingly resemble global tendencies.

The Yoremensamble project then remains an exclusive mestizo “audiotopia”—a term defined by Josh Kun as a “small, momentary, lived (utopia), built, imagined, and sustained through noise, sound, and music,” as a sonic space “of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together, not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and mapping of geographical space that music makes possible as well.”⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

George Lipsitz writes that “the post-colonial era is one of displacement and migration, of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, of split subjectivities and divided loyalties.”⁵⁶ Collectivity is no longer defined by the state as transnationalism undermines the nation-state as dominant in forging a cultural identity. At a distance from Mexico’s hegemonic center, artists in the northwestern border region have long gravitated toward the North: for the Yoremensamble musicians, Tijuana and Los Angeles are closer than Mexico City—and all these centers are closer than the outskirts of Los Mochis. Due to a proximity born “out of the technologically achieved compression of space and time,”⁵⁷ distant places have become more easily accessible than one’s own backyard. Modern social life in the urban centers of northwestern Mexico is characterized by rapidly developing and ever-denser networks of interconnections and interdependences. Forms of global cultural practice such as jazz, rock, and rap music—as the Yoremensamble CD project shows—open up space for struggles over identity and eventually control over representation.

Deterritorialization is the major cultural impact of global connectivity, Tomlinson believes. And García Canclini claims that the most innovative and dynamic cultural production resulting from deterritorialization is happening in the main area of migrations on the continent, that is, the border between Mexico and the United States.⁵⁸ Although felt more forcefully in some places than others, deterritorialization is “a troubling phenomenon, involving the simultaneous penetration of local worlds by distant forces, and the dislodging of everyday meanings from their ‘anchors’ in the local environment.”⁵⁹ Integrated into the global processes of economic modernization, indigenous people in many ways are the victims of a cultural modernity that appropriates indigenous cultural expressions to define itself. The Yoremensamble project is one such example.

Notes

1. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).
2. Steven Feld, “Sound Worlds,” in *Sound (The Darwin College Lectures)*, eds. Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 180.
3. Christopher Dennis, “The ‘Afro-Colombianization’ of Hip-Hop and Discourse on Authenticity,” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, eds. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 204.
4. Tony Mitchell, “Introduction: Another Root, Hip Hop Outside the US,” in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 2.
5. Abril Trigo, “A Two Sided Coin? Globalization from the Cultural Perspective,” *Centre for Research on Globalisation/Centre de recherche sur la mondialisation* (2003) at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/TRI310A.html> (accessed August 5, 2009).
6. The reason to bring racial or ethnic groups into play here will become apparent in the discussion of the Yoremensamble project below. This is not the place to give a detailed account of the complex history of Mexico’s national discourse on race. But briefly: during the formation of a Mexican revolutionary nationalism the mestizo was imagined as the child of a Spanish father and an indigenous mother, thereby construing the mestizo as “*la raza cósmica*” (“the cosmic race”)—coined by the Mexican writer José Vasconcelos in 1925—a race superior to both its European and indigenous components.
7. Ceremonial music involves a number of masked dancers called *pascolas* (*pajco’olam*, literally “the old men of the fiesta”) and a *venado* (*maaso yi’ileero*, deer dancer). For detailed descriptions of these ceremonies in several indigenous communities, see the collection of papers in Rosamond B. Spicer and N. Ross Crumrine, *Performing the Renewal of Community: Indigenous Easter Rituals in North Mexico and Southwest United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

8. Among the Mayo-Yoreme, the *cargo* or *fiesta* system relies on the voluntary participation of a large number of men and women. Individuals who hold an *oficio* (or *cargo*) generously give time and money in service to the community in exchange for symbolic capital.
9. Edward H. Spicer, "Contrasting Forms of Nativism among the Mayos and Yaquis of Sonora, Mexico," in *The Social Anthropology of Latin America*, ed. Walter Goldschmidt and Harry Hoijer (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 117.
10. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
11. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.
12. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), ix.
13. See N. Ross Crumrine, "A New Mayo Indian Religious Movement in Northwest Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1975), 127–145; and *The Mayo Indians of Sonora: A People Who Refuse to Die* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977). The groups of indigenous people in northern Sinaloa and southern Sonora who are known as Mayo Indians call themselves Yoreme (also Yoleme). In this text, I will use the self-ascribed term Yoreme.
14. John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 29.
15. *Ibid.*, 28.
16. See, for example, Gilberto Giménez, "Territorio, cultura e identidades: La región sociocultural," in *Estudios sobre la cultura y las identidades sociales* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, 2007), 115–47.
17. Yoremensamble, *Hombre digno*, CD (CONACULTA, DIFOCUR Sinaloa, Municipio de Ahome, 2006).
18. Established in 1988, the role of CONACULTA, Mexico's National Council for Culture and the Arts, is to preserve and enrich the historical and cultural heritage of the Mexican nation, and to promote and foster cultural and artistic creation among the diverse social groups throughout the country.
19. See chapter 4 in Helena Simonett, *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).
20. Javier Pérez Espinosa "El Elote Bárbaro," personal interview. Los Mochis, Ahome, Sinaloa. May 6, 2009. All translations from Spanish are by the author.
21. The indigenous people referred to as "Mayo" (derived from *mayóa*, shores of the river) call themselves "Yoreme" (also Yoleme; plural Yoremem or Yolemem), derived from the verb *yore* which means "the one who will be born." The term may be best translated as "human being," "native," "the people."
22. The three states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua constitute Mexico's "golden triangle" of marijuana cultivation. Sinaloa is home of Mexico's most notorious drug cartel. Many poor peasants and indigenous people are being coerced to work for the drug lords as so-called *narco-jornaleros* during the peak times of harvest.
23. Pérez Espinosa, personal interview.

24. These regulations required commercial broadcasters to include at least 25 percent “typical Mexican music” in all radio programs. See Joy Elizabeth Hayes, “Early Mexican Radio Broadcasting: Media Imperialism, State Paternalism, or Mexican Nationalism?” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 12 (1993), 31–55.
25. See Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
26. Mitchell, “Introduction,” 12.
27. Nina Cornyetz, “Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan,” *Social Text* 41 (1994), 114.
28. Described in much detail in Spicer and Crumrine, eds., *Performing the Renewal of Community*.
29. For a reevaluation of contemporary Yoreme beliefs, see Helena Simonett, “Narrativity and Selfhood in Mayo-Yoreme Mortuary Rituals,” in *The World of Music* 5½ (2009): 45–64.
30. For a discussion of the meaning of ceremonial labor among the Yaquis, see Edward H. Spicer, *The Yaquis: A Cultural History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 66, 117, 311–12.
31. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995 [1969]), 185, 201.
32. N. Ross Crumrine, “The Júpare Mayo Easter Ceremonial,” in *Performing the Renewal of Community*, 265.
33. I’m drawing in this paragraph again from Turner’s concepts of liminality and *communitas* as social phenomena not necessarily attached to the model for transitional rituals (as proposed by Arnold van Gennep). Rather, experienced on the margin of the society at large, this kind of spontaneous *communitas* is a form of “anti-structure” (much as the hippie movement analyzed by Turner), alternating with normal social structure.
34. A video clip posted on YouTube in 2007 showing *judíos* doing deer dance (“Danza del Venado [“judío”]) elicited some quite controversial reactions among the viewers. One commented: “I suspect that this is a perverse parody that survived in folklore...like when in the original deer dance the poor deer dies at the end...some Christian represented the Pharisee with the deer dance...and that’s what we see here today” (posted in 2008; translation mine). Another exclaimed: “That are Pharisees????? And since when do Pharisees dance the deer dance?? Good God, what these Sinaloan people do to those respectable customs is a joke and a carnival; if the Yaquis would see this, they would prefer to die...jaj!” (posted in 2008; translation mine).
35. In more detail, the three ensembles are: the *músicos* (the three musicians or *jíponamem*: *aplaleero* and *labeleer*, harpist and violinist), the *tampoleero* (the “drummer” or *cubbauleero* who plays the combination of *baaca cusía* and *cubbau*, *flauta* and *tambor*, flute and drum), and the *cantores de venado* (the three *maaso buicleerom* playing *ba’a buejja* and *jiruquiam*, deer singers playing water drum and rasping sticks, respectively). The musicians and singers never perform without the dancers of which there are two types: the *pascolas* and the *venado* (see note 7).
36. For a detailed study of the *matachines* in northern Mexico, see Carlo Bonfiglioli, *Fariseos y matachines en la Sierra Tarahumara: Entre la Pasión de Cristo, la*

- transgresión cómico-sexual y las danzas de Conquista* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, 1995).
37. The real goal of the *indigenismo* movement was the incorporation of the Indian populations into Mexican society and not the redemption of the indigenous people. It was the state's attempt to forge a new Mexican citizenship by "indigenizing" modernity while at the same time modernizing the Indians, "thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community," Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico. An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 231.
 38. See N. Ross Crumrine's instructive discussion of the use of sandals as an identity marker for Mayos in southern Sonora in the early 1970s, "The Problem of Ethnic Identity," in *The Values of Social Science*, ed. Norman K. Denzin (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1973), 45–51.
 39. *Ibid.*, 50.
 40. Peter W. Preston, *Political/Cultural Identity: Citizens and Nations in a Global Era* (London: Sage, 1997), 5.
 41. For a lucid discussion of the topic in the North American context, see Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
 42. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds. *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 11.
 43. Clifford Geertz, "Afterword," in *Senses of Place*, 261.
 44. Anthony P. Cohen, "Introduction—Discriminating Relations: Identity, Boundary and Authenticity," in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, ed. Anthony P. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2000), 5.
 45. Jesús Martín Barbero, "Identidad, comunicación y modernidad en América Latina," in *Posmodernidad en la periferia: Enfoques latinoamericanos de la nueva teoría cultural*, eds. Hermann Herlinghaus and Monika Walter (Berlin: Langer, 1994), 93.
 46. I'm grateful to David Yetman for the correct translation: Water Lily, *Nymphaea elegans*, *Nymphaeaceae*.
 47. The Spanish-only versions by Los Cadetes de Linares and by Carlos y José are accessible on YouTube. A version in Yaqui only by accordionist Ramón Vega is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UPnxINu9XI&feature=related> (accessed August 19, 2009). A bilingual (Yoreme-Spanish) interpretation can be heard on Los Sierreros, *En Dialecto "Mayo"*, CD 9057301302 (Monterrey, Nuevo León: American Show Latin, Disa Records).
 48. Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 147.
 49. Tricia Rose, in her second book on hip hop, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), consistently ignores rap outside the geographic confines of the United States. See Adam Krims's critique of U.S. hip hop academics in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 200.
 50. Tony Mitchell, "Doin' Damage in My Native Language: The Use of 'Resistance Vernaculars' in Hip Hop in France, Italy, and Aotearoa/New Zealand," in *Global*

- Pop, Local Language*, eds. Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), 12.
51. Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 205.
 52. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 21.
 53. Informal interviews with members of the Yoreme communities between April 2008 and May 2009, including Julia Gastélum whose voice was used for one of the tracks without her consent and Leandro Mejía Sacaría, one of the contributing *venado* singers.
 54. Cohen, *Signifying Identities*, 5.
 55. Kun, *Audiotopia*, 21.
 56. George Lipsitz, "Diasporic Noise: History, Hip Hop, and the Post-colonial Politics of Sound," in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, eds. C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001), 183.
 57. Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 5.
 58. García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 231.
 59. Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 29.

Waila as Transnational Practice

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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 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 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 inter-related 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.

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 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

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)

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.

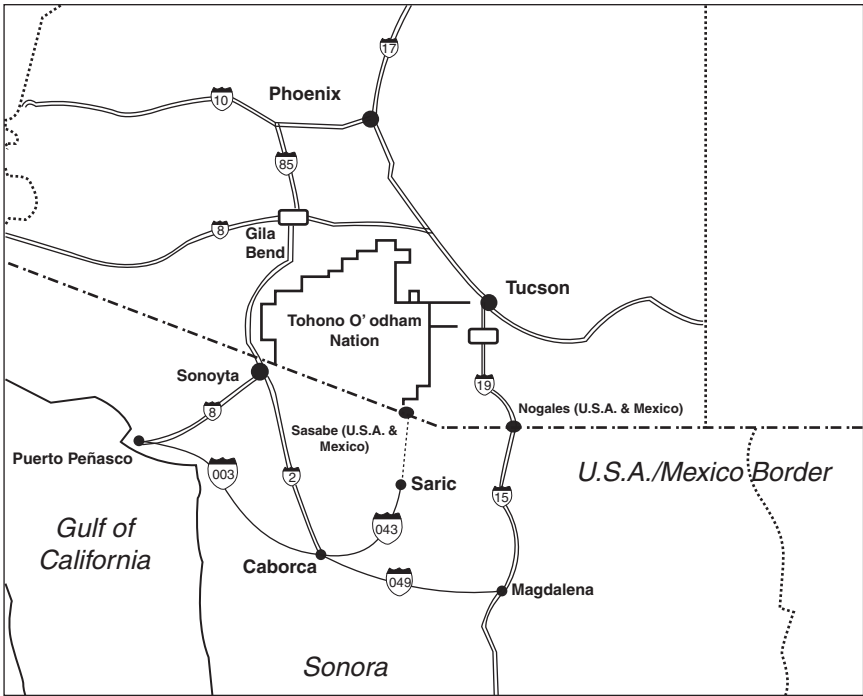


Figure 8.1 Map of the O'odham in Arizona and Sonora. In the United States, the Tohono O'odham reservation is divided into eleven districts and exists in three central segments: one directly south of Phoenix, another near Gila Bend, and another containing San Xavier. (All contained within the bold lines 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.

Brief Timeline of Development of *Waila*:

- 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 instrument 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.

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 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 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 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.

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



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.

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* 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 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 live-stock industry and wage labor. The post-contact 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 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 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.

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 an 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.

Notes

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).
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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, No.2, (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 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.
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 Institute Press, 1999).

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.
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).
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.

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PART FOUR

Cultural Citizenship and Rights

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Transnational Identity, the Singing of Spirituals, and the Performance of Blackness among Mascogos¹

ALEJANDRO L. MADRID ■

A celebrity among Mascogos (as Black Seminoles are called in Mexico) and beyond—her singing inspired an award-winning documentary—Doña Gertrudis Vázquez passed away at eighty-two-years old in Nacimiento de los Negros (Birth of the Black) on January 9, 2004. Gertrudis's prominent status was partly the result of being a key figure in keeping traditional Afro-Seminole practices, particularly spirituals singing (*capeyuye*), alive at the beginning of the twenty-first century in her community, more than 150 years after the first Mascogos crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in the middle of the nineteenth century to settle in northern Coahuila. Born in 1922, at a time when some of the original Mascogo settlers were still alive in Nacimiento, Gertrudis represented a living link between a mythical past of strong, indomitable Black Seminoles defending both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border against the incursions of Comanches and Apaches, and the distressed contemporary settlers of a desolated village ravaged by emigration and a long-standing drought period. Her death, along with the increasing growing religious tensions within the community, immigration issues, and what many in Nacimiento have perceived as unethical attitudes from outside researchers, triggered a drastic change in the role of many of these Afro-Seminole traditions, particularly *capeyuye* singing, as unique markers of collective Mascogo identity.

In this chapter, based on fieldwork and archival research in Nacimiento, Múzquiz, and Mexico City, I show the role of *capeyuye* in Mascogo strategic constructions of self-identity as individuals, as a community, and as part of the larger Black Seminole diaspora. I am interested in exploring the changes in the *capeyuye* tradition after

Gertrudis's death in order to better understand the complex intersection of ethnicity, Othering, cultural capital, cultural reification, and religious affiliation that informs Mascogo identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, I wish to show how the figure of Gertrudis mediated a complex and contentious set of social relations at the core of the understanding and representation of blackness and spirituality in and beyond the Mascogo community, and how her passing away exacerbated a number of tacit local tensions. I am particularly interested in exploring these issues against twentieth-century Mexican racial discourses that have rendered blackness invisible, and most specifically in relation to local ideas about blackness at the northern Mexican border. The idea of *mestizaje* that permeated Mexican society during the twentieth century neglected to recognize the importance of African culture in areas of the country such as Veracruz or Guerrero's Costa Chica, where its presence is unmistakable; however, its consequences were even stronger in the North of Mexico, a region with a history of colonization that takes at heart the civilization-barbarism dichotomy represented by European colonists and nomadic Indian tribes. Blackness has no place in a discourse that imagines white culture as the victorious outcome in that struggle for civilization. If, as many Mexicans still repeat today, *no hay negros en México* (there are no blacks in Mexico), it would be even less likely to imagine them at the U.S.-Mexico border, with its "history" of European defeat over Indian "barbarism." However, the presence of the Mascogos as well as their story as guardians of the country's borders at the very historical moment when the nation-state was being defined complicates the nation's racial imagination. In this essay, I take Anne Anlin Cheng's notion of "racial melancholia" and my own idea of "dialectical soundings" as points of departure to explore the relationship between these racial constructions and the individuals and communities who live and deal with them on an everyday basis. I argue that the Mascogo body and the performance of its blackness via Black Seminole expressive culture questions the racial borders of the nation-state not only from a historical perspective—at the contested moment of their migration to Mexico—but also in their daily life since the Mascogo transnational experience problematizes the discourses that validate that nation-state's political and cultural boundaries. My goal in this essay is to show that the Mascogo history and experience illuminates our understanding of these limits. It informs of the historical porosity of the U.S.-Mexican border; of the crude history of the American frontier; of the contradictory racial borders of the Mexican nation-state; of the limits between blackness and indigeneity; of the slippery discursive boundaries of race; of the racialized body itself as a border; of the boundaries between faith, spirituality, and religion; and of ways to transcend these limits.

Black Seminole historiography on both sides of the border has privileged historical narratives over the experience of individuals.² The substantial archival documentation of their nineteenth-century migration and their service to both Mexican and American governments has made it easier to tell the story of the fierce freedom-seeking people searching for a place in a world maddened by civil war and colonialism than the stories of the folks living peacefully after these events. How did Mascogos live once the border they were forced to cross and later

guard was established and enforced as a true line of separation? How did their culture allow them to forge a diasporic transnational identity? How do they deal with discourses of difference that place them as Other by virtue of their nationality or skin color? What does the performance of Black Seminole culture allow them to do in their everyday life?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: OF CURLY HAIR, *CALDO DE RES*, AND NO MORE *CAPEYUYE*

After a bumpy one-hour truck ride from Múzquiz, Coahuila, I finally arrive in Nacimiento. The heavy and continual rain that has accompanied my journey from Saltillo onward, the green vegetation, and the muddy village's roads make it difficult to believe that this area went through a ten-year drought that forced many Mascogos to emigrate and changed the agricultural lifestyle of those who stayed. When I arrive, many of the older women of the village, led by Zulema Vázquez and Lucía Vázquez (cousin and sister of Gertrudis respectively), are meeting at the town's school building waiting for a crew of doctors from Múzquiz who will teach them how to integrate soy products into their diet. But it seems like the storm has kept the doctors from showing up, and I decide to take advantage of having most of the capeyuye singers in the same room. Don Miguel, my eighty-five-year-old guide and a friend of the community since he was a child, introduces me to the women. When we start talking, I notice they look at me with unusual interest and whisper among themselves; finally one of the women finds the courage and asks me about my curly hair, insistently claiming that I look just like her son. Mentioning my Cuban-born mulatta great-grandmother seems to please them and they proceed to give us bowls of some of the *caldo de res* (beef soup) they had cooked for the doctors. As we eat and continue the small talk, I express my interest in capeyuye singing and the *Día de los Negros* (Day of the Blacks) celebration. Zulema responds that I am welcome to visit them for the *Día de los Negros*, but warns me that I should not expect to hear any capeyuye because in order to honor Doña Gertrudis's memory they have decided not to sing it anymore.³

My first reaction was one of distress for what I felt was the imminent disappearance of a music tradition that had precariously survived until the twenty-first century. I understood Gertrudis's seminal role in maintaining the capeyuye tradition alive in Nacimiento for the last sixty or seventy years; nevertheless, the women's excuse did not seem to make much sense. How could it be that a community would discontinue a meaningful cultural manifestation out of respect for someone who had gone out of her way to ensure its survival? As I would slowly learn in the following months through fieldwork in Nacimiento, Múzquiz, and Mexico City, their decision reflected much more than a simple desire to honor Gertrudis's memory. It was their way to cope with a complex history of ethnic and religious differences as well as local power relations within the Mascogo community that was further exacerbated by the presence of outsiders interested in researching their music and culture.



Figure 9.1 Welcome sign in Nacimiento. Photo courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid, 2005.

A HISTORY OF BORDER CROSSINGS

The history of the Mascogos and Black Seminoles is one of constant border crossings. First moving beyond the limits of the British colonies in the seventeenth century; later traveling past the American frontier and challenging the boundaries between indigeneity and blackness as they came to establish a strategic alliance with the Seminole Indians in the eighteenth century; and finally moving back and forth from one side of the Rio Grande to the other in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, theirs is a continual journey across geographic and cultural borders. But as they moved beyond the political limits that claimed to contain the imaginary spirits of two nation-states and keep them from polluting each other, their bodies became the ultimate border to cross in the performance of racial difference and belonging. At this juncture, song became a strategic expressive tool to either reinforce this difference or to transcend their bodies to place them beyond the limits of ethnic recognition and cultural citizenship.

Originally runaways from plantations in Georgia and South Carolina, the Mascogos settled in Nacimiento in 1866 after an almost two-centuries-long struggle for freedom.⁴ Since the late seventeenth century, enslaved Africans had taken refuge from the British colonists by escaping to Spanish Florida, where they were granted freedom as early as 1704 in exchange for cooperation to repel British

expansionism.⁵ After Spain ceded Florida to Britain in 1763, blacks (who kept fleeing from the British colonies) founded maroon communities and established alliances with the Seminoles. Kevin Mulroy suggests that the ethnogenesis of the Black Seminoles took place at this time, at the end of the eighteenth century and during the early nineteenth century.⁶ The two Seminole Wars of the first half of the nineteenth century, which counted among their goals the destruction of runaway towns and refugees, forced a slow but continuous Black Seminole diaspora. In 1820, a group of Black Seminoles arrived in Guanabacoa, Cuba; in 1821, another group migrated to the Bahamas.⁷ After the passing of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 and the relocation of Indian Seminoles and Black Seminoles to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, a problem arose between Creeks and Seminoles due to the Black Seminoles condition as runaway slaves. The first negotiations with the Mexican government to obtain land in Coahuila for the Seminoles began soon after, in 1834.⁸ The increasing danger posed to the Black Seminole community by Southern white slave masters, and their Creek associates, who were determined to get back their slaves forced both Indian Seminoles and Black Seminoles to seek refuge in Mexico. The first group of Black Seminoles, led by Espopogne Imaya, crossed the Mexican border and settled on the banks of the Sabinas River in 1843.⁹ There is no further documentation about their fate, but Paulina del Moral speculates that the Texas Revolution might have pushed them to migrate back to Indian Territory.¹⁰ However, Willie Warrior, chronicler from Brackettville, recounts that on the arrival of the larger Seminole migration seven years later “a small settlement of about two dozen blacks who’d run away from the Creeks had already been established nearby [and] they were welcomed by the Seminole Negro community.”¹¹ It might be possible that these blacks were what remained of Imaya’s early migrant group.

In 1850, led by Wild Cat (Gato del Monte) and John Horse (Juan Caballo), the Indian Seminoles and the Black Seminoles negotiated with the Mexican government their relocation south of the Rio Grande. They were immediately accepted into the country on the premises that they would guard the newly established Mexico-U.S. border from the attack of both Indians and U.S. filibusters. Once in Mexico, the Black Seminoles became the Mascogogs, a phonetic alteration of the word “Muskogee,” the language spoken by many of the southeast Indians relocated in Indian Territory, among them the Creeks and the Seminoles. Nevertheless, their early years in Mexico were not easy; they kept moving back and forth different limits and in response to pressures that came beyond the U.S.-Mexico border but also within the Seminole community, as the borders between Indian Seminole and Black Seminole became more demarcated. Although the Seminoles were to guard the border, the proximity to U.S. territory by a group of free blacks was problematic since U.S. slave owners considered the Black Seminoles lost property and an inspiration for their slaves to runaway south of the Rio Grande.

The Seminoles and the Mascogogs first settled in El Moral, near Monclova. However, after continual U.S. filibuster attempts to capture Black Seminoles, in 1851 the Mexican government decided to move them further

south to the neighboring villages of Nacimiento de los Negros and Nacimiento de los Indios in order to avoid a possible international conflict with the United States. They remained in Nacimiento until 1859, when they were again ordered to relocate further south in Laguna de Parras in order to avoid the incursion of slave hunters.¹² This order, as well as a number of tensions within the Seminole community, had a decisive effect on the strategic alliance between Indian Seminoles and Black Seminoles. In 1861, the alliance was broken and the Indian Seminoles went back to Indian Territory in (today's) Oklahoma, leaving the Mascogos in Mexico. Nevertheless, the relocation to Laguna de Parras ended up being just a temporary move. By 1865, some of the Mascogos began to migrate back to Nacimiento under the leadership of John Kibbits. Their land in Nacimiento was already taken by Mexicans and Kikapoos, but Kibbits confronted the Mexican government and asked for the recognition of the original treaties that gave the Mascogos that territory. In November 1866, President Benito Juárez officially granted them the land of Nacimiento as well as the status of colony—the land belongs to the community as a whole and not to individuals—which would allow them to keep a relative autonomy for almost one hundred years. At the same time, since the Civil War was over and slavery abolished in the United States, some Mascogos chose to move to Texas, where they served as the Detachment of Seminole Negro Indian Scouts at Fort Clark, under a similar agreement to the one they had with the Mexican government; that is, to guard the border in exchange of land.¹³ Their service in the American military lasted until 1914, when the Detachment was dismissed, without the Black Seminoles receiving the land they had been promised.¹⁴ Some families relocated in Brackettville, Texas, while others, given the disappointment, returned to their relatives in Nacimiento.¹⁵

PERFORMING CAPEYUYE

The oral testimonies of Willie Warrior, Miss Charles Emily Wilson, Clarence Ward, and the other facilitators whose stories makeup Jeff Guinn's *Our Land before We Die*, show that the family ties between Black Seminoles in Brackettville and Mascogos in Nacimiento were closely maintained throughout the twentieth century. Gertrudis Vázquez was born only six years after the Detachment of Seminole Negro Indians was dismissed; thus, her life connects the end of the Mascogo and Black Seminole historical epic saga with the lives of the contemporary members of the communities in Nacimiento and Brackettville. As a keeper of their history and their soul embodied in capeyuye, Gertrudis became a living symbol for her people. She was the link to that mythic past “when everybody spoke English” in Nacimiento.¹⁶ Furthermore, her body, her speech, and her chants performed Black Mascogo authenticity at the end of the twentieth century, when the people of the colony no longer recognized themselves as negros.

A year after my first visit to Nacimiento, I had a chance to do fieldwork in the community prior to and during their annual celebration, the Día de los Negros

in June 2005. Homero Vázquez, cousin of Gertrudis and former commissariat of the colony, gave me an informal tour of the village the day before the celebration. Later, he and his wife, Leticia Palao, invited me and other neighbors and visitors to his house for dinner. We all sat around a table in the backyard and enjoyed some *cabrito horneado* (oven-roasted goat) and Homero's fabulous stories of the town and its people. When I interviewed him, I asked him to give me more details about those stories, he recollected: "When I was a child all the elders spoke English here. All the *negritos puros* [pure blacks] spoke English. But I didn't learn it because my father never taught me. At that time the government gave these neighboring lands to Mexicans for an *ejido* [communal ranch] and after that we began to mix with Mexicans and Kikapoos . . . Now there are only *cuarterones* [mixed blacks, one-quarter black], the *negritos puros* are gone."¹⁷ Until the 1930s and 1940s, the Mascogos enjoyed a certain amount of isolation from mainstream Mexican culture. According to Homero and most other Mascogos I talked to, that situation and the history of continual transnational crossings, settlements and resettlements that I have discussed allowed for the survival in Nacimiento of a number of Afro-American and Seminole traditions among the Mascogo: foods like *soske* (corn drink), *soske* bread, and *tetapún* (sweet potato bread); a type of Creole English; and the singing of capeyuye, or *cantos* (chants).

The capeyuye is a singing tradition closely related to the Negro spirituals that originated in the Baptist Church hymns of the deep South. Customarily sung at funerals and during Christmas and New Year's celebrations in Creole English by a group of a capella women, the capeyuye gets its name from a phonetic variation of the phrase "Happy New Year." Like most Afro-Seminole traditions in this almost matriarchal community, capeyuye singing is kept by women; however, men sometimes sing along. When they do, they follow the early Afro-American spiritual singing practice of doubling the melody one octave lower. Like in Negro spirituals, capeyuye lyrics feature the sense of loss, melancholy, and hope that characterizes Afro-American spirituals singing. Recurring topics include impermanence, the need to be always prepared for death, and the reunion of family members in the afterlife. As Leticia, Homero's wife and a Mascoga capeyuye singer says, the *cantos* are "our farewell to the dead . . . that's what they [the *cantos*] mean for us. It is what we say to a person who is leaving."¹⁸

Led by the oldest woman, the group sings while hand clapping and in the case of funeral performances moving in a circle around the dead body.¹⁹ During the performance, the leader chooses the order of stanzas, the number of repetitions, and the alternation of verses and chorus in any given *canto*, and is followed by the group in heterophony. The group does not attempt to achieve a uniform, homogenous timbre or sound; thus, although the leader plays the most important role in deciding what to sing, there is room for individuals to add the embellishments, bent-note intonations, and moaning, that gives capeyuye its unique character. There are three surviving recordings of Mascogo women singing capeyuye; two of them under the leadership of Gertrudis. The first two were taped during the shootings of Rafael Rebollar Corona's *From*

Florida to Coahuila (1995), and Patricia Carrillo Carrera's *Gertrudis Blues* (2003). The last source of recorded capeyuye, taped after Gertrudis's death, is a documentary titled *Tribu mascogos de Coahuila* produced in 2005 by José Luis Velázquez for a series about indigenous communities produced by Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education). The capeyuye style in the films by Rebollar Corona and Carrillo Carrera is very similar; one can hear Gertrudis's voice clearly in the foreground, leading the group, and accenting with a louder dynamic the beginning of every new stanza to indicate to the rest of the group what lyrics and what part of the chant are coming. In the background, we can clearly differentiate Zulema Vázquez's voice above the rest of the group, somehow making sure Gertrudis cues are understood and pulling the singers together into following their leader. These recordings are precious not only because of the perfect communication between Gertrudis and the ensemble—one can almost feel Gertrudis winking at Zulema to increase the tempo and then Zulema keeping the women together as they all speed up—but also because one can hear the enjoyment of the singing group in the embellished internal cadences with expressive ad lib bent notes and glissandi. The older versions in Rebollar Corona's film—shot in 1995 although not released until 2001—are unique in that one can also hear male voices joining in parallel organum, which is not abnormal but rather unusual since, as Homero told me, many of the men do not know the lyrics or English to understand what they sing.²⁰ Capeyuye in Velázquez's documentary sounds quite different from the previous recordings mainly because Gertrudis was no longer leading the women. Instead, one hears Zulema struggling to maintain a group together that evidently lacks the spirit shown in the earlier productions.

Mascogo cantos do not have titles and can only be recognized by their lyrics. "This May Be My Last Time" is the beginning phrase of one of which I have been able to find concordances in both the U.S. archive and repertoire. Although we can not be sure when this chant entered the Mascogo tradition, comparing the different versions might give us some insights into the similarities and differences between capeyuye and African-American spiritual and Baptist gospel traditions. The concordances come from Harold Courlander's *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (1963); Dr. Charles G. Hayes with the Cosmopolitan Church of Prayer in Chicago (broadcasted on October 27, 2008); and a Reverend Charles Nicks with the congregation of the St. James Baptist Church of Detroit.²¹

All versions show a melodic construction based largely on the unfolding of a simple harmony. Courlander's transcription differs the most from the other versions in a few aspects; the lyrics state "This may be your last time" instead of "This may be my last time," the harmonic mode is major instead of minor, and the rhythm prominently features a triplet on the weaker part of the measure. However, the basic melodic contour, although staying within a much narrower range, is quite similar to the other three versions; the vocal range in this version does not move beyond the interval of a sixth while the other three versions are characterized by a leap of an octave in the second period of the tune before a quick descent back into the tonic (See music example 9.1).²²

This may be your last time, this may be your last ti me

This may be your last time, may be your last ti-me I don't know

Music example 9.1 Refrain from “This May Be Your Last Time,” as printed in Harold Courlander’s *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (1963).

The remaining versions have more similarities among them in terms of melodic contour. Interestingly, Reverend Nicks’s version neglects to use the rhythmic inflection usually referred to as “swinging” that often characterizes African-American musics. Instead, it stays within an alternation of quarter and eighth notes (See music example 9.2). On the other hand, Hayes’ version is the closest to the Mascogo’s both in terms of melodic contour as well as in the use of the swinging rhythm; they both employ the dotted eight-note followed by a sixteenth-note

This may be my last time, this may be my last time chil dren

This may be my la st time, it may be my la st time I don't know

Music example 9.2 Refrain from “This May Be My Last Time,” as sung by Reverend Charles Nicks with the congregation of the St. James Baptist Church of Detroit.

version of rhythmic swinging (See music examples 9.3 and 9.4). There are two main differences between capeyuye and all the African-American versions. First, the performance rendition that I have just discussed; while the African-American versions are responsorial, taking the first tune as a type of refrain or response that alternates with improvised calls in between response repetitions, the Mascogo version privileges continual communitarian singing. The second difference is the Mascogo’s use of a microtonal melodic inflection, a type of “blue note” on the seventh degree of the scale. Here, the pitch F sharp, is slightly flattened to make it a note in between F and F sharp. (See music example 9.4) This is of course a typical feature of classic African-American traditional music, particularly country blues, where these kind of “blue notes” are often used as expressive tools on the third, fifth, and seventh degrees of the scale. One could speculate as to whether the use of a regular leading tone (F sharp) on the seventh degree in both African-American versions is a result of the incorporation of well-tempered instruments into the singing tradition in the twentieth century; a careless interpretation might

This may_ be my last time, this may_ be my last time chil_dren

This may_ be my last time, it may be my last time I don't know

Music example 9.3 Refrain from “This May Be My Last Time,” as sung by Dr. Charles G. Hayes with the Cosmopolitan Church of Prayer in Chicago.

This may_ be my last time, this may_ be my last ti__ me

This may_ be my last time, and may be my last time I don't know

Music example 9.4 Refrain from “This May Be My Last Time,” as sung by Mascogo women from Nacimientto.

also lead us to believe that the Mascogo version could be related to an earlier African-American version and that thus it could have entered the Mascogo repertoire before the standardization observed in the versions by Dr. Hayes and Reverend Nicks, remaining closer to traditional African-American work songs due to the absence of well-tempered instruments in traditional Mascogo music. This is a plausible interpretation; however, it is virtually impossible to know when “This May Be My Last Time” entered the Mascogo repertoire and determine if it is a more “authentic” version according to traditional ethnomusicological criteria. This chant might have entered the Mascogo repertoire back in the nineteenth century or at any point along the history of close contact between Mascogos and Black Seminoles not only from nearby Brackettville, but also from the larger Black Seminole diaspora, as Mascogo women have been invited to perform capeyuye at Black Seminole festivals in the United States. However, I am not interested in determining the “authenticity” of the Mascogo version or to engage in an exercise of cultural “rescue” and “preservation.” Instead, I am interested in exploring this music and its performance complex from the perspective of sincerity to “evaluate performance for its affective charge [and] attend to the ways in which performers as agents activate repertoires of behavior to make public their sense of self,”²³ as proposed by Ramón Rivera-Servera. In other words, I am interested in exploring the performative character of capeyuye in relation to its use by Mascogos in order to represent themselves as part of a trans-border cultural group; as such I am more concerned with how Mascogos use capeyuye to metaphorically and factually move beyond bodily, ethnic, religious, and national borders.

PERFORMING BLACKNESS. RACIAL MELANCHOLIA
AND DIALECTICAL SOUNDINGS IN NACIMIENTO

As I engaged in further conversations with Zulema and Lucía Vázquez, I realized that the reasons behind their decision to stop singing capeyuye went beyond the aforementioned respect for Doña Gertrudis's memory, it was also a response to their perception that foreign researchers were interested in their music but were not respectful to the community. Later, I would find another important piece of information in understanding the current position of capeyuye performance among the Mascogos. As Homero Vázquez walked me through the community's cemetery, I asked him if the women had sung at Doña Gertrudis's funeral. He replied: "Of course. Women came from as far as San Antonio [Texas] to sing to her... They still sing, as long as the dead is a '*negrito*.' But if it is a 'Mexican' then they do not sing."²⁴ Clearly, as I was slowly discovering, their decision to stop singing the capeyuye was not as drastic as Zulema had put it before; mostly, it referred only to its performance in public or for foreigners (as part of the Día de los Negros), but they maintained it as part of its local ritual context and as part of other strategic communitarian performances, as their participation in José Luis Velázquez's documentary shows. Homero's account also foreshadows the internal discourses of difference at work in determining who is worthy of the cantos and who is not. Homero's story made it evident that determining race is one of the hidden but important power struggles at stake in determining Mascogo identity; the other being religious affiliation. The question about capeyuye in Nacimiento is not whether the Mascogos should make an effort to keep it alive but rather what does its performance allow them to do today. What are the complex and often contradictory racial and ethnic relations and discourses that the performance of capeyuye render visible?

For generations, capeyuye singing was transmitted as an oral tradition among the Protestant Mascogos whose lineage could be traced back to the early founders of the community or the families who have moved back and forth from nearby Brackettville, Texas, since that time. Gertrudis Vázquez, Lucía Vázquez, Zulema Vázquez, Carmela Vázquez, Mariana Vázquez, the older women, and capeyuye singers learned to sing from their parents. They kept the tradition alive in Nacimiento until the late 1990s against the disdain and scorn of a growingly mixed community where Catholics of Mexican blood quickly outnumbered Protestants of less mixed ethnic background. Zulema's experience as capeyuye singer is a good example of the complex relationship between tradition, race, ethnicity, religion, and difference that the capeyuye tradition articulates. As many Mascogos do, Zulema and her husband moved to the United States and lived in Brackettville and San Antonio for many years before returning to Nacimiento. According to her, even though she was away from her native town, she was never ashamed of being black and kept singing capeyuye.²⁵ In 1989, when she returned to Nacimiento, she witnessed a larger presence of Catholics and "Mexicans" in the community. She told me people got upset when reminded they had black blood and would ridicule Mascogos and capeyuye, saying capeyuye performers looked

like monkeys.²⁶ Worried about the situation, Zulema approached Gertrudis, the old Mascogo matriarch, and organized a group of singers to ensure that the younger generation would not forget the songs.

The group, originally made out of the Vázquez sisters and cousins, quickly caught the eye of local authorities in nearby Múzquiz who began to invite them to perform at local and regional events as symbols of Mascogo cultural identity. It was at one of these presentations, in Coahuila's city capital, Saltillo, that the "traditional" female Mascogo attire was born. Homero Vázquez states that "the clothes were made in Múzquiz. They [the organizers of the concert] told us that that was the way *los negritos* dressed a long time ago. That's what they say the governor wanted... that he wanted to see them [the singers] dressed like that."²⁷ Although foreign to their culture, the southern plantation, Nancy-Green's-Mammy-kind of clothing was quickly embraced by the Mascogos because it allowed them to capitalize on the Other's desire for difference and exotic authenticity. (See figure 9.2) Soon, the invitations to perform capeyuye came from cultural institutions interested in the preservation of African culture both in Mexico and the United States. Zulema told me they went to sing at black festivals in Veracruz and then in Mississippi, where she says people cried as they sang because the Mascogo cantos were only slightly different from theirs.



Figure 9.2 *Capeyuye* female singers from Nacimiento. Doña Gertrudis Vázquez is the third woman sitting from the right. Photo courtesy of Homero Vázquez.

According to Zulema, their problem was that the natives of Nacimiento were more and more mixed with Mexicans and kept making fun of them.²⁸ However, the situation in Nacimiento improved unexpectedly in the late 1990s, when a group of Baptist ministers from Louisiana went to the colony to help Mascogos with the paperwork to obtain visas to enter the United States to visit their Black Seminole relatives. Two problems arose when going through the process. First, in order to qualify for the visas each applicant needed to prove that he or she was a Mascogo recognized as such by the community. Second, they needed to solve a problem that was detected when Mascogos went to get their Mexican birth certificates in Rosita Coahuila. According to Paulina del Moral, the birth certificates of many of them did not state their Mexican citizenship because, arguably, the authorities in charge were not sure if the Mascogos were in fact Mexican citizens or not.²⁹ Once their Mexican citizenship was proved and the Mexican passports issued, the process to obtain American visas started with the understanding that immigration officers in Del Rio, Texas, would grant them only to those who could demonstrate to be descendants of the Black Seminole scouts that had fought for the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars of the late nineteenth century.³⁰ Zulema Vázquez expresses that all of a sudden everyone wanted to be a Mascogo and that many in the colony wanted to learn the capeyuye songs. But she also complains that it was impossible because the cantos cannot be learned overnight, they are learned as part of people's daily life.³¹

Clearly, in the 1990s, capeyuye singing worked as a complex and powerful catalyst for the construction of Mascogo cultural identity and its regional, national, transnational, and international representation. Homero's early account of a time when the people of Nacimiento were black and the town's lingua franca was English informs of a kind of "racial melancholia" as defined by Anne Anlin Cheng, a "malady of doubleness . . . a dis-ease of location and memory, a persistent fantasy of identification that *cleaves* and *cleaves to* the marginalized and the master."³² As such, racial melancholia acts as a mechanism by which racialized subjects render invisible their own racialized bodies, often mystifying it in a distant past as they conform to hegemonic assimilating discourses in the present. Homero's melancholic descriptions of an idyllic Nacimiento long gone places authenticity in the traces of difference in the past but erases it in the present by buying into the hegemonic discourse of the mestizo nation. When Homero states that "now there are only *cuarterones*, the *negritos puros* are gone," he performs an act by which he racializes his own body in the present as mestizo, thus complying with a Mexican hegemonic racial discourses in which mestizaje inherently renders blackness invisible. This kind of rhetoric is commonplace among members of the Nacimiento colony. On June 19 2005, I attended a service at the Templo Evangélico Los Amigos, the evangelist sanctuary that took over the old Baptist temple in Nacimiento. Zulema was acting as pastor that morning and delivered a sermon about ethnic changes in the community, at the climax of her speech she cried "*el negro ya se fue*" (the black is gone), implying there are no more blacks in the community. As Homero Vázquez commented, capeyuye was a cultural manifestation that clearly set individuals' ethnic and religious affiliations apart within the colony. When

Homero refers to *los negritos* he is not only performing a racial marker but in fact is also differentiating in terms of religious affiliation. *Los negritos* are not only “pure blacks,” but also the “original Protestants,” and the source of a sort of authenticity that makes them deserving of the honor of having the cantos sung at their funerals. Interestingly, with this labeling Homero excludes himself from the group since he recognizes not only to be a Catholic but also a *cuarterón*. Thus, capeyuye singing becomes a marker of local authenticity in a distant past, one that contemporary Mascogos acknowledge to be long gone.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s seminal work placed language at the center of the intellectual inquiry of border studies. For her, language works as a distinctive and very personal marker of identity but also as a bridge or window for the racialized or gendered bodies to enter into other worlds.³³ In the case of capeyuye, language plays a fundamental role in the kind of performance that this musical practice advances. The Creole English of capeyuye chants allow Mascogos to enter a space where the past lives in the present; as such, it makes capeyuye into an audiotopic moment that allows for a communal recognition in the present based on the imagination of the past (“when everybody spoke English”). Language in capeyuye thus plays a double role: it works as a catalyst for the virtual reconstitution of myth in the present while at the same time marking ethnic (and even racial) difference, and establishing a cultural link beyond the policed political borders of the nation-state and the policed borders of language (since itself the language of capeyuye is a creole, mestizo, “impure” English). As such, the complex uses of language in capeyuye inform the uniqueness of racial melancholia among the Mascogos.

Racial melancholia as a theoretical tool sheds light upon the complex relation Mascogos have with racial discourses in Mexico; however, their experience and the strategic ways in which they engage with these discourses also problematizes Cheng’s notion. A particularly important aspect in Cheng’s definition of racial melancholia is the development of a sense of self-hate by the individuals performing these dis-identifications with their past. The Mascogo case shows a group of savvy individuals who also take conscious strategic decisions to engage what the mainstream expects from them as the Other—as long as it serves their political agendas. There is no time for self-hate among the Mascogos because being different and entering discourses of difference also benefits them.

Curiously, as this rhetoric flourishes among Mascogos, their “Mexican” neighbors from nearby Múzquiz still emphasize the discourse of difference, marking their *negrito* neighbors as different but somehow a source of regional cultural pride, as seen in *Mascogos. Freeman* (2008), a homemade documentary produced by Marco Antonio Llanos, an English teacher at a public junior high school in Múzquiz. The documentary begins with a staged conversation between three kids and then proceeds to tell the usual epic narrative of the Black Seminoles migration to Mexico and the disbanding of their community in the last years. However, more than the predictable information in the video, what is truly telling is to read the comments left on its YouTube Web page. “I am very proud of being from Múzquiz, Coahuila, and even more of having people as beautiful as the Mascogos,” “Thanks,

we are very proud,” “I am happy to see positive things about my town.”³⁴ These comments reinforce what seems to be the idea behind the production of the video, that the Mascogo presence is something that makes Múzquiz unique and their people should be proud of it. This kind of rhetoric recognizes the Mascogo presence through a recognition of their black skin (“I belong to the Vázquez family, which is a very extended family because it’s made of many *negritos*” assures a voiceover, as the video shows the image of a young black woman), and argues for a sense of local pride based on it.

This kind of local recognition of the black body has also taken place within the community itself and it is used strategically. In an article about the experiences of Mascogos in the United States, Adrián Cerda writes:

Mascogos remember the golden age, when they could cross the border in Laredo, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass just by laconically saying “American Citizen,” without bothering with any type of documents. At that time the officers thought that everyone with black skin had to be American and let them through without looking at their papers. Undocumented black Mexicans have an easier time hiding from the *migra* [immigration, the Border Patrol] than their compatriots: their Afro-American appearance keeps them from being bothered by the agents. They say “we are only arrested if they catch us speaking Spanish.”³⁵

The recognition of blackness from within and from outside the community and its strategic uses as shown in these two cases further complicates the issue of racial melancholia. In Cerda’s account, the racialized body that was once invisible on the Mexican side of the border becomes a tacit sign of legality as the American INS agents can only see these bodies as belonging in the U.S.’s essentialized racial discourse. Therefore, the Mascogo skin becomes the border that separates their bodies as part of the American system of racial representation and their inner selves as part of the Mexican side of cultural representation. This type of strategic use of the body and the racialization of its culture can also be verified in the Mascogo negotiation of external influences in relation to their own traditions. When the capeyuye singers accepted the foreign clothing suggested by the governor for their presentation in Saltillo and later adopted it as their official capeyuye attire, they inadvertently performed an exercise on strategic essentialism. This type of strategy responds to Slavoj Žižek’s suggestion that the quintessential question of desire is not “what do I want?” but rather “what do others want from me?”³⁶ and puts in evidence the role that the expectations of the majority play in the construction of a minority’s self-identity. When state authorities requested the use of the “plantation-type” clothing they were responding to stereotyping discourses of representation about blackness that have been challenged and contested for decades in the United States but that remain in place in Mexican society, since it has largely chosen to ignore the presence of Africa in their cultural heritage. However, by accepting to play along, the Mascogos were able to attain a level of empowerment and cultural recognition for their

community unprecedented in Mexico. In fact, they were able to cash on the cultural capital of a tradition that up to that moment had remained marginal not only in Mexico, but a tradition that was slowly being marginalized even within the Mascogo community.

In order to account for the social and discursive implications of the articulation of cultural citizenship by music and expressive culture, I have coined the theoretical concept of “dialectical soundings.” This concept is inspired by Walter Benjamin’s notion of “dialectical images.” Benjamin proposed that dialectical images work as moments when the detritus of material memory generates a critical practice instead of just being a mode of transmission of dominant culture. As such, Max Pensky suggests, the dialectical image constitutes a “temporal shock of legibility [that] serves as a pinion around which present, past, fantasy and prehistory are collected into one focal point.”³⁷ In her reading of Benjamin, performance theorist Jill Lane suggests that these dialectical images appear in the present to recognize a moment in the past that has been discursively rendered invisible, and to provide a possible avenue into the future.³⁸ I have taken Lane’s provocative reading of Benjamin a step further and propose that music as dialectical sounding could work as a medium that makes visible the invisible via a specific articulation in the present and provides a possible place for that past in a new narrative of the present toward the future. I argue that as Mascogo capeyuye singing transcends the boundaries of their community it becomes a type of dialectical sounding that renders blackness visible within a culture that has discursively erased it. Mascogo capeyuye singing as dialectical singing shows that racial melancholia is a complex phenomenon that might not necessarily lead to the type of self-hate that Anne Anlin Cheng proposes. The Mascogo case indicates that although individuals might be unaware of adopting the racial terms of the dominant culture about themselves, they can do it without buying into the intrinsic racial hate that informs it. Instead, they can take advantage of those very terms and turn them to their advantage.

“THIS MAY BE MY LAST TIME”

The increasing presence of foreign researchers in the community and the continual invitations to perform outside Coahuila eventually became a source of conflict between the Protestant minority and the Catholic majority that had embraced the tradition in the late 1990s. For the “Mexican” Catholics embracing capeyuye and its aura of Black Seminole authenticity, it was a chance to benefit from the immigration policies promoted by the American Baptist ministers. However, such a situation created an imbalance of powers between Protestants and Catholics, between *negritos* and *cuarterones*, or “Mexicans” in the community, because it questioned who and how would capitalize on the cultural reification of capeyuye. Until her death, the presence of Gertrudis, the old community matriarch, a cherished figure among Protestants and Catholics alike, facilitated the easing of those tensions. However, her death in 2004 left the community without a

widely respected figure who could mediate among the factions. The fact that Zulema, Gertrudis's natural successor as capeyuye leader was also the minister of the new Templo Evangélico Los Amigos only made the situation more difficult. The decision to stop the public performance of capeyuye singing and abandon the project of teaching the songs to the younger generation needs to be understood within this complex contingency.

The 2005 Día de los Negros celebration in Nacimiento, organized by the newly elected Catholic, "Mexican" commissariat of the community, was semi-boycotted by the Protestant community. As Zulema had warned me almost a year earlier, there was no capeyuye singing as part of the event, and *soske* bread and *tetapún*, the traditional Black Seminole foods, were also absent from the celebration. Furthermore, none of the members of the Evangelist temple headed by Zulema showed up during the evening dance held at the town's central basketball court. The absence from the celebration of a group that up to the year before had remained central in the performance of Mascogo identity shows the increasing religious and ethnic tensions in Nacimiento since Gertrudis's death.



Figure 9.3 Gertrudis Vázquez's grave in Nacimiento. Photo courtesy of Alejandro L. Madrid, 2005.

Mascogos will need to resolve the power struggles that have resulted from the outside recognition of capeyuye and the local recognition of its important cultural capital. While capeyuye rendered Mascogo blackness visible, it also opened the Pandora box of difference within the community. Mascogos will also need to.

Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge Marco Antonio Llanos and his family for their hospitality in Múzquiz and Nacimiento. I also want to thank Don Miguel Salazar Jiménez for introducing me to many Mascogo families in Nacimiento; Don Homero Vázquez and his wife Doña Leticia Palao for their generosity and for providing the pictures of the capeyuye singers included here; and Socorro Mendoza for sharing with me the documents she collected for her own historical research about the Mascogos. Paulina del Moral was also a gracious source of information and contacts, I deeply appreciate her help. Finally, I wish to thank Ruth Palao for her help tracing back members of the community and for providing information only insiders have access to.
2. From the early research conducted by Kenneth Wiggins Porter and Rosalie Schwartz to the more contemporary works by Kevin Mulroy, Paulina de Moral, Martha Rodríguez, and Gabriel Izard Martínez, the tendency to privilege the Mascogo epic narrative as well as the trope of the freedom-seeking *cimarrones* has been a constant in Black Seminole historiography. See Gabriel Izard Martínez, “De Florida a Coahuila: El grupo mascogo y la presencia de una cultura afrocriolla en el norte de México,” *Humania del Sur*, Vol. II, No. 3, (2007); Daniel F. Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Paulina del Moral, *Tribus olvidadas de Coahuila* (Saltillo: Fondo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Coahuila, 1999); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom at the Border. The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1993); Kenneth Wiggins Porter, “The Hawkins Negroes Go to Mexico,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, (1946); Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de resistencia y exterminio. Los indios de Coahuila durante el siglo XIX* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1995); and Rosalie Schwartz, *Across the Rio to Freedom. U.S. Negroes in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1975). Even Jeff Guinn’s *Our Land before We Die: The Proud Story of the Seminole Negro* (New York: J.P. Tarcher, 2002), largely based on the contemporary oral testimonies of Miss Charles Emily Wilson, Willie Warrior, and Clarence Ward, among other chroniclers from Brackettville Texas, focuses on the historical events of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, to the detriment of the living experience of the individuals and the everyday life of the communities.
3. Zulema Vázquez, personal conversation, Nacimiento, Coahuila. September 1, 2004.
4. Kenneth W. Porter states that the land of Nacimiento (“four *sitios de ganado mayor*”), were officially granted to them by President Benito Juárez in November 1866 (twenty-three years after the first Black Seminole group settled in Mexico). See Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles. History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 171.

5. Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom at the Border. The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1993), 10.
6. Ibid.
7. Ian F. Hancock, *The Texas Seminoles and Their Language* (Austin: University of Texas, African and Afro-American Studies Center, 1980), 20.
8. Ibid.
9. Martha Rodríguez, *Historias de resistencia y exterminio. Los indios de Coahuila durante el siglo XIX* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1995), 103.
10. Paulina del Moral, *Tribus olvidadas de Coahuila* (Saltillo: Fondo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Coahuila, 1999), 95.
11. Willie Warrior in Jeff Guinn, *Our Land before We Die*, 182.
12. Jeff Guinn suggests that the real reason behind this order was that a number of wealthy Coahuila families wanted to take some of the land that had been given to the Mascogos. See Guinn, *Our Land before We Die*, 221.
13. Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 181.
14. Gabriel Izard Martínez, “De Florida a Coahuila: El grupo mascogo y la presencia de una cultura afrocriolla en el norte de México,” *Humania del Sur*, Vol. II, No. 3, (2007), 17.
15. Willie Warrior in Guinn, *Our Land before We Die*, 335.
16. The phrase “when everybody spoke English” was used by Homero Vázquez and other Mascogos or friends of the Mascogo community during informal conversations to talk about an almost mythical moment in Nacimiento’s past when blacks were a majority in the village.
17. Homero Vázquez, personal interview. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005.
18. Leticia Palao, personal interview. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005. Mascogos refer to their spirituals interchangeably as *el capeyuye* or *los cantos*.
19. Homero Vázquez, personal conversation. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 17, 2005.
20. Homero Vázquez, personal conversation, June 17, 2005.
21. Pastor Hayes version can be found in the following YouTube link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z44JnG55I_s (accessed June 15, 2009). Reverend Nicks version can be found in the following YouTube link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xctUgeLfWuA> (accessed June 15, 2009).
22. I have transposed Courlander’s transcription from G flat major to G major for easier comparison with the other versions, which I transcribed all in G minor.
23. Ramón Rivera-Servera, “Musical Trans(actions): Intersections in Reggaetón,” *Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música*, No. 13 (2009) <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans13/art11.htm> (accessed February 9, 2010).
24. Homero Vázquez, personal conversation. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 17, 2005.
25. Zulema Vázquez, personal conversation. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005.
26. Ibid.
27. Homero Vázquez, personal interview. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005.
28. Zulema Vázquez, personal conversation. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005.

29. Paulina del Moral, electronic communication. October 20, 2005.
30. The visas were selectively issued in 2000 but they expired in 2009. Mascogos have requested help from the Mexican government in their negotiations with the American government. Ideally, they want the same deal that allows Kikapoos free transit between Mexico and the United States and claim that just like the Kikapoos, the Mascogos also belong to a transnational community, the Black Seminoles. See "Pide comunidad de negros mascogos a EU trato igualitario," *El Universal*, May 11, 2008 at <http://movil.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/estados/505905.html> (accessed June 3, 2009).
31. Zulema Vázquez, personal conversation. Nacimiento, Coahuila. June 18, 2005.
32. Anne Anlin Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1997), 60.
33. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 53–64.
34. Marco Antonio Llanos García, *Mascogos. Freeman. Five Films* (2008), available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpKgUADMU7o> (accessed June 13, 2009).
35. Adrián Cerda, "Andanzas de los 'afromexicanos' en Estados Unidos," *Contenido*, No. 507 (2005), 63–64.
36. Slavoj Žižek, *El acoso de las fantasías*, trans. by Clea Braunstein Saal (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1999), 19.
37. Max Pensky, "Geheimmittel: Advertising and Dialectical Images in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*," in *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, ed. by Beatrice Hanssen (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 113.
38. Jill Lane, "Smoking Habaneras: The Presence of the Racial Past." Working paper for the Tepoztlán Institute of Transnational History in Latin America. July 2008.

Transnational Cultural Constructions

Cumbia Music and the Making of Locality in Monterrey

JESUS A. RAMOS-KITRELL ■

Quiero sentir algo misterioso,
Voces que me griten, alguien quien me llame.
Soñar un sueño profundo donde mire al mundo con amor de cumbia.
“*Cumbia de la paz*”¹

In October 2007, five years after the media boost that promoted him as the cumbia legend from Monterrey, Mexico, the press still referred to the popularity of Celso Piña in mainstream Mexican popular music. Even until today, his 2001 release *Barrio bravo*, and specifically the hit track “Cumbia sobre el río,” is considered a musical cornerstone due to its breaking through genres and wide audience appeal. The commercial success of the album not only earned Piña two Latin Grammy nominations but also transformed the image of Monterrey from that of an industrial metropolis to one of a breeding ground of musical innovation. For bands in Texas and Monterrey (e.g., Grupo Fantasma, Genitallica) the dub sound of the album represented a groundbreaking landmark, as it touched on different musical sensibilities transpiring across the border, thus making Toy Hernández—producer of the album—one of the most sought-after music producers in Mexico.

Historically marginalized as the sound of the working class, the commercial impact and mainstream popularity of *Barrio bravo* gained the attention of

middle-class listeners in Monterrey and Texas. Soon after the release of the album, the press alluded to the formation of a “Monterrey-Austin cumbia axis,” perhaps as a counterpart to the enduring connection between Monterrey and Houston, related to the traffic of cumbia music since the 1980s.² It is intriguing, however, that after the decades-long presence of cumbia music in Texas and Celso Piña’s twenty-year-long career in Monterrey, the U.S. and Mexican media were suddenly mesmerized by the overnight success of “Cumbia sobre el río” as a fulfilling answer to the prophecy that “the next big [musical] thing from Mexico would come [to the United States] from Monterrey.”³ And thus, the media constructed an image of Celso Piña as that of a musical messiah bringing news from the promised land, as the voice spreading a Colombian gospel from a now mystical place announced in the song: *desde Monterrey, pura cumbia colombiana, para todo el mundo*. (From Monterrey, pure Colombian cumbia, for the whole world).⁴

The mainstream popularity of cumbia music from Monterrey during the last decade has triggered inquiries not only about the origins and social relevance of the genre in this city, but also about the role that transnational processes of collaboration and influence have had in its embrace and dissemination.⁵ Seminal scholarship by Olvera and others about Monterrey cumbia, without a doubt, appeared at a moment when this music was in the commercial spotlight in the city. This phenomenon invariably raises questions about the impact that the realignment of socioeconomic structures had in the dissemination and reception of this music, an issue that still awaits attention. In this regard, it is important to consider that while it is true that the emergence of a cumbia scene in Monterrey ought to be attributed to the efforts of Celso Piña during the 1980s, the economic shifts brought by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) during the 1990s also accelerated the proliferation of foreign cultural services and commodities, which more than before plugged the public sphere to information and entertainment networks from the United States. In this context, if Piña’s activity is an important historical precedent to consider, the role of a younger generation of producers and consumers, fluent in the acquisition of foreign sounds, meanings, and symbols, should be rendered also as important to the popularization of this music.

Considering the geographic mobility of cumbia music during the last thirty years, this paper attempts to provide a framework of theoretical inquiry inspired not only by the self-reflexive experience of the author, but also by the work of authors like Olvera, whose information is important for the mapping of a sociology of cumbia in Monterrey, Mexico, an endeavor still in need of deeper analysis. In this light, I approach the practice of cumbia in Monterrey as related to the reterritorialization of foreign cultural practices that, steeped into consumption, give a voice of social legitimacy to historically marginalized individuals. This phenomenon invites inquiries about the relevance of geographical context for the mapping of the *local* in relationship to a transnational arena articulated by networks of migration, consumption, and communication. Context, therefore, is understood not as the exclusive site of cultural production but as a site where such networks influence the operation of structured forms of sensibility as important localizing agents.

By focusing on the city of Monterrey, my aim is to provide a case study of cumbia that explores its relationship to locality not as a geographical site but as a performative complex, in which individuals assemble their identities through the performance of cumbia music as symbolic referent to a collective social and cultural experience. In this sense, cumbia is a performative referent to *la colombia*, not the country but a set of foreign cultural practices, symbols, and meanings appropriated by marginal individuals that, as a form of identity organization, acquires social legitimacy through consumption. I would like to note, however, that this narrative does not focus on the territorial implications of Colombia in the minds of individuals engaged with Colombian music and dance. Given the importance of music and dance as central elements in the process of culture formation in Monterrey, and the eventual mainstream consumption of this music, my aim is to show (1) how this process operates as a contestatory strategy to marginal individuals against the city's social and economic hegemony, and (2) how this strategy acquires social legitimacy through mainstream consumption. Ultimately, I hope to show how by engaging with networks of circulation and consumption of de-localized cultural repertoires individuals invariably develop cultural affiliations defined more by a personal experience with this traffic and less by parameters of sociocultural organization produced by the state, a phenomenon in which identity unfolds as a globally articulated and transnationally operating way of being.

TRACING CUMBIA IN MONTERREY

From a sociocultural perspective, cumbia music in Monterrey could be better understood as a symbolic referent to a phenomenological space articulated by social dynamics of collective bargaining in which political and economic factors influence significantly lived experience. Such space is usually referred to as *la colombia* (roughly translated as “Colombianess” or “the Colombian thing”), a term referring to a set of expressive elements once of Colombian origin (such as music and dance) that permeates even the most intimate realms of experience, including dynamics to build personal relationships, affective bonds, as well as aesthetic understandings. In this respect, cumbia plays an important role in the production of Colombianess, a space in which identity operates.

Tracing the origins of cumbia in Monterrey has been until recently a historically challenging task. The most common urban tale relates to Colombian bands, which on their way to the United States stayed for a while in the city to perform this music. Yet more obscure is the arrival and urban dissemination of Colombian dance practices, like *El baile del gavián* (Dance of the Sparrow), a ritual dance called *coyongo* in Colombia that imitates the flight of Andean birds. In his book *Music, Race & Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia*, Peter Wade outlined a dynamic of mass dissemination for cumbia through the phenomenon of *música tropical* in Latin America, a sort of genre that encompassed commercial adaptations of different Colombian folk rhythms like cumbia

and vallenato. Taking advantage of the marketing momentum that Latin music enjoyed during the 1950s (not in small part due to the wide appeal that Afro-Caribbean music had during this decade), Wade shows how *música tropical* rapidly disseminated out of Colombia finding a niche in the nightclubs of Mexico City. However, due to the music's association with cabarets and prostitution, the government of the capital city eventually established restrictions on the production of Colombian music.⁶

As a result, musicians migrated from Mexico City to the north of the country in search of work opportunities. This movement became an appendix to the massive migration of individuals from the Mexican north-central states like San Luis Potosí, Coahuila, and Zacatecas who arrived in Monterrey during the 1940s in search of employment. Coming from prominently rural states and with low levels of literacy and professional skills, these individuals settled on the margins of the industrially developed city, notably on the skirts of Loma Larga (literally a long hill where some of the poorest neighborhoods like Colonia Independencia and Colonia Moderna are located), where since the 1960s they made illegal possession of the land, and thus found themselves lacking the most basic urban services, such as electricity, a sewer system and paved streets.

Meanwhile, the sounds of *música tropical* disseminated through the *sonideros*, local DJs who since the late 1950s set their sound systems to advertise and sell homemade versions of mix-tapes in the flea markets that operated in some neighborhoods, or to provide musical entertainment for special occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, or other social events. Due to the popularity that this music had among the popular classes, the *sonideros* continually strove to find new recordings to play at social gatherings or to advertise in informal markets, since the popularity of and the ability to get hired as a *sonidero* relied on procuring the latest releases. By listening to these recordings, however, some people—Celso Piña included—realized that musicians working within the industry of *música tropical* usually made arrangements out of cumbia and vallenato rhythms from Colombia to fit the commercial demands of record labels, a fact that Piña often lamented in the 1980s when he started performing: “[T]his music is really cool! [*¡está con madre!*] I don’t know why they don’t play it like it should be!”⁷ But in trying to promote a sort of authenticity Piña often encountered apathy and marginality in the market. Such was the case when at dance where he and his band Ronda Bogotá were hired, they were asked to play cumbias like Rigo Tovar, one of the most popular artists of *música tropical* in Mexico during the 1980s: “‘Oh, no, no, no, sweetie. Excuse me, but I don’t know that gentleman. What does he sell or what?’ Forget it. And there goes Celso [kicked out] with the band and everything.”⁸

While commercially Celso Piña found it hard to appeal to wider audiences, listeners and *sonideros* from the barrios allegedly became more and more intrigued about the song versions from Colombian records that inspired arrangements by Mexican musicians in the vein of *música tropical*. By procuring Colombian recordings the *sonideros* became pivotal figures in establishing networks of circulation and consumption with Colombian record labels and record stores in

the United States, which also became important suppliers. But even though local record stores in Monterrey kept constant communication with suppliers from Colombia and Texas (Houston, specifically) some *sonideros* realized that the newest releases were usually laid away for prominent *sonideros* and radio DJs, a fact that prompted many individuals to travel to Houston to buy the records directly.

In this regard, it is interesting to note to what extent recorded media helped to forge connections between Monterrey musicians and fans, and Colombia. People found Colombian records more informative than records made by Mexican artists of *música tropical*. It was from Colombian records that fans, DJs, and musicians in Monterrey not only learned about the lives of prominent Colombian artists, but also about music performance in terms of instruments used, what musician played what instrument, etc. In a way, it was through the information and art from record covers that people from Monterrey gathered elements to construct a musical imaginary that they would be able to reproduce and give local meaning. Therefore, a concern for originality is what promoted the consumption of Colombian cumbia in Monterrey and what perhaps helped Celso Piña to land recording contracts with local labels—a fact that inspired other groups to follow along, such as *La Tropa Colombiana*, *Los Vallenatos de la Cumbia* (from *Colonia Independencia*), and *Ronda Colombiana* (from *Colonia Moderna*), among others; all groups that, despite their names, sprung from some of the poorest neighborhoods in Monterrey.

RECONSTRUCTING CUMBIA

The mainstream popularity of cumbia, and of Celso Piña along with other prominent groups such as *La Tropa Colombiana*, interestingly coincides with other economic and social phenomena that proved to be important factors in the reception of this music. On the one hand, shifts in the political economy of Mexico after NAFTA positioned Monterrey as the economic indicator of the country. This shift brought along a democratization of consumption practices, which until then had been restricted to the middle classes. A shopping trip to the United States to partake in the experience of U.S. consumerism did not necessarily reflect a loftier economic status anymore, since by the mid-1990s people could find Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and JCPenny (just to mention a few stores) conveniently in the city. The erasure of an economic border in the north of Mexico exposed civil society to the circulation of U.S. cultural products and media, an encounter that eventually influenced the creative efforts of younger musicians.

On the other hand, it has been proposed that the artistic emergence of Celso Piña as a sort of “godfather” of the Monterrey cumbia scene is also parallel with the coming-of-age youth groups from Monterrey’s marginal barrios; the sons and daughters of a first generation of migrants for whom academic education did not necessarily become a means of social mobility.⁹ For a lot of these individuals, living in the poorest neighborhoods of Monterrey, a tension between the stigma attached to their socioeconomic condition and the dominant construction of Monterrey as a hotbed of economic progress was a common experience.

In this regard, the sociocultural rearing of these youngsters (i.e., the rough and undeveloped landscape of their barrios, their inexpensive clothing and a lack of corporate-culture appearance, their lack of opportunities for better education, and eventually employment) is at odds with what is regarded as the *regio* ideal:¹⁰ someone belonging to a “decent” family, attending a good school, and ultimately landing a job practicing a “normal” profession, such as dentistry, engineering, architecture, business administration, accounting or marketing. In short, a job that guarantees “*hacer buena lana*” (making good dough) and allows for advancement in the socioeconomic hierarchy of the city. It is largely this corporate attitude of economic achievement, what makes the media perpetuate an image of bourgeois progress in the popular imagination as the ethos of the city—perennially promoted by a popular saying about Mexico: “the north [of the country] works, the center thinks, and the south rests.”¹¹

In this urban context, younger individuals are seemingly bound to bear the social stigma of their parents, whom being socioeconomically marginalized, only found employment as domestic servants, construction workers, under-qualified factory personnel, and in the so-called informal economy of flea markets. Due to their social condition, youngsters sometimes engage in robbery, street gangs, and drug use, thus exacerbating the stigma associated specifically with the popular classes. They are called *cholos* or *colombias*, individuals who in their marginality symbolize the opposite of the dominant ideal of identity in Monterrey: a person with a “good job,” clean-cut, well dressed, and making money. This is a fact that Piña himself resented in his early career as he realized how his music was stigmatized as the music of *cholos* or *colombias* and opposite to the bourgeois tastes of the middle class, thus making impossible any effort to permeate across social boundaries.

In this respect, newspapers documenting Piña’s incursion into the mainstream were quick to report how the social underpinnings of cumbia music in Monterrey projected a dissonance with the pervading image of the city, a tension that—even musically—portrayed a binary cultural field. Piña’s success with *Barrio bravo* is arguably due in large part to the inventiveness of Toy Hernández, a twenty-eight year old, who in the late 1990s embarked on a trip of self-discovery, finding in East Los Angeles his longed-for Mexican roots. While in L.A., Hernández recalled that “in Monterrey everyone was exposed to Colombian cumbia no matter what your class...I realized I was proud of Monterrey.”¹² Soon after his realization, Hernández began a mix experiment pairing up cumbia with reggae and rap, among other sounds. “I knew I had something,” said Hernández, aware that the mix could be a commercial hit, as an imaginative attempt to reconcile the marginality of cumbia (recognized by him as a Monterrey roots element) with mainstream appeal.¹³

In this sense, Hernández’s cumbia-mix sound operates as a liminal aesthetic border, a metaphor to the bipolar social landscape of Monterrey mapped by the media in the wake of *Barrio bravo*. The U.S. press depicted the city as bourgeois yet marginal, driven by a highly consumerist society and yet populated by a large working class, a social group that, like immigrants crossing the Rio Grande looking

for work in the United States (as Hernandez recalled), cross every day the Río Santa Catarina in their commute to work in Monterrey's central district, a natural border separating the business sector from the Loma Larga neighborhoods. And given Piña's origins in the Cerro de la Campana, one of the most marginal barrios, his album is also a metaphor about the encounter of cultural sensibilities from the rough neighborhood (*barrio bravo*) and the consumerist practices and strategies of bourgeois society, thus alluding to the title of his hit single, "Cumbia sobre el río."

CUMBIA AND THE PRODUCTION OF LOCALITY

As a consequence of their social alienation, youngsters from barrios in the Loma Larga found in *la banda* ("the gang," a general term denoting "the group of guys or buddies" and not necessarily a violent gang) the much sought-after bonds of solidarity and support, in which *la colombia* (in terms of music, clothing, art graffiti, and dance) became an element of self-definition. This does not mean that cumbia was the only sound that colombias would exclusively listen to; as a matter of fact, Mexican rap and heavy metal were also favorites, according to some informants. However, cumbia, as an intrinsic element of *la colombia*, acquired a privileged position, since cumbia songs reflected early on some of the common problems and socioeconomic anxieties that these youngsters faced. In this respect, some of the most popular songs allude to themes such as life being a road of sorrow and suffering ("Los caminos de la vida" ["The Paths of Life"]) or social marginality ("El hijo de nadie" ["Nobody's Son"]).

For young colombias, cumbia represents a form of expressed sensibility that finds resonance among the banda members. Coming from backgrounds in which economic stagnation and a lack of opportunities for education and employment often aggravate dysfunctional or altogether absent family relationships, colombias create in *la banda* the expressive place that they do not find at home or in the highly consumerist society of Monterrey, in the midst of their surrounding social insecurity. Such was the story that radio DJ Cory Colombia encountered daily while interviewing colombias on her radio show, devoted to provide a means of expression for these youngsters through song requests and live commentaries: "If I tell my mom that I have a problem she is going to be mad at me, but my buddies are not going to let me die because they support me real cool [*me defiende[n] acá, chido*]. I feel better when I'm with my buddies than at home because they don't abandon me."¹⁴

According to Cory Colombia, it is in Colombian music where these youngsters learn strategies of social interaction that they reproduce with each other. In this music, she says, "they find a form of expression, of how to talk to their girlfriend, to their mom, to their brother, and the music reflects what happens to them or what they are missing socially."¹⁵ Colombian music, therefore, is a performative strategy through which colombias produce *la colombia* as a structured form of sensibility: a set of social desires and preferences (i.e., a space of support and social legitimacy) influenced by socioeconomic and political factors.

It is in this sense that *la colombia* might be better understood in terms of a structure of feeling,¹⁶ a concept that provides the possibility to better understand the relationship between the structuring constraints of an institutional societal order and subaltern structures of interpersonal, social, and cultural formations. Williams's concept, nonetheless, has been received not without criticism due to its ambiguous application in the realm of literary studies, where it was originally conceived.¹⁷ Moreover, in the realm of cultural studies, the concept has been called "elusive" because of the "inchoate 'moment' of cultural process for which it attempts to provide a general formulation."¹⁸ I believe, however, that performance studies might be able to provide a clearer picture about the operation of the structure of feeling as a performative complex.

The structure of feeling is primarily generated through the interactive sociocultural practices of reflexive communication of experience.¹⁹ In practical terms, the application of this concept relates to the particularity of a collective historical experience and its effects on individuals aligned with groups that neither dominate nor whose interests are served by the established institutional order. In relationship with this backdrop, the collective experience shared by *colombias* refers to a common sociocultural marginalization that, on the one hand, strips them of a series of rights and benefits accorded by the state (such as basic urbanization services, sanitation, adequate schools, and vocational orientation in the popular neighborhoods,) and on the other, discriminates against them on the basis of appearance and social class for not conforming to the *regio* bourgeois ideal of socioeconomic development.

The structure of feeling, therefore, refers to the imaginative ways in which marginal youths appropriate foreign cultural practices (Colombian music and dance) as a symbolic referent that acquires meaning through its embodiment in performance, as an "interactive sociocultural practice" and as a "reflexive communication of experience." This understanding of *la colombia* is also resonant with Arjun Appadurai's conception of locality as a structure of feeling. Appadurai envisions locality as a phenomenological quality that is relational and contextual, rather than spatial. In turn, space (or more specifically, the production of space) is regarded as an instance or moment within the general process of localization.²⁰ As a complement to his thesis, Appadurai reserves the term neighborhood to refer to social forms (situated communities characterized by their actuality—whether spatial or virtual—and their potential for reproduction) in which locality, as a structure of feeling, is realized.²¹ Taking theoretical tools from Williams and Appadurai, I would like to suggest that for these situated communities (neighborhoods) locality indeed works as a form of identity organization. It is in this light that I would like to approach the relationship between *la colombia* and the community of *cholos* or *colombias* in Monterrey, showing how this relationship is articulated in the process of producing locality: a phenomenological performative complex produced through the very act of performance, thus alluding to a notion of "space" as a momentarily materialized instance in which performance has a central role. And it is at this point that consideration of Colombian music (i.e. *cumbia*) as a performance practice becomes pivotal.

PRODUCING LOCALITY: RETERRITORIALIZING CUMBIA

One of the most interesting aspects of localizing processes is the production of space as an ephemeral instance or moment in which space acquires a contextual relevance. In the case of colombias, these moments refer to the taking of the street corners, concert venues, or other social events to consume cumbia, a socializing ritual that relies not only on listening, but also on the appropriate dancing to this music. This reterritorialization of cultural practices enables colombias to recognize themselves as such and develop a sense of identity and belonging, as illustrated by common statements from people watching others dance, like “that guy is a true colombia”²² or “I love Colombian music . . . and Monterrey is full of colombias [that dance to it], and they are never going to be over [*sic*].”²³

The localizing phenomenon that I attempt to describe relies on a reterritorialization of Colombian cultural practices that allows, on the one hand, for a localization of space, and on the other, the production of subjects whom in their performative embodiment of local knowledge produce that local space. According to Néstor García Canclini, reterritorialization refers to a process of resignification of cultural forms as modalities of identity organization.²⁴ Alejandro L. Madrid has further noted that, in a cultural context, reterritorialization involves “the appropriation of hegemonic symbols and their reconfiguration according to the specific needs and values of contesting individuals or communities.”²⁵ For colombias in Monterrey, the consumption of cumbia is an essential component of this reterritorializing process, for not only has Colombian music been resignified as an identity referent of the Monterrey barrios, but also, through its embodiment in dance, this music has become a strategy to reclaim the city—an hegemonic symbol of bourgeois economic progress in Mexico—from their marginality.

Although the traditional way of dancing to cumbia in Monterrey historically has involved male–female couples, colombias usually dance alone, predominantly choreographing *el baile del gavilán*, a movement where people lightly squat moving their feet back and forward in alternation while flopping their arms and elbows like wings. An alternate version of the dance involves a fist on the mouth while the other hand is open and fakes pushing against the fist from below, simulating the way some colombias dance while inhaling chemical substances from paper bags, such as glue or paint thinner.

If it is not at live concerts or social dance events, these performance moments occur when colombias take their boom boxes to the streets and either play music from tapes or listen to radio stations. In this regard, Gregorio Cruz recognizes the street (or the street corner, as he mentions) as a privileged site in which la colombia unfolds its expressive potential through performance. According to Cruz, *hacer esquina* (making the corner) is an important component in the construction of identity for colombias in Monterrey. “Making the corner” involves, in essence, meeting buddies on the street corner to pass time by listening and dancing to cumbia, and drinking beer, although sometimes other substances might be consumed as well. This ritual of sociability is a way of making oneself a part of the

banda, of establishing a bond of solidarity inspired by the sharing of a common marginal social experience.²⁶

Space (in this case, the street), therefore, becomes the quintessential material moment in which marginal youths appropriate and resignify elements of Colombian expressive culture to produce *la colombia* as a phenomenological arena of cultural production and subject formation. This process of reterritorialization denotes a socialization of space, a material production of locality that relies on the enactment of local knowledge (dancing) as a means to situate locality in a spatial context, or as Appadurai mentions, bring about a spatial production of locality. Such a dynamic enables the production of local subjects who recognize themselves as *colombias*, for whom the performance of local knowledge, in turn, is central to the production and maintenance of local space.

The relevance of dance in this process points to the importance of the body as the main site for the inscription of locality, and, therefore, of cultural experience. Dance is a means of embodying locality, an act of performance that accounts for the production of local subjects situated within a community of kin, neighbors, and actors. As performance, dance is, therefore, a way to embody locality as well as a way to locate bodies spatially, a process by which the production of subjects and of local space become virtually one and the same.²⁷ In this respect, the importance of performance to the materialization and sustenance of locality, is realized in the reaction cited above from someone watching *colombias* dance: “Monterrey is full of *colombias* [because they dance Colombian music] . . . and they are never going to be over.” Here the message alludes not only to the fact that *colombias* will not stop dancing despite social criticism by the middle classes, but more important, to the fact that it is through performance of *cumbia* (listening and dancing) that *colombias* are recognized as such, as embodiments of *la colombia*.

“SONIDERO NACIONAL . . . SALIENDO DEL BARRIO
VALLENATO FREESTYLE . . .”

In spite of *cumbia*'s marginal position, it is worth noting that the eventual popularity that Celso Piña reached during the late 1990s and consequently becoming *ídolo del barrio* pushed *cumbia*—and Colombian musical culture, for that matter—into the mainstream of public consumption in Monterrey. Moreover, due to its marketability in the United States and Europe after 2001, Piña not only became one of the most recognized artists in the city (as reflected in the campaigns in which he appeared on television promoting public cultural festivals sponsored by the city government, like his ad for *Mundo Fest 2005*), but his fame also prompted the media—specifically radio stations—to respond to a growing public demand for *cumbia*.

In 2000, after forty years of the city counting only two stations for Colombian music, every public radio station inaugurated a channel frequency devoted to *cumbia*. This emergence further enabled *colombias* to establish collective

dynamics to assert a sense of cultural belonging and representation through the media. In different radio shows (e.g., the show of Cory Colombia mentioned above) colombias would call to request songs; send greetings to la banda of the barrio; and discuss concerns related to drug use, contraception, and family relationships. By allowing marginal youngsters to engage with the media in this way, radio stations promoted the idea of an imagined community of colombias in the city articulated by a recognition of its members through comments, personalized greetings, and by validating their problems and anxieties.²⁸

The unprecedented popularity of Colombian musical culture in Monterrey since the late 1990s perhaps finds explanation in the role of a younger generation of musicians who promoted cumbia and vallenato among the middle classes through the acquisition of new sounds and performance elements (e.g., DJing). Such was the case of Toy Hernández, producer of Celso Piña's album *Barrio bravo* and the DJ creative force of one of Monterrey's most prolific bands, Control Machete, whose members were pioneers of Spanish hip hop in Mexico. As mentioned above, Hernández allegedly became inspired during his trip to East Los Angeles to mix the sounds of cumbia *rebajada* (cumbia records played at less revolutions per minute to make it sound slower) with electronica grooves, and rap. This mix created a sound that Hernández called *sonidero nacional*, as a sort of homage to the work of renowned sonideros from the flea markets of colonia Independencia in Monterrey, who Hernández recognizes as important influences in his search for a Monterrey "roots music."

Another important group was El Gran Silencio, a band whose members also experimented mixing cumbia with electronica grooves, rock, and hip hop during the 1990s. The band's first album released in 1998, *Libres y locos*, was a commercial success in Monterrey, since the incorporation of foreign sounds brought cumbia outside its marginal realm. After this, the band released its most successful record, *Chúntaros Radio Poder* (2000), a simulacrum of one full day of radio transmission in an imaginary radio station of the same name playing all twenty tracks of the album. In between songs, the record showcases simulated radio segments by prolific local radio DJs, whose work spans from cumbia radio stations to pop, heavy metal, and electronica, alluding to the band's eclectic style and reach across social tastes and boundaries.

However, the most interesting element of this album is its promotion of one main concept, *chuntarismo*, a noun referring to *chúntaros* as synonym of *cholos* or *colombias*. Alluding to the customs, tastes, and lifestyle of youth from the marginal barrios in Monterrey, the album's narrative of chuntarismo speaks of the music, movement, material culture, and territory that articulate and contextualize locality. Specifically, one of the hit tracks of the album, "Chúntaro Style," is a song that speaks of chuntarismo as the embrace of cumbia with other sonic (e.g. ska, electronica, hip hop) and performative elements that have given more visibility to colombias in the public sphere: "This is the chúntaro style, because I sing ragamuffin and do the sparrow dance."²⁹ Perhaps more poignantly than the lyrics, the music video of the song presents chuntarismo as a repertoire of expressive culture that, featuring clothing, dance, and physical symbology, accompanies performative images of colombias in the marginal and rough places of Monterrey, images that contest dominant discourses of the city's image.



Figure 10.1 Caption 1 from the video “Chúntaro Style,” El Gran Silencio, directed by Leo Synchez.



Figure 10.2 Caption 2 from the video “Chúntaro Style,” El Gran Silencio, directed by Leo Synchez.

As shown in the video, it is ultimately the enactment of a repertory of physical movements that alludes to the encryption of la colombia (the chúntraro style) in the body. Snapshots taken in the video (see figures 10.1 and 10.2) explicitly stress hand signs and the bodily contours that result from *el baile del gavilán* as referents to a type of cultural knowledge that in its performance not only produces cultural subjects but also contextualizes material space. By projecting iconic images of the city (like the saddle mountain, for example) with frames of poor, marginal neighborhoods, the video shows how colombias re-map the city by the representation and *localization* of a space through performance, thus reclaiming the city from their marginality.

Due to their blending of cumbia with hip hop, rock, and electronica elements, El Gran Silencio positioned Colombian music within the mainstream of music consumption, which by 2000 indicated ratings equal to the most commercial and consumed music on the radio waves of Monterrey.³⁰ It was not long before Celso Piña—main cumbia influence in the musical rearing of younger musicians like Toy Hernández and El Gran Silencio—was asked to collaborate in mix projects. It was Julián Villarreal (ex-bass player of El Gran Silencio) who suggested to Piña the idea of mixing it up with up-and-coming musicians. “I took a chance,” said Piña in an interview after the release of his album *Barrio bravo*, “we flipped a coin and it worked.”³¹ The hit track “Cumbia sobre el río” featured the characteristic mix of cumbia, rap, and rebajada of Toy Hernández’s sonidero nacional sound. But *Barrio bravo* not only featured Hernández’s mix wizardry, other songs also showcased collaborations with some of Mexico’s most prolific alternative artists, such as Patricio “Pato” Chapa Elizalde (Control Machete), Café Tacuba, and Blanquito Man (from Venezuela).

All of a sudden, Celso Piña was hip, and soon after his nomination for two Grammys and one MTV award Colombian music skyrocketed in popularity in Monterrey, as it was legitimized by mainstream circulation and consumption. Being his “most successful record,” as Piña himself observes, *Barrio bravo* gave him—and Monterrey cumbia in general—international visibility: “Thanks to *Barrio bravo* my music was heard all over Latin America and Europe. [These types of records] reflect the good work of [record] companies [in promoting the music].”³² Prompted by the commotion, renowned Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis even wrote a prologue for the album that Piña had named in honor of his “rough neighborhood”:

[Celso Piña], a social phenomenon as it is well said, and a musical phenomenon as it is well heard...[Piña, with his power of convocation] overflows the plazas, the *dancings* [*sic*], the gatherings, the suddenly closed streets, the alleys, the roofs, and the music insinuates itself, expands itself, it becomes eternal, guided by a rhythm without acrobatic pretensions and honestly sensual...cumbia and vallenato are at once mirrors of the perfect coitus and of choreographic virtuosity...the kids throw themselves to the television camera—whether it is there or not—and give away an image of triumph that also shows gratitude.³³

In this quote there is one point worth pondering. Is this “power of convocation”—the ultimate catalyst for the dissemination of a cultural practice that overflows the urban map in every plaza, street, alley, or roof—really intrinsic in Piña’s music, as Monsiváis observes? Or is this “power of convocation,” rather, intrinsic in the imaginary television camera, where marginal kids “throw themselves” not only to localize and claim a spatial image of triumph, but also of “gratitude” in the social legitimacy that pours out of the media lens?

It was in large part because of the new mainstream popularity of cumbia music that Monterrey was bound to develop an affiliation with Valledupar, the city considered to be the cradle of cumbia and vallenato in Colombia. After the release of *Barrio bravo* the cumbia boom in Monterrey not only pushed for the creation of spaces for the circulation and performance of Colombian music, but also for initiatives to recognize the impact that Colombian culture had on the city. Following the first trip of cumbia devotees from Monterrey to the Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata in Valledupar, Colombia, Monterrey inaugurated its own version of the event in 2003 called festival Voz de Acordeones (accordion voices), which featured not only local groups but also Colombian artists showcased in the Colombian version. The second edition of the festival in 2004 featured as guest of honor the mayor of the city of Valledupar, who traveled from Colombia as cultural ambassador. And therefore, resulting from the development of transnational cultural networks between both cities, the municipal government of Monterrey established an official link to Valledupar as the sister city of Monterrey, thus recognizing the prominence of Colombian culture in the public sphere.

This case regarding the development and eventual recognition of Colombian cultural practices in Monterrey as symbolic referents of representation for young colombias is telling of the ways in which transnational networks of music production, circulation, and consumption serve as means to construct a sense of cultural belonging. From this phenomenon arises a concept of citizenship that, beyond notions of political rights, responsibilities, and ideologies accorded (or neglected) by the state, considers a set of cultural and social practices that promote a sense of belonging and difference, thus providing the means for individuals to organize and identify in specific ways. In this case, citizenship points toward the struggle for recognition of colombias as social subjects with cultural claims that have not been recognized historically in the city.

Ultimately, it was as due to the mainstream popularity of cumbia (as a result of the commercial success of artists like Celso Piña, Toy Hernández, and El Gran Silencio) that the cultural practices and positioning of colombias gained visibility. After all, perhaps it is not so much the music itself—as Monsiváis observes—as it is the summoning power of the media that ultimately promotes consumption as a legitimizing social force. In this light, the imageries of triumph and gratitude of colombia youngsters poured out by the media speak of acts of reclamation to the culture and material space of the city from the margins, just as the voice surging amid the mix sound of the sonidero nacional declares in the song: “*desde el río en la ciudad, nunca deja de soñar*” (From the river in the city, [s/he] never stops dreaming).³⁴

Notes

1. I want to feel something mysterious, voices that scream to me, someone to call me. I want to dream a profound dream in which I see the world through cumbia love.
2. Melissa Sattley, "Cumbia Sobre El Rio. Celso Piña Exports Monterrey's New Cumbia Dub," *Austin Chronicle*, October 18, 2002, at <http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=106216> (August 17, 2009).
3. Ibid.
4. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
5. See José Juan Olvera Gudiño, *Colombianos en Monterrey: Origen de un gusto musical y su papel en la construcción de una identidad social* (Monterrey: Fondo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes, 2005); Darío Blanco Arboleda, "Transculturalidad y procesos identificatorios. La música de la costa atlántica colombiana en Monterrey, un fenómeno transfronterizo," *Alteridades*, Vol. 15, No. 30 (2005), 19–41; and Peter Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
6. Olvera Gudiño, *Colombianos en Monterrey*, 38.
7. "¡... pues esta música está con madre! Yo no sé porqué no la tocan como debe ser." Ibid., 79.
8. "Ah, no, no, no, mi reina. Me va a disculpar, pero no conozco yo a ese señor. ¿Qué vende o qué? No, pues olvídate. Y allá va Celso para afuera con todo y chavos." Ibid., 80.
9. Ibid., 93.
10. *Regio* is short for *regiomontano*, as natives from Monterrey are called.
11. "El norte trabaja, el centro piensa, y el sur descansa."
12. Sattley, "Cumbia Sobre El Rio," 3.
13. Ibid., 4.
14. "Si tengo una bronca mi mamá me va a regañar y la raza no me va a dejar morir, me defiende acá, chido. Yo me siento mejor cuando estoy con mi raza que cuando estoy en la casa porque ellos no me abandonan." As related by radio DJ Cory Colombia, in Olvera Gudiño, Ibid., 129.
15. Ibid.
16. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 131–32.
17. Paul Filmer, "Structures of feeling and socio-cultural formations: the significance of literature and experience to Raymond Williams's sociology of culture," *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2003), 200.
18. Ibid., 199.
19. Ibid., 201.
20. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180.
21. Ibid., 179.
22. "Ese vato sí es colombia," in Olvera, "Continuidad y Cambios," 3.
23. "Me encanta la música colombiana, aunque no les guste Monterrey está lleno de gente colombia y no van a acabar con ella nunca." Commentary defending a criticized video of people dancing cumbia to a song by Celso Piña at a live concert in Houston, Texas, (May 6, 2008), available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzNJZQm6Q1Q&feature=Playlist&p=B1D1539AB>

- D66F916&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=45 (accessed August 12, 2009).
24. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City, Mexico: Grijalbo, 1989), 304–305.
 25. Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-tec Rifa! Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 115.
 26. José Juan Olvera, Benito Torres, Gregorio Cruz, and Cesar Jaime, *La Colombia de Monterrey* (San Antonio: unpublished manuscript), quoted in José Juan Olvera, “Continuidad y Cambios en la Música Colombiana en Monterrey,” *Actas del IV Congreso Latinoamericano de la Asociación Internacional para el Estudio de la Música Popular* (2002), at <http://www.hist.puc.cl/iaspm/mexico/articulos/Olvera.pdf> (accessed August 11, 2009).
 27. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 179.
 28. Olvera Gudiño, *Colombianos en Monterrey*, 107.
 29. “Este es el chúntaro style, porque canto ragamuffin y bailo de gavián.” Cano Hernández, “Chúntaro Style,” *Chúntaros Radio Poder*, EMI Music, 2000.
 30. Olvera Gudiño, *Colombianos en Monterrey*, 109.
 31. Sattley, “Cumbia Sobre El Río,” 6.
 32. Celso Piña, “Sobre Barrio bravo,” Página Oficial de Celso Piña (2006), <http://www.celso.com.mx/podcastingtres.html> (accessed August 18, 2009).
 33. “[Celso Piña], un fenómeno social como bien dicen, y un fenómeno musical como bien se oye . . . [Celso Piña, con su poder de convocatoria,] desborda las plazas, los dancings, las reuniones, las calles cerradas súbitamente, los callejones, las azoteas, y la música se insinúa, se expande, se eterniza, guiada por un ritmo sin desemboaduras acrobáticas, pero francamente sensual. . . la cumbia y el vallenato son a la vez espejos del coito perfecto y del virtuosismo coreográfico. . . Los chavos se lanzan hasta la cámara de television, esté o no presente, y le regalan el semblante triunfal que también incluye el agradecimiento.” David Carrizales, “Habla Monsiváis del autor que celebra 20 años de interpretar cumbias,” *La Jornada*, March 26, 2001, at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/03/26/17an1esp.html> (accessed May 29, 2007).
 34. Patricio Chapa Elizalde, “Cumbia sobre el río,” *Barrio bravo*, Warner Music Latina, 2001.

Patriotic Citizenship, the Border Wall, and the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival

MARGARET E. DORSEY AND MIGUEL DÍAZ-BARRIGA ■

On a hazy June morning in Corpus Christi, Texas, Margaret Dorsey received an e-mail from an old friend, conjunto music diva Linda Escobar,¹ informing her that BNET Internet radio, the number one Tejano radio station, had slated Escobar for a live interview that afternoon. Escobar invited us to join her and film the interview. In a quiet neighborhood near the oil and gas refineries that define the city’s skyline, we visited with Linda Escobar at the home of Internet DJ Manny Garcia, known to fans of BNET or “Jalapeño” radio as “El Picante.”

Garcia guided us through his home from an airy and recently renovated great room into a tiny room overflowing with digital equipment and jammed from floor to ceiling with signed celebrity photos, from those featuring the legendary TV host Domingo Peña to a glossy framed photo of Selena in one of her signature black bustiers. After his hour-long live interview with Escobar, the four of us moved to the great room, sat in his plush sofas, popped a few Bud Lights and chatted. In that conversation, Garcia responded to our questions about the meanings of conjunto/Tejano music:

Tejano is a story of an episode of your life or someone’s life or a memory that still lingers, when you first started out as a kid. Say, for example, your parents as migrant workers, the struggle, in the fields, picking cotton, vegetables, whatever. They had to go where the work was. A lot of them migrated out of Texas to the northern-tier states, to California to Florida to continue the struggle of life. So, the music, again, goes back to the music that “Hey, I remember those

songs when I was growing up as a kid.” They bring back a lot of memories, good and bad memories. The loss of a loved one. And then good memories, “Hey, they were great times that we had.” Remember Grandpa and Grandma. My dad, my mom. The struggles that we had to go through. Tejano music, that’s what it is. It brings back a story. It tells of true life stories, NOT of fables.

[Linda Escobar chimes in agreement.] It’s all true.

Conjunto/Tejano scholarship and music articulate the relationship of music to the struggle of life, collective memories, and class identity.² In this chapter, we explore an experience that has drawn little, if any, attention in the study of conjunto/Tejano music: participation in the military. Specifically, we will use the work of Linda Escobar to analyze Mexican-American perspectives on citizenship and patriotism.³ We focus on the annual “El Veterano” (“The Veteran”) Conjunto Festival that she began almost a decade ago. Escobar is both a popular conjunto musician and Tejano roots music activist with experience in the music industry for over forty years. Her first album, at age eight, went gold and sold over one million copies. She is an award-winning performer who has received numerous tributes from various conjunto/Tejano organizations: Female Vocalist of the Year (1987); Narciso Martinez Award for Conjunto Female Vocalist of the Year (2001); and Inductee and Board Member of the Tejano ROOTS Music Hall of Fame (2003, 2007). As recently as a few weeks before our conversation at Garcia’s home, listeners rated her song “Amigo Freddy Fender” number one on KEDA AM radio, one of the top conjunto/Tejano stations.

Our analysis borrows from Escobar’s music, life history, and performance events, with particular attention to the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival. Our aim is to trace the ways that Escobar’s musical production expresses patriotism, and a particular expression of Mexican-American culture, through its circulation in the public sphere. We end the chapter by showing how the circulation of “El Veterano” mediates the meanings of patriotic citizenship as an expression of both cultural citizenship as defined by Renato Rosaldo,⁴ and necro-citizenship as Lázaro Lima takes the concept from Russ Castronovo.⁵ In short, we interpret this musical production as an expression of belonging to the United States that is articulated through Mexican-American cultural forms, thus the concept cultural citizenship. Furthermore, we argue that the festival’s emphasis on sacrifice for the nation can be read in relation to wider practices of exclusion and death, hence the concept of necro-citizenship. Our wider aim is to show how this musical production mediates between these two forms of citizenship. Conjunto devotees’ understandings of this music as expressing life histories and life itself, as Manny Garcia’s definition suggests, is a key element of this mediation.

We base this essay on ethnographic research conducted over the past ten years with Linda Escobar. Since 1998, Dorsey has attended Escobar’s performances at dance halls and festivals across South Texas in addition to an annual music festival organized by Escobar, “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival. Escobar and Dorsey have talked at the events, before her performance and after her performance, including while traveling to and from the event itself. Since 2004, Dorsey has been creating

a digital archive of Escobar’s oral history and of conjunto music more generally.⁶ The data this essay draws from includes concert paraphernalia, participant observation at events, conversations and filmed interviews with Escobar and Tejano music activists, material downloaded and printed from her Web site and MySpace, and e-mail correspondence with Escobar over the past ten years.

PATRIOTISM IN SOUTH TEXAS

Our interest in Mexican-American patriotic citizenship relates to our research on the construction of the U.S.-Mexican border “wall”—as border residents call it—in South Texas. Understanding border wall politics clarifies our conceptualization of the circulation of “El Veterano” as it mediates between cultural and necro-citizenship. Environmental groups, landowners, and government officials, including mayors of border towns, strongly opposed construction of the border wall in south Texas. Environmental groups opposed the wall because it would place large tracts of wildlife preserves, including land in the United States owned by the Nature Conservancy and Audubon, south of the wall. Landowners opposed the wall because it would bisect their properties, creating uncertainty about how they would access their land south of the wall. Border mayors rejected the wall because it would wind an eighteen-foot structure through parts of their cities including public parks. Nonetheless, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) erected the wall. (See figure 11.1)



Figure 11.1 Construction of the border wall at Hidalgo Pumphouse and World Birding Center. Photo courtesy of Margaret E. Dorsey, 2009.

For many border residents, border wall construction signified yet another example of how policymakers do not view them as full citizens of the United States. National politicians' frequent reference to South Texas as a war zone, and their legislation of security measures without consulting border residents fuels this perception. On April 28, 2008, U.S. Congressman Thomas Tancredo (Colorado) attended a congressional hearing about border wall construction hosted at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. At this meeting, Tancredo addressed Brownsville landowners, environmental activists, and other concerned citizens disturbed by the government's seizure of property and the construction of the border wall. For a while, the Congressman responded to citizen's statements against border wall construction with a series of counter-arguments, but at the end of the hearing. At one point in the meeting, Tancredo became exasperated and stated: "Too many people in this area do not think that borders matter." He then criticized the audience's "multiculturalist attitude" and stated in a matter-of-fact manner: "If you do not want a fence between you and Mexico, we suggest that you build the fence around the northern part of your city."⁷ In a single stroke, Tancredo transformed a rational public deliberating border policy into a threatened public. To the mostly Mexican-American audience, the reference to "multiculturalist attitudes" encompassed a wider critique of their biculturalism, a hallmark of cultural citizenship as we describe below. Finally, through his willingness—might we risk saying exuberance—to bisect Brownsville from the United States, Tancredo demonstrated the extent to which he is willing to apply a politics of exclusion: not only to Mexican immigrants but also Mexican-American citizens of the United States.

Opposition to the U.S.-Mexico border wall in South Texas, as our research shows, is widespread and centers not only on the practicalities of the wall (it will not deter undocumented immigration) but also the way it was constructed without consulting border residents. Here, we must take into account the post-9/11 moment in which Michael Chertoff of the Department of Homeland Security uses federal legislation (Secure Fence Act and Real I.D. Act) to waive international, federal, and state laws in order to rush construction of a border "wall" across the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Chertoff and the Bush administration hurried construction while ignoring the feedback of the very people whose everyday lives will be most effected by this monumental undertaking.⁸ Thus, when Mexican-Americans speak against a wall or criticize U.S. policy, they are not speaking from an "open border" perspective much less an anti-patriotic one.

In our interviews, border residents reacted to the Congressman's statements not so much with anger but with bewilderment. Attitudes of Rio Grande Valley residents about the border wall, obviously, are much more complex than "not caring about borders" and being "multiculturalist." By wanting to place Brownsville on the south side of the wall, Congressman Tancredo implies that residents are anti-United States. Our research finds such assumptions false. It is true that many in South Texas are against the border wall.

The question is more complicated: how should we understand this opposition to the border wall? The results of a random telephone survey that we recently completed are telling. Out of 153 residents of Hidalgo County surveyed, 60 percent of the respondents were against the border wall. At the same time, those very same respondents favored increasing border security. Forty-five percent of respondents support virtual fencing (up from 16 percent support for the wall) and 37 percent thought that the number of border patrol agents in the area should be increased. Only 9 percent thought the number of border patrol agents should be decreased. These numbers show that the attitudes of border residents toward the border wall cannot be reduced to a lack of concern for border security. Such data makes us wonder, then, what does it mean that Tancredo—in the face of opposition—characterized the Brownsville, mainly Mexican-American, public as multicultural, and for open borders, and then offered to build the wall north of the city?

Perhaps the most troubling irony of this era is that at the same moment when being marked as “Mexican” or speaking “Spanish” at best connects with not belonging to the United States it also indexes illegality, criminality, and terrorism. At that time, the Bush administration guided the United States into two wars. In both wars, Mexicanos died and risked their lives for the United States and continue to do so. Finally, at a time when armed forces’ recruiters often fail to meet their recruitment goals in most parts of the United States, South Texas—an area in which the vast majority of the population is of Mexican descent and bilingual—remains a region where recruiters consistently meet their target. How does this context speak to notions of “patriotism” and “citizenship” in the United States today?

In what follows, we theorize that just this sort of politics of exclusion forms the basis of necro-citizenship. In light of statements like Tancredo’s, necro-citizenship, defined broadly as citizenship practices shaped by exclusion and the possibility of death, contextualizes the highly ritualized format of patriotism we observed at “El Veterano.” In other words, “El Veterano” both enacts the militarization of the border region and the sacrifices, including death, through which Mexican-Americans claim full citizenship in the United States. Thus, the concept of necro-citizenship describes three interrelated political and cultural practices:

1. The concept describes state practices that, rather than being primarily concerned with life and the overall health of its citizenry, seem more concerned with controlling exclusion and death.
2. The concept takes into account the deterritorialization of Mexicano/a and Mexican-American identity as essential to their construction as extra-nationals in the public sphere, thus making them targets of exclusion.
3. Mexican-Americans in South Texas continually reenact their sacrifice, and reenact it in poetic, embodied, and highly ritualized ways in order to validate and remind the nation of their status as citizens.

The “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival reenacts this sacrifice, through a Mexican-American cultural idiom, to make claims on being full citizens of the United

States. As such, the patriotic citizenship expressed in this festival mediates between articulations of necro-citizenship and, by expressing cultural difference in order to express belonging to the nation, cultural citizenship. Let us see how attendees, organizers, and participants at the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival articulate patriotic citizenship through necro- and cultural citizenship.

“EL VETERANO” CONJUNTO FESTIVAL

Iterations of “El veterano” and of the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival instantiate a way in which Mexican-Americans in South Texas express their patriotism. Escobar, fellow conjunto musicians, and attendees of this event demonstrate their loyalty to the United States by making the event “American.” Participants express this through traditional practices such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, showing reverence to the U.S. flag, and risking one’s life for the United States. But, participants express it in a particular idiom; for instance, through prayers to La Virgen de Guadalupe and through conjunto music. Like Lawrence Taylor in his work on the Minutemen and citizenship, one can aptly label this action as a “performance of citizenship”; the attendees perform a version of “America.”⁹ The syncretism, moreover, seen between traditional symbols of the U.S. nation and Mexican-American culture can also be labeled an expression of “cultural citizenship.”¹⁰

On Veterans Day for the past nine years, Linda Escobar organizes, hosts, and directs the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival.¹¹ She holds the event to honor military veterans and to perform conjunto music in memory of her deceased father, Eligio Escobar, a World War II veteran and respected conjunto musician. The event serves as a fundraiser for music education: money raised at “El Veterano” goes into scholarships for children with talent in conjunto music.¹² For the first few years, the festival shifted locales in South Texas from Alice to Falfurrias to Corpus Christi. For five years, the committee set the location for “El Veterano” at the High Chaparral venue in Robstown, a rural South Texas town.¹³ The inaugural festival lasted three days with more recent events landing on Sunday and lasting twelve hours, from noon to midnight. The event opens with a military ceremony in which participants honor each branch of the military. Typically, a couple of youth performances start after the performance of the Patriots Band in the military ceremony. Conjunto bands play during the remainder of the festival.

Escobar invites an array of conjunto artists: children, new bands, and highly respected senior artists. Ranging from Mingo Saldívar y sus Cuatro Espadas, Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos, Gilberto Pérez y sus Compadres, Rubén Vela y su Conjunto, Los Dos Gilbertos to the Veterans Band, the festival usually features between eight and sixteen bands—primarily conjunto—some of local prominence and others international stars, with musicians coming from as far as Japan to perform. The musicians donate their talent to the festival, and Linda Escobar emphasizes that these celebrities are highly supportive of this festival, generously donating their energy to perform. Between 200 and 500 people attend “El Veterano.” (See figure 11.2).



Figure 11.2 Veterans Band at the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival, 2008. Photo by Isabel Díaz-Barriga, used by permission.

Generally speaking, “El Veterano” attracts Mexican-American families, although the time of day and the featured band (who specifically comes to the event at a particular time), also influence the composition of the audience. The age of family members ranges from ten to eighty-five. You might find nuclear and extended families, couples, and a few clusters of single men and women. The single men tend to be veterans or are presently active in the military. Participants include a fairly even mix of men and women with slightly more men than women present.

Participants and musicians speak and code switch between English, Spanish, and the regional vernacular. Musicians sing the vast majority of the songs in Spanish. Between songs, performers will address the audience in Spanish and English. During these interludes, performers typically mention something concerning “honoring veterans and the men and women presently serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan.” Most attendees wear typical attire for a South Texas *pachanga*. Many of the men dress in boots and jeans with a collared, cotton, button-down the front shirt; other apparel includes loose-fitting 1950s bowling-style shirts with collars that button down the front and are not tucked in. We noticed only a few of the hallmark red, blue, and gold American G.I. forum hats on the heads of older male veterans, from the Korean War and World War II. We also saw a couple of the younger participants dressed in active duty U.S. military uniforms. One of the more accomplished dancers stood out from the crowd in a dashing canary yellow zoot/pachuco suit that fit over a black T-shirt, paired with a matching black hat. The women’s clothes ranged from comfortable dresses to

snappy yet casual shirts and pants. In general, other than a few exceptions, participants' attire typified what one would find at a Sunday dance hall.

For an outsider, the "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival might look like any other live music event. That the "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival indexes South Texas' pachanga¹⁴ tradition highlights that this event is more than just a party, more than a site for Budweiser to market its beer, and more than a glitzy simulacra of fun. Dorsey's previous work draws attention to the history of the pachanga in relation to Mexican-American's participation in the political sphere and its role in building political publics.¹⁵ Far from being a barbeque with music and dancing, the pachanga underscores a way Mexican-Americans gain entrance into the public sphere and retain it, from the post-World War II Mexican-American civil rights movement to grassroots-based district court campaigns in the twenty-first Century.

If you were to walk into the "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival, it would look and feel much like the one Dorsey attended at a dance hall in Robstown in 2005. Robstown is a working-class, predominately Mexican-American rural town twenty miles west of the city of Corpus Christi.¹⁶ Dorsey found the High Chaparral Dance Hall close to the highway and easy to access from out of town. Dorsey pulled into and parked alongside a shiny black, Ford pickup truck. As soon as Dorsey opened her car door, the welcoming *ump-pah* of the conjunto music penetrated her surroundings. Once she entered the dance hall through the open door on the side, she immediately saw a table to her left monitored by "Aunt Celia", who warmly greeted her. The woman seated beside Aunt Celia politely collected the eight-dollar admission fee while casually visiting with a couple of guys. As Aunt Celia tucked the eight dollars into the cash box, Dorsey noticed the bar and food along the opposite sidewall of the dance hall. Aunt Celia gestured toward a long, narrow folding table where twelve members of the Escobar clan sat. The table included a couple of elder Escobar men who fought in World War II. Mr. Ramiro Escobar, from the World War II generation, introduced Dorsey to his *primo* (cousin) who survived Iwo Jima. While Dorsey chatted with these veterans, Linda Escobar walked on stage and introduced her young female protégé, Cristina, who plays with her.

In front of the Escobar table, Dorsey noticed a column of twelve similar tables that opened up to the dance floor. Two more columns of tables flanked the right and left of theirs. These tables, also opened to the dance floor, which was peppered with approximately sixteen dancers. Organizers erected the stage at the front of the dance hall with a large, red, white and blue U.S. flag as the only backdrop. On stage, the vocalist wore a U.S. flag shirt. To the right of the stage hung a banner announcing "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival also adorned with a U.S. flag icon. Dorsey returned to the Escobar table and visited with the family, who characterized the food as delicious and mostly prepared by Aunt Polly—in essence, food not to be missed. Without too much prodding, Dorsey walked over to the bar and barbeque table and bought a plate. (The event's flyer explained that the food proceeds would benefit the "El Veterano" Scholarship Fund.) Her barbeque plate included Spanish rice, charro beans, and beef brisket barbeque complimented by

slices of ultrasoft white bread, onions, jalapeños and pickles. For an additional dollar, Dorsey could have purchased a piece of white cake.

The warm, festive atmosphere welcomes participants to enjoy the event in a variety of ways. Couples of various ages danced.¹⁷ After a little dancing, others ate some barbecue. Some sipped beer at the table and chatted. Others took a break and visited the “veterans memorial” nearby the dance hall entrance.

Mr. Raul Escobar, who at age seventeen became a flame-thrower in the U.S. military, guided Dorsey to the memorial. He showed her photos and newspaper articles about his service and poems he wrote during World War II. He explained his wife’s thoughtfulness during this tragic time: she wrote him a “Dear John” letter to enable him to fight free of the fear of leaving his family behind in the event of death. (See figure 11.3) The veteran’s memorial reminded Dorsey of a home altar–church reliquary hybrid. Organizers transformed a simple brown folding table into a memorial zone, featuring veterans’ memorabilia from various U.S.-led wars and military excursions similar to the material Mr. Raul Escobar showed Dorsey: large, posed photos of young men dressed in military clothes, photos of the men at military sites, correspondence to loved ones. When ready, participants can visit the memorial table and solemnly remember the ways in which U.S. military engagements effected their lives: relatives killed in distant lands; a brother’s smile lost in Vietnam; a sister’s soul left in Iraq.

For many, the memorial table also invited discourse. It provided an opening to talk about times of war and how it affected the survivors: veterans of foreign wars



Figure 11.3 Veteran’s memorial table. Photo by Isabel Díaz-Barriga, 2008, used by permission.

as well as their family and friends. Our present wars, the loss of loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan and those still there, loomed large as participants stood by this memorial table and looked over to it as they discussed the ways in which past wars disrupted and permanently transformed their lives and families. Both the veterans memorial table and music listened to at the conjunto festival offered avenues to contemplate war, more generally, and Mexican-Americans' blood sacrifice to the United States and its particular contours, more specifically.

At this music event, Mexican-Americans appropriate symbols of the U.S. nation (e.g., U.S. flag icons, the American eagle featured on the cover of the event booklet) in a distinct vernacular. We want to argue, though, that here we witness more than a Mexican-American appropriation of U.S. patriotic discourse. This employment also makes visible and defines what patriotism is in the United States in relation to their experience. As the veterans' memorial table highlights, a base of patriotic citizenship is blood sacrifice to the United States. Another includes remembering that sacrifice and re-remembering it annually—if not more often—and in a highly ritualized form (the conjunto festival and pachanga). Patriotism to the United States is a struggle and lived experience reanimated and celebrated by the community—not just elderly men—but families. Young and old, men, women, and children gather to celebrate their patriotism and belonging to the United States in Spanish and in English. This event does not erase that the participants are of Mexican descent and their verbal artistry in Spanish; it uses such vehicles to celebrate, encode, and circulate their contribution to the United States.

In his ethnographic work on the Minutemen “guarding” the U.S.-Mexican border, Taylor highlights that patriotic-military language, as their name “Minutemen” suggests, is a key framing device. Many members align their service in the Minutemen with their military experience fighting for the United States. They view their present work guarding the border as reminiscent of the halcyon days of their youth spent protecting the nation. Today, these U.S. military veterans in their 60s and 70s tote guns, use military speak, and protect the U.S.-Mexican border from what they call “Spanish people.”¹⁸ When one recalls how commentators such as Pat Buchanan and activists such as the Minuteman elect to outline citizenship and patriotism in the United States (essentialized cultural substance manifest in Mexican-not Canadian-border guarding), one witnesses seemingly contrary discourses of citizenship coming into play at “El Veterano.”¹⁹ Envision the Patriots Band playing at the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival (not “the Veteran” in English but “El Veterano” in Spanish, not marching down Main Street but playing at a conjunto event, a distinctly hybrid Mexican-American cultural form), and witness this alignment.

CULTURAL CIRCULATIONS: FROM A PISTOL TO A MAUSER IN HIS HAND

In considering how “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival instantiates a way in which Mexican-Americans in South Texas express patriotism, we must also consider its wider cultural circulations into the public sphere. We theorize citizenship not

simply as a static value system but rather as a discursive construct that circulates through culture. The application of the notion of culture as circulation derives from theoretical work by Aparicio and Jáquez, Corona and Madrid, Dorsey, Urban, and Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin that explores the movement of culture refracted through social practice, including how social actors rearticulate cultural forms.²⁰ As such, this conceptualization hooks into projects of “musical migration” and appropriation by spotlighting performance events—in including event organizers and attendees—as they transform systems of signification.²¹ This overall theoretical framework enables us to view perspectives on citizenship as an intersection of cultural practices that derive from many sources including music events such as “El Veterano.”

Cultural material concerning “El Veterano” circulates across various media before, during, and after the event affecting meanings in the process. Actors use e-mail to organize, publicize, and share memories of the event. Escobar and the “El Veterano” Committee use e-mail to organize volunteer networks and to send publicity fliers. During and after the event, participants circulate photos taken at “El Veterano” on digital cameras, cell phones, and blackberries through their phones or later through e-mail. Conjunto artists and their fans transmit their performances from “El Veterano” on YouTube.²² Readers who prefer more traditional and less interactive media can learn about the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival in the regional newspaper, *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, where respected Tejano music columnist Juan Tejeda frequently mentions the festival around Veterans Day. The colorful and sizeable “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival Program provides residents and participants an additional way to learn about and remember the “El Veterano” festival, Mexican-American veterans, their war dead, war veterans who are and were Mexican-American political activists, as well as Mexican-Americans presently serving in the military. The free program runs about the size of a sheet of notebook paper (8x11 inches) and is approximately thirty-pages long. From the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival program left on the coffee table to e-mail listservs and cell phone photos from the event itself, cultural material remembering the event circulates locally and globally using conjunto music and appropriating patriotic discourse in acts that bring and bind together senders and receivers around a celebration of Mexican-American veterans and war dead.

It is worth considering how these cultural circulations, and their role in the construction of a South Texas Mexican-American public, have become intertwined with patriotic discourses. While it is beyond the scope of the essay to describe fully this historical process, we can productively engage this topic through a consideration of Américo Paredes groundbreaking work on border music. Paredes, like Eligio Escobar, served in World War II as part of the occupation force in Japan.²³ On returning to the United States, Paredes completed his bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate as well as published his well-known account of the folklore and music that surrounded the conflicts between border residents and their own version of an occupying force, the Texas Rangers. The University of Texas at Austin Press published *With His Pistol in His Hand* in 1958.



Figure 11.4 Poster for the 10th Annual “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival, November, 9, 2008. © Linda Escobar, used by permission.

During World War II, Eligio Escobar continued playing conjunto music for friends and family. He returned from Japan to the United States to work as a truck driver for an oil company. After becoming partially paralyzed in a truck-driving accident, Escobar focused his attention on music and recorded “El Veterano” in the early 1960s. Out of 250 recordings, many consider “El Veterano” to be Eligio Escobar’s most famous.²⁴ Throughout his professional music career, Escobar played this song to benefit organizations such as the American G.I. Forum, a veteran’s association of which he and his brothers were members.²⁵

While scholars have written extensively about how *With His Pistol in His Hand* serves as a masculine poetics and a stinging and necessary critique of Anglo-racism, few focus on Paredes’s criticisms of the violence wrought by World War II. In writing about the changes that have taken place in South Texas since World War II, Paredes states:

On the Texas bank physical changes also were taking place. New people had settled in most of the country; grapefruit orchards and truck farms replaced the chaparral. Still, on the Texas side cultural isolation remained. But with the

advent of World War II greater numbers of north-bank Borderers began to think of themselves seriously as Americans. Like the unreconstructed Southerner—whom he resembled in some respects—the Border Mexican was surprised to find that the Peoples of Europe and the Pacific thought of him as just another American.²⁶

Most readers interpret Paredes’s characterization of post–World War II border residents as a call for them to maintain their border culture. Paredes aims his critique not only at these cultural changes but also at the ways border residents lionize World War II veterans. He does so with a sharp sense of irony. Consider the following depiction of a World War II hero from the border:

Brownsville’s World War II hero was a Border Mexican. Armed with the modern equivalent of the Ranger’s Colt, a machine gun, he displayed such Spanish-Indian cruelty toward the German army that he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. And all good Texans in Brownsville received him on his homecoming with festivities and parades. His deeds were not celebrated in *corridos*; legends were not made about him. For he was not the hero of the Border folk but of the American people.²⁷

For Paredes, the border culture that created *corridos* exemplified a patriarchal democracy where social relations were based on respect and social hierarchy was fluid. Paredes celebrates the *corrido* hero Gregorio Cortez not for his use of violence, but for his cunning as a horseman and his tenacity in front of violence wrought by the Texas Rangers, or *rinches*. Paredes’s unwillingness to celebrate the violence of World War II follows from the critiques of racism and Ranger violence and terror that form the body of *With His Pistol in His Hand*. For some, it will seem unfortunate that border residents did not heed his call since border residents esteem veterans, particularly those from World War II. However, Paredes’s writing in the 1950’s could not anticipate that twenty-first century conjunto festivals named after a *corrido* titled “El veterano” would indeed celebrate military service.²⁸

Eligio Escobar, contrary to Paredes’s expectations, went on to write and perform music (including *corridos*) about the experiences of Mexican-American veterans. Like Paredes, though, Escobar glorifies neither violence nor the heroics of conquering an enemy. Consider one of Escobar’s most memorable songs simply titled “El veterano” (“The Veteran”):

“Veterano,” *soy señores*
De la guerra más terrible, fui guerrero
Soy mexicano de raza
Por la mano del destino, nacido en el extranjero

Me llamaron al servicio
Como macho es mi deber, dije: “Presente”

*Por buena, por mala suerte
Me toco la infantería de esos que van en el frente*

*Después del entrenamiento
Me mandaron en un barco
¡Ay! ir a jugarme la vida
Al otro lado del charco*

*Yo en mi vida, había rezado
Pero allá aprendí a rezar mil oraciones
Bajo la lluvia de acero
Balas de ametralladoras, y bombas de mil aviones*

*No he podido comprender
Como pude yo volver, quizás por suerte
O es que mi Dios es muy grande
Mi Virgen Guadalupe me protegió de la muerte*

*¡Ay! Que vida tan amarga
La que un soldado se pasa.
¡Ay! Sin ninguna esperanza
De regresar a su casa*

*En los campos de batalla
Se mostró su valentía, ser mexicano
Para que el mundo lo sepa
Que no se afrenta de nada el que tiene sangre azteca*

*Ya me despido señores
Con mi “mauser” en mis manos
Ya (aaa) aquí se acaban cantando
Los versos del veterano*

*“The veteran” is who I am, gentlemen
Of the most terrible war, I was a fighter
I am of Mexican descent [“raza”]
By destiny’s hand, I was born abroad*

*I was called to military service
Like a “man,” I should be brave [“macho”]. I said: “Present.”
For good or bad luck,
I was placed in the front line infantry*

*After training [boot camp],
They sent me off in a boat*

To gamble my life
On the other side of the ocean.²⁹

In my life I have prayed,
But over there I learned to pray a thousand prayers.
Underneath the rain of steal
Bullets of machine guns and bombs from a thousand airplanes.

I have never understood
How I was able to return, probably by luck
Or, that my God is so grand
My Virgin of Guadalupe protected me from death

Oh! What a bitter life
That happens to a soldier.
Oh! Without any hope
Of return [to his] home.

On the battlefield,
[Proud] To be Mexican [American], I demonstrated my valiantness
So that the world would know
That we, of Aztec blood, are not afraid to face anything

I say goodbye now gentleman
With my “Mauser” in my hands
And here I finish singing
The verses of the veteran.

Like Paredes, in “El veterano” Escobar does not lionize war. Notice in line 2, for example, Escobar does not label the war itself as “great” but as “the most terrible war” (*la guerra más terrible*). Escobar focuses on the randomness of death (see lines 11, 18) and reflects on the bitter life of a soldier (stanza 6).

We interpret “El veterano” as a corrido. For readers and scholars who disagree, however, we can all agree that “El veterano” clearly encompasses many of a corrido’s signifiers. The song itself contains a structured pattern of end rhyme, starting with the opening stanza’s abcb pattern. We transcribed the song into a four-line quatrain structure with eight stanzas that include a classic corrido introduction (*Veterano, soy señores*) and farewell (*ya me despido señores*). The song utilizes everyday language and claims only a handful of literary or cultural references, in this case La Virgen de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) and Aztec culture. These are hallmarks of a classic corrido structure as outlined by Paredes in *With His Pistol in His Hand*.

Escobar perhaps consciously makes this reference by ending his corrido that he is fighting “Con mi ‘mauser’ en mis manos” (“With my ‘Mauser’ in my hands”). The Mauser reference might seem surprising since it is a German pistol used by

German soldiers in World War II. In corridos, however, the Mauser has antecedents. First introduced into Mexico by the dictator Porfirio Díaz, many fighters used it during the 1910–1920 Mexican Revolution. A number of revolutionary war corridos, in fact, mention the Mauser. Escobar's reference to the Mauser thus serves as a point of reference to earlier corridos about the hardships and violence of war.

Eligio Escobar, a man of Américo Paredes generation, used his music to shift the meanings of participation in World War II into a South Texas landscape. As Paredes highlights, this generation saw itself as American. At the same time, the meanings of both being American and border culture were in flux. Through community-based political activism, including the formation of the American G.I. Forum in South Texas, Mexican-American World War II veterans organized to claim their rights as U.S. citizens. The music of many of these G.I.'s, as represented by Eligio Escobar's song "El veterano," did not represent the "Americanized" version of the border.

Some fifty years after its composition, this song serves as the centerpiece of the "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival. Escobar's daughter Linda Escobar performs this song in honor of her father and all veterans.³⁰ It celebrates *Mexican-American* veterans and circulates through records, performances at dance halls, and now on the Internet. As Eligio Escobar's daughter, Linda, explains:

My father's sentiments are expressed in his recorded composition of "El veterano." The song is about a Mexican-American who is drafted and trained as an infantryman and he is shipped to the warfront. "I never prayed before, but there I said a thousand prayers," he sings. He returns home, and thanks La Virgen de Guadalupe for his safe return. It is a song full of valor and pride in being a veteran.³¹

For Linda Escobar, references to Mexican-American culture and the valor of veterans flow together naturally as a central aspect of South Texas culture.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL AND NECRO-CITIZENSHIP

For participants and for many South Texans more generally, these discourses of Mexican-American identity and military service do not appear contrary. For them, this manifestation of U.S. patriotism makes sense. To an outsider, even a well-intentioned liberal one, the format of this effervescence of patriotic citizenship might appear contrary: people celebrating *U.S.* patriotism in *Spanish*? Loud music and sacred memorial housed in the same space? In *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, William Flores and Rina Benmayor argue that expressions of cultural difference are often about creating a safe space.³² These expressions are examples of what the authors term cultural citizenship:

Cultural citizenship can be thought of as a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society and eventually claim rights. Although it involves difference, it is not as if Latinos seek out such difference. Rather, the motivation is simply to create space where the people feel “safe” and “at home,” where they feel a sense of belonging and membership. Typically, claimed space is not perceived by Latinos as “different.” The difference is perceived by the dominant society, which finds such space “foreign” and even threatening.³³

Indeed, with its celebration of U.S. military service, conjunto music, and Spanish language, the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival is a prime example of this integration of difference and belonging strengthening the social fabric.

The discourse circulating in the context of the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival celebrates belonging to the U.S. in a particular dialect that is valid to Mexican-Americans in South Texas. Musicians and residents celebrate U.S. military veterans and Veterans Day in a specifically hybrid Mexican-American way. They account for their dead and experiences of sacrifice to the United States through conjunto music, in English and Spanish. The song “El Veterano”—whose performance is a focal point—speaks to almost every military person’s experience of war. At the same time, performers voice this “every serviceperson” experience through symbolic language highly meaningful to Mexican-Americans.

The concept of cultural citizenship with its focus on difference and belonging, however, cannot fully account for the ways in which South Texans express citizenship through service, sacrifice, and death. To describe this construction of citizenship, we employ the term “necro-citizenship” through which we broadly refer both to the construction of citizenship in a war or militarized zone and the privileging of sacrifice and death as the highest mark of citizenship. Within the national imaginary, South Texas with its large number of military bases and border security politics is often conceived as a militarized zone. In this context, through events such as “El Veterano,” Mexican-Americans strive to assert their presence in the United States as full citizens by demonstrating their willingness to die for one’s country.

As described by Lázaro Lima in *The Latino Body: Crisis Identities in American Literary and Cultural Memory*, necro-citizenship recognizes the significance of the dead body and the disappearance of specific bodies in ordering the U.S. national imaginary. Lima states: “The survival of the body as a historical and material entity is directly related to its gender, ethnicity, and class, and although it follows that almost every ‘body’ has a story to tell, not all bodies matter equally to everyone.”³⁴ Necro-citizenship places the Latino body in the symbolic center of this battleground of meaning. The concept calls for Latinos to remember history, remember elided narratives “through the aesthetic play of the corporeal.”³⁵ Like Eligio Escobar’s hit song, “El veterano,” necro-citizenship refuses to let the Mexican-American war veteran’s experience be forgotten: according to Lima, it provides “a testimonial-like accounting of a place in time in need of what I have called, following Toni Morrison, narrative re-memory: a counterhistorical

re-presentation of past events in need of national reevaluations.”³⁶ Recall Raul Escobar taking me to the veteran’s memorial table and then describing his experience of loss and death.

Such articulations of necro-citizenship profile specific contours linked to Mexican-Americans’ experience; one of the most prominent is death. Not just risking one’s life seems necessary to make Mexican-Americans valid U.S. citizens, but continually remembering and reminding the public of that act seems central to constituting Mexican-Americans as valid U.S. citizens. Thus, to remind the U.S. nation that they are valid citizens, Mexican-Americans in South Texas continually reenact that sacrifice, and reenact it in poetic, embodied, and highly ritualized ways.

The Mexican-American patriotism that manifests at the annual “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival in South Texas is made meaningful and circulated through music that is not jingoistic like that promulgated by the right wing. It is not Buchanan’s essentialized notion of patriotic citizenship. Rather, patriotic citizenship as manifest on the ground in South Texas embeds cultural and necro-citizenship. It does not forget history: it articulates history and propels aesthetically embodied memory suffused with meaning at the grassroots level.

The cultural circulations of the song “El veterano” and the “El Veterano” event itself thus creates a platform for patriotic citizenship that both expresses cultural citizenship, i.e., belonging through difference, and the politics of necro-citizenship, belonging in a militarized society through expressions of sacrifice and death. The song mediates between these extremes at once celebrating the strength and resilience of Mexican and Mexican-American culture while decrying the hardships of military service. The “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival contextualizes these hardships into a wider recognition of the importance of military service to the construction of the nation and a remembrance for those who have given their lives. Music and events, such as the “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival, mediate between these meanings of patriotic citizenship both reproducing the vitality of Mexican-American cultural forms and normalizing militarization and military engagement within them.

We use the concept of mediation to emphasize the tensions in citizenship practices that this music and its circulations represent. In order to illustrate this point, let us return to Manny Garcia’s definition of conjunto/Tejano music with which we started this article. After Garcia defined this music, Dorsey asked him the following question:

MD: Do you think making a distinction between Tejano and conjunto music is important?

MG: No, it’s not...It’s all the same...It all tells the same story. You can listen to any music you want, but it all tells you the same story: it’s life struggles. It’s about the journey of life.

Garcia then narrated his own story—a Vietnam veteran who arrived in Corpus with only the clothes on his back, sleeping out of his car parked beneath an

underpass. He explained how from one job and with persistence he has the beautiful home and happiness that make up his present life. A feature of Garcia’s definition that surprised us was not that he defined conjunto/Tejano music in relation to struggle in the fields, to hard work, to poverty, but what he did not do. The instrumentation, the lyrical style, rhyme scheme: they are not what define this music. Often, when scholars approach U.S.-Mexico border music, they begin to define it through its instruments; for example, the bajo sexto and accordion mark the conjunto along with the polka beat. However, Garcia, someone with a clear investment in the music, does not start there. Actually, he goes a step further; he tells us that the differences between Tejano and conjunto are not important. What is important is that the music tells “good and bad life stories” and “the journey of life.” He emphasizes that the music keeps the body moving—picking, dancing, thinking, and struggling. As such, the cultural circulations of “El Veterano” represent this constant engagement with lived experience as it is transformed, at least momentarily, into a commentary on cultural belonging, death, and citizenship.

Notes

1. We want to thank Linda Escobar for consistently supporting this project over the past ten years and Cristina Beltrán for reading an early draft of this chapter.
2. See Manuel Peña, *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
3. The “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival is not the only site where a convergence between patriotic citizenship and conjunto music exists. In an article on the annual Narciso Martinez Cultural Arts Center 16 Septiembre Conjunto Festival, held at Veteran’s Pavilion, a local reporter described the U.S. patriotism expressed in the event, Bruce Lee Smith. “Gritos and Music: Downtown San Benito Site for Annual Conjunto Festival,” *The Monitor*, September 15, 2000.
4. Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism,” in *Race, Identity, and Citizenship. A Reader*, eds. Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Mirón, and Jonathan Xavier Inda (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 253–261.
5. Lázaro Lima, *The Latino Body: Crisis Identities in American Literary and Cultural Memory* (New York: New York University, 2007), 66–67; Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2003), 11–40; and Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 43.
6. Margaret E. Dorsey, “Linda Escobar and Tejano Conjunto Music in South Texas,” Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis Digital Archive, <http://www.eviada.org/collection.cfm?mc=7&ctID=45> (accessed March 10, 2010).
7. A video of Tancredo’s comments at the University of Texas at Brownsville can be found on YouTube at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiQWc4wK2l8> (accessed March 10, 2010).
8. For articles covering the issue, see Melissa McEver, “Environmental Groups Sign on to Border Lawsuit,” *The Monitor*, June 2, 2008; and Christopher Sherman, “Company Sought to Build Fence: Congress Hopes to Have 670 Miles of Fencing in Place by the End of the Year,” *The Monitor*, June 3, 2008.

9. Lawrence Taylor, "The Minutemen: Re-Enacting the Frontier and the Birth of the Nation," in *Wildness and Sensation: Anthropology of Sinister and Sensuous Realms*, ed. Rob Van Ginkel and Alex Strating, Antwerpen (Belgium: Het Spinhuis, 2007), 90.
10. See Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism."
11. Quote from flyer for the 7th Annual "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival, November 11, 2005.
12. The "El Veterano" Conjunto Festival Committee, thus far, has given twenty-seven scholarships.
13. On the first years, "El Veterano" occurred on Memorial Day weekend, lasting three days. Because Linda Escobar found running a three-day event exhausting, she shifted the festival to a single-day event. She changed the date to Veterans Day in part due to the name "El Veterano" and also in part because May is a busy festival time for conjunto/Tejano musicians. On years that Veterans Day, November 11, lands on a weekday, the festival happens on a Sunday bracketing Veterans Day.
14. In Spanish *pachanga* generally refers to a party. In South Texas the word *pachanga* has a very specific cultural and political meaning that centers on barbecues and informal events that have wider political significance, such as political campaigning. See Margaret E. Dorsey, *Pachangas: Borderlands Music, United States Politics and Transnational Marketing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
15. See, Margaret E. Dorsey, "The Role of Music in Materializing Politics," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2004), 61–94; and Dorsey, *Pachangas*.
16. The 2000 U.S. Census documents 93 percent of the Robstown's population as Hispanic, with a median income of \$22,000, and 32 percent of its population living below the poverty line.
17. "Couples dancing," at this festival and at many conjunto festivals that I attended over the years, signifies more than just a husband and wife or heterosexual pairing. You will also see mothers and daughters dancing, women dancing together, a man or woman dancing with a young child, and children dancing together. I, however, have not observed men dancing together.
18. Taylor, "The Minutemen," 98.
19. A video of Buchanan's comments about the Minutemen can be found in the following link: <http://buchanan.org/blog/video-are-minutemen-vigilantes-pat-buchanan-debates-juan-hernandez-718> (accessed March 12, 2010).
20. See Frances, R. Aparicio and Cándida F. Jáquez, eds., *Musical Migrations Volume 1: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, eds., *Postnational Musical Identities. Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Dorsey, *Pachangas*; Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, eds., *Media Worlds: Anthropology on a New Terrain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); and Greg Urban, *Metaculture: How Culture Moves Through the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2001).

21. See Aparicio, and Jáquez, “Introduction,” in *Musical Migrations Volume 1*, 1–10; Steven Feld, “Pygmy Pop: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, No. 28 (1996), 1–35; and Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-tec Rifa! Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87–113.
22. For example, a video of Boni Mauricio and his son jamming at the 9th Annual “El Veterano” Conjunto Festival (2007) can be found on YouTube at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXAk7W-N5So> (accessed March 11, 2010).
23. For an analysis of Paredes’s World War II experience, including interview materials where Paredes describes his experiences in Japan see, Ramón Saldívar, *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
24. Thomas H. Kreneck, “Escobar, Eligio Roque,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/EE/fesaj.html> (accessed March 11, 2010).
25. Ibid.
26. Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand. A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas, Press, 1958), 106.
27. Ibid., 107.
28. Indeed, the post–WWII Chicano music scene was complex. For example, Anthony Macías describes the musical borrowing between Chicanos and African-Americans after WWII in Los Angeles. See Anthony Macías, *Mexican-American Mojo. Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
29. In the song Escobar uses “charco” which means puddle of water. According to Linda Escobar, her father Eligio Escobar selected “charco” instead of the more semantically accurate “el mar” (the ocean) for poetic reasons.
30. Eligio Escobar recorded over 250 songs in Spanish and English and toured extensively in the United States and Mexico. Songs aired on Spanish-language radio were his most popular.
31. Quote extracted from 3rd Annual El Veterano Conjunto Jam Festival booklet, May 20, 2001.
32. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, “Introduction,” in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, edited by William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon, 1998).
33. Ibid., 15.
34. Lima, *The Latino Body*, 140.
35. Ibid., 132.
36. Ibid., 166.

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PART FIVE

Trans-Border Cosmopolitan
Audiotopias

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The Tijuana Sound

Brass, Blues, and the Border of the 1960s

JOSH KUN ■

So close to *la migra*, so far from Memphis.

—DELIA MARTÍNEZ

En Tijuana, ya lo baila, en México ya llegó.

—LOS TJS, “EL TWIST DESPACIO” —

People take advantage of borders in ways that are not intended or anticipated by their creators.

—MICHEL BAUD AND WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL

By 1967, Los Tijuana Five had become one of the top bands working the crowded Tijuana rock scene. They had flawless Beatles haircuts, a local reputation for being able to play the entire *Rubber Soul* album live in the middle of a Revolución Avenue strip club from start to finish without missing a single special effect or tape loop, and a full-length album out in Mexico on U.S.-based Pickwick Records that was full of the band’s deft makeovers of familiar U.S. and U.K. rock hits. Like so many of their Mexican rock contemporaries, they were in the business of cross-border audio smuggling and rock radio kidnapping. They infiltrated the Brill Building by turning Goffin and King’s “Don’t Bring Me Down” into “No me critiques,” Jagger weeping “As Tears Go By” became Tijuana Five lead singer Pájaro Alberto weeping “Ya nunca más,” and The Beatles “Drive My Car” got a more literal treatment, “Mi auto puedes manejar.” But it was their take on The Mamas and the Papas’ “California Dreamin’” that went far beyond being just another cover version and became something of a cultural statement

about the role of Tijuana in altering the dominant cultural geographies of California politics and identity in the 1960s. One of the great anthems of upper California sunshine mythology, “California Dreamin’” was written by John Phillips after leaving L.A. for a particularly rough and frigid New York winter and the song is his wish for a return to safety and warmth. Phillips gives us a mythic California—a romantic Eden of perfect beaches and warm evening winds. It’s a song that makes the California it wants, the California it needs, because it’s just too cold outside.

Los Tijuana Five might have just replicated the song like they did with *Rubber Soul*. But they didn’t, precisely because they were singing from a California of their own, a California below the border. If the other California was a dream, for them it wasn’t a meteorological one: “*Siempre estarás en mi corazón, y la ilusión de volverte a ver / Tienes el amor que yo quiero tener / California mía, algún día volveré*” (You will always be in my heart, and the illusion of seeing you again, you have the love that I want to have, my California, some day I will return.) We don’t know which California they mean—upper or lower, Alta or Baja—until they change the chorus, “California dreamin,” into a possessive that happens to rhyme with the English lyric, “California mía,” my California. The California they miss, the illusion they create through their longing, is not the same one that Phillips built behind the frost of his New York City windows. Their California isn’t L.A., it’s Tijuana. Their California is *their* California. You can’t even hear the California that’s not theirs in the song. It’s made to vanish, as if Alta California was simply folded beneath Baja California in an origami map, as if it were a spare part in the construction of something bigger, some greater vision of where they are in the world, and how their city might be saved if they could just dream it right.

I want to suggest “Sueños de California” as a turning point in the musical history of the U.S.-Mexico border; the song that perhaps more than any other signals a shift in the history of Tijuana as a key site for thinking through questions of national identity, political economy, and cultural creativity. The song is the unofficial anthem for the birth of modern Tijuana out of the Black Legend myths, or to borrow Heriberto Yopez’s phrase “Tijuanologías,” of its tourist past.¹ I hear “Sueños de California” as the sound of Tijuana’s historical shift from a city predominantly defined by the ebbs and flows, desires and fears, of a booming U.S. tourist industry that built the city up from its nineteenth century roots as a small family rancho to meet the vice demands of Americans on the run from themselves, to a city defined by the ebbs and flows, desires and fears, of post-World War II transnational industrialization and, eventually, the free-trade drive toward a voracious and vicious era of asymmetrical economic globalization. The sociologist Kathryn Kopinak has written at length on what she calls “the social costs of industrial growth” in the Tijuana region, but in this essay I’m interested in what we might call the cultural ecologies and cultural networks of industrial growth.² That is, what cultural networks, what cultural ecologies, emerge in Tijuana in the 1960s as a direct result of border industrialization and how do these new networks and ecologies interact with previous cultural regimes tied to the bi-national flows of tourist dollars and tourist fantasies? If, as Julian Steward wrote in 1938, the “force of purely cultural



Figure 12.1 Los Tijuana Five.

and psychological determinants” cannot be understood “if the ecology which conditions and delimits them is unknown,” then to understand the rise of Tijuana rock culture in the 1960s we need to also understand the changing border ecology of the 1960s.³ Just as Kazys Varnelis has argued for a study of “networked ecologies” in contemporary Los Angeles—along an axis of urban infrastructure, new media technologies, and cultural geography—I am interested in how listening to border popular music can help us better understand culture’s role in building and sustaining the “networked ecologies” of border life.⁴ “Sueños de California” makes us consider not only the social costs of industrial growth, but also the cultural dreams that get born in the hands of border artists and musicians.

Yet precisely because these are border networks of culture, border ecologies of musical infrastructure, “Sueños de California” cannot be heard in a national vacuum. In fact, it can be heard as only the A-side of a border 45rpm single, a song about border dreams being sung right across the line from B-sides singing right back at it. Tijuana scholar Humberto Félix Berumen has characterized this duality as central to “the semiotic border”: the extent to which the border “constitutes a mechanism that filters and/or translates external messages from one semiotic system to the given language of a different system, and vice versa.” As a result, the border becomes a switchboard, a channel, a mediating node in a bi-national, bilingual network that “acts as a powerful and active mechanism of cultural translation.”⁵ As we will see, Los Tijuana Five were creating new musical expressions in

the 1960s, but they were also skilled translators of preexisting rock languages and countercultural codes coming from north of the line. And their dreams of their California were also messages in reply to external messages from the other side, messages from the U.S. full of their own ideas about Tijuana and Mexico, messages riddled with their own dreams and myths of Tijuana's past, present, and future that date back at least to the first European dreaming of California as a fantasy island of monsters and magic and death. Literary scholar Norma Klahn, putting a southwestern spin on Edward Said's orientalism, has called it the tradition of "South of the Borderism": "The way that the United States and its peoples have come to terms with Mexico as they continuously invent an 'Other' image, and defend and define their own."⁶

In the 1960s, the chief protagonist of South of the Borderism was a musical act from Los Angeles, Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, whose relentless global success throughout the decade overshadowed the site-specific art and culture being born from Tijuana itself. Indeed, Los Tijuana Five and their cohorts in the Tijuana rock scene—Los Moonlights and the Dug Dugs, Los Rockin' Devils and Los TJs to name but a few of dozens—were not the only ones coming up with the sound of Tijuana. North of the border, thanks to the massive popularity of The Tijuana Brass (themselves the result of a different set of the border's cultural translations, message filtering, and musical mediation) the whole world was tuning into a whole other sound entirely—what had become marketed and beloved as "The Tijuana Sound"—and dreaming of Tijuana as an Old Mexico wonderland of marimbas and brass.

What I will explore here is this clash of cultural networks between "south of the borderisms" and the actual cultural and social geography of south of the border itself, these crossed wires of cultural ecology: an upper California musical invention of Tijuana as an eternally romantic, eternally backward, and (cue trumpets and marimbas) eternally perky preindustrial Mexican village, and the realities of Tijuana as a rising industrial center that played a central role in the formation of the Mexican counterculture. For, if by 1968 the Mexican cultural critic José Agustín could call rock "a new aesthetic order that no other musical current or artistic discipline could deliver," then Tijuana was that new order's aesthetic capital.⁷ "In those days, Tijuana was like Liverpool was for British rock," Tijuana rock veteran Martín Mayo has argued. "All of the great Mexican bands of that time came from Tijuana."⁸ Or as legendary Tijuana rock icon Javier Bátiz has put it: "All of the bands in one moment or another had to come to Tijuana to go to rock school. You had to spend at least three months in one of our nightclubs or discotheques... This was the university for rock. You had to come here to research your thesis and present your work."⁹

This renewed attention to the Tijuana rock scene of the 1960s ruptures two dominant narratives of border culture: First, the U.S. narrative of fantasy and stereotype that ran like a mythic current through The Tijuana Brass, Speedy Gonzalez, The Tijuana Toads, and countless other pop cultural examples of the rogues gallery of Mexican symbology and simulacra that William Anthony Nericcio has dubbed "text-Mex" (Mexicans are "less a people than a text"); and second, the Mexican narrative of cultural centralism that continues to marginalize the role of

the northern border in the development of Mexican national culture and identity.¹⁰ Leading rock critics and scholars on both side of the border like Federico Arana and Eric Zolov may pay tribute to the “frontier armies” that shaped the 60s rock movement of *la onda* and the countercultural revolution that surrounded it, but in both Arana’s classic 1985 *Huaraches de ante azul* and Zolov’s 1999 influential study *Refried Elvis*, the real story remains at the center and the border is left as merely a brief detour from the commanding musical orbits of Mexico City.¹¹ As Tijuana critic Omar Foglio has argued, Tijuana is a sort of no-man’s land of bi-national rock history in that “it doesn’t figure in the North American version of rock history, nor in that of Mexico City’s.”¹² In the case of the latter, we can blame it on long-standing traditions of Mexican *centralismo* that only see the border as a cultural vanishing point and northern edge of authentic Mexicanness—or as Jesús López Gastélum put it in his 1964 poem “Estado 29,” the place “where eternal Mexico defends itself resisting the overpowering force of the fascinating dollar.”¹³ In the case of the former, it was hard for anyone north of the border to hear Tijuana’s “frontier armies” because their ears were already busy digesting a completely different Tijuana sound, one that was deaf to the modern noise and blues blasts bubbling up from the burlesque houses just down the road from the sombrero-wearing donkey-zebras posing for pictures with U.S. tourists in front of watercolor backdrops of an Old Mexico that never existed to begin with.

THE TIJUANA SOUND

The story of The Tijuana Sound begins in 1962 when Herb Alpert, a young Los Angeles songwriter and trumpet player who had cut his teeth writing hits for Sam Cooke, Jan and Dean, and Dante and the Evergreens, was having trouble with a new song a friend had sent his way, “Twinkle Star.” He couldn’t get it to go anywhere so he gave up, put his trumpet in its case, locked up the L.A. garage where he did most of his writing and playing, and headed south to Tijuana to catch a bullfight. He sat in the bleachers 180 miles from home, watched a bull go down in the Baja dirt, and then heard a group of mariachis play a fanfare as the dirt was raked of blood. Everything else that afternoon was a blur. He got into in his car, drove back north across the line with the mariachi horns ringing in his head, and set back to work on the song. He knew that what he heard in Tijuana had changed him. What the son of the Russian tailor didn’t know was that he was about to change the history of American popular music.

In 1962, Herb Alpert tried to capture the sound of those mariachis by recording two separate trumpet parts with the same trumpet, two sides collapsed into one, then layering them on top of each other and wrapping them around a slowed-down version of “Twinkle Star.” Another friend, Ted Keeps, an engineer over at Liberty Records, let him borrow some field recordings of bullfights, and Alpert spliced in the roar of a crowd chanting “Ole!” He called the track that resulted, “The Lonely Bull,” and called the musicians who dropped by the studio to play on it (which included Sun Records guitarist Bill Riley and Ventures drummer Mel

Taylor) The Tijuana Brass, even though none of them were from Tijuana, or for that matter, anywhere else in Mexico. (see figure 12.2) To release the song that cost them five-hundred dollars to record, Alpert and his business partner Jerry Moss formed their own record label, A&M Records.



Figure 12.2 Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, *The Lonely Bull*.

The song born from the Tijuana bullring reached number 6 in two months, and then quickly went to sell over a million copies. The group born from the Tijuana bullring would become one of the top-four biggest album-selling acts of the 1960s, alongside Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and The Beatles. The label born from the Tijuana bullring went on to become one of the greatest recording empires in American music. Without Tijuana, American audiences wouldn't have met Sergio Mendes and Brasil 66, the Carpenters, Cat Stevens, Joe Cocker, Hugh Masekela, or Antonio Carlos Jobim.

Fueled by the success of the single, Alpert and his crew of session freelancers went back into the studio to fill out an entire album of Mexican-tinged pop instrumentals. "The Lonely Bull" and its 45 B-side, "Acapulco 1922" were there, as were "El lobo," "Mexico," "Struttin' with Maria," and "Tijuana Sauerkraut." Where there weren't Mexican references in all of the song titles, Alpert left it up to the arrangements—with their lulling marimbas and evocative Latin American guitar strums—to do the Mexicanizing for him on covers of "Let It Be Me," "Limbo Rock," and even the recent bossa favorite "Desafinado."

There was, of course, nothing that was very Mexican about any of this. The brass elements that Alpert used were only vaguely reminiscent of a mariachi horn section (the one he heard was led by Miguel Bravo, a seasoned bandleader who had cut his teeth leading the house jazz orchestra at the Agua Caliente casino), and the sound of the Tijuana Brass had nothing to do with any of the music actually going on in Mexico in the 1960s: the early rock 'n' roll of Chula Vista-Tijuana band Los Rockin' Devils, the swinging Mexico City orchestrations of Juan García Esquivel, the sophisticated *ranchera* ballads of Javier Solís, the weepy boleros of Los Tres Ases, the ballroom shuffles of Cuban-born band leader Mariano Mercerón.

Alpert has since admitted that he never listened much to Mexican music, that as few had suspected at the time, his relationship to Tijuana mariachis started and stopped with that one afternoon in the bullring. But back in 1962, he was pushing his sound as a distinctly Tijuana sound and nobody north of the border cared much about how authentic it was. "This is Tijuana music," the album's liner notes announced on the back jacket, "a chance to hear Tijuana in all its aspects."¹⁴ The notes were credited to "Hernando Cortes," Alpert's Tijuana Sound given the stamp of the Spanish authentic by the comic reincarnation of a long-lost Spanish conquistador. Just below Cortes's testimony was a black-and-white photo of Alpert, dressed in casual pants and a blazer, clutching his trumpet, posing with a Mexican mariachi sextet in matching outfits. There was no caption, no reason to suspect that the six Mexican musicians weren't the infamous Tijuana Brass themselves. They weren't of course. The real Tijuana Brass were as Alpert once described them, "Four salamis, two bagels, and an American cheese." The Mexican musicians in the photo were the house mariachis of Caesar's Hotel and Restaurant, a legendary Tijuana tourist haunt on Revolución Avenue, best known for being the birthplace of the Caesar Salad. Throughout 1962, Alpert continued to pose in press pictures with the actual Mexican mariachis. In one shoot, he stood with the Caesar's house band just down the street from where the original tourist hotspot The Foreign Club once stood, posing beneath a sign that connected his new school Tijuana tourism to the old school Tijuana tourism his music's popularity relied on: *Open New Foreign Club Bar Entrance*.

The Lonely Bull album, like "The Lonely Bull" song, knew exactly what it was—the perfect distillation of U.S.-Mexico tourist fantasy into perky pop instrumentalism. "Tijuana is a spectacle, a garish border town," the liner notes announced. The sunny music inside was its fantasy soundtrack, an imaginary, postcard Mexico converted into pop songs handmade for U.S. ears out of a century's residue of border romance. *Time* magazine began to call the sound "Ameriachi" and "Mexiland," noting it was "born not in Old Mexico but in the recording studios of Hollywood."¹⁵

When the Brass first performed live at The Crescendo in Los Angeles in 1963, they added an extra layer of impersonation. Their opening act was José Jimenez, a make-believe Mexican played by the Jewish-American comic Bill Dana. "Myyy name," he'd say in a thick mispronouncing Mexican cartoon accent while the audience waited for the punch line. "José Jiménez." Dana debuted José on a November 1959 episode of *The Steve Allen Show*, when he appeared as a department store

instructor (“I teach to Esanta Claus how to espeak,” he tells Don Hinckley during the Nutley-Hinkley-Butley-Winkly Report), and José mania was quickly born. On TV and on nearly a dozen LPs, José became Speedy Gonzalez converted into the immigrant everyman—a hotel elevator operator, a sailor, a submariner, an astronaut. In the early days, Dana insisted that José was not an insult, but a cross-border olive branch. “Among his greatest fans are friends from Latin America,” the liner notes to the second José Jiménez album protested too much. “Who admire not only his linguistic talents but also the fact he has created a humorous character with warmth and kindness; one will offend nobody.”¹⁶ Once the Tijuana Brass comes along, José is a natural ally and fellow traveler, and he quickly becomes a regular Brass opening act. José even occasionally wore the Brass’s bullfighter outfits, as if he were a satellite member of the group—their secret guest vocalist, the Brass’ fifth Beatle. When the two played The Hollywood Bowl on September 16, 1965—Mexican Independence Day—they were not booed or harassed but honored by the American Mexican Institute of Cultural Exchange. Dana stood with Alpert as the Brass were presented with a “Good Neighbor Award” by “Citizens of Mexico” for “fostering better understanding and friendship between the peoples of Mexico and the U.S. through music.”¹⁷ In the picture Dana looks proud of his fellow Mexican simulacra, his younger Mexican clone, sincerely believing in what the plaque said. Only five years later, with the Chicano movement in full swing, Dana would announce José’s retirement in the name of good taste, a decision that in 1997 got him an award of his own, an image award from the National Hispanic Media Coalition.

For all of the raging popularity of the Tijuana Brass in the 1960s, nobody has done much to account for it. Entire bookshelves have been devoted to the Brass’ Top 10 comrades—The Beatles, Elvis, Sinatra—but Alpert and company have mostly been written off as 1960s Mexi-kitsch, a trend that out stayed its welcome. But they were far more than that. They were a social antidote delivered by a handsome toreador with a trumpet. In the early sixties, with the country in the midst of what President Kennedy would call “a moral crisis” just months before his assassination, American listeners of all ages embraced Alpert and the Tijuana Brass like an intergenerational balm. The light, simple, and memorable melodies that Alpert was drawn to, and the music’s playful evocation of cultural and international difference (a closer-to-home version of the exotica boom’s tiki fantasies in the 1950s; Mexico not Polynesia, Ole! Not Taboo!) offered an escape from picket lines, police violence, and protests against racial segregation. It is a striking contrast, indeed: as Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the masses who gathered to march on Washington in 1963, speaking of “the chains of discrimination,” millions of Americans were whistling along to pop dreams of a Mexico frozen in the past. Alpert had clearly given America a vision of itself that it could handle: friendly, joyful, and free of discord. The liner notes to *The Lonely Bull* may have claimed “This is Tijuana music,” but they should have said “This is America music,” music that said far more about the realities of American life than the worlds it imagined south of the border. The music of the Brass was an escape from politics, a make-believe Tijuana that enabled a make-believe America. The harsh civil rights realities

of the 1960s were erased by a cross-border fantasy: a happy, lazy, sleepy, sunny Mexico to the south, and a happy, dancing, sunny, melodic America to the north; no revolutions or riots or sit-ins or LSD or mass murder or free love, just music that was, album after album for eight years straight, light and fun, pretty and harmless. Put on a Brass LP and, like a political narcotic main-lined through a living room hi-fi, all was calm on the fantasy border of the western front.

To celebrate the first official touring lineup of The Tijuana Brass, A&M released a colorful promotional booklet that featured the band in matador outfits in Tijuana bullring posing for pictures beneath banners for Alka-Seltzer, Carta Blanca, Castillo rum, and local restaurants like Bocaccio's and the legendary Rat Pack retreat Victor's. It called them "matadors of the four-beat measure, picadors of the polka" and announced what was quickly becoming true: the group's mix of north of the border and south of the border had taken them far beyond the bleachers and "estupenda!" signs of the Plaza de Toros, and issued them "a passport to all the world." When they played Basin Street East in Manhattan in 1965, *Time* magazine described it this way: "It was ole all the way. Grinning and joking like a bunch of frat brothers at a stag party, trumpeter Herb Alpert and his side-burned sidemen served up a dozen tamale-flavored numbers that had the audience rocking in their seats."¹⁸ By 1966 they had become among top-grossing musical acts in the world, and the Brass was everywhere, on the radio, on television ads for bubble gum, on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and soon enough, on supermarket and elevator loudspeakers. They played the White House and got spoofed on *Get Smart* (Agent 86 infiltrates the KAOS-controlled band, The Tijuana Tin). In July 1966, an Ohio businessman even proposed a chain of Herb Alpert Tijuana Drive Ins "featuring tortillas nationwide with a franchise structure similar to McDonald's." By 1968, they were being played on both the naval intelligence ship USS Pueblo as it headed for North Korea, and on the Apollo 8 space craft to keep the astronauts company as they traveled beyond the earth's orbit for the first time in world history.

As much of a musical simulacrum as the Tijuana Brass sound was, it became the best known "Mexican" music in the United States. When leading Mexican classical composer Blas Galindo came to play Carnegie Hall in 1966, the *New York Times* couldn't even preview his performance without alluding to the influence of the Tijuana Brass on U.S. perceptions of Mexican music. "What most North Americans know about Mexican music can be summed up in the time it takes to say Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass," critic Dan Sullivan wrote. "Even the serious concertgoers among us might stumble a bit if asked to name three Mexican composers. Revueltas, of course. Carlos Chavez. And...uh..."¹⁹ Alpert hadn't just created a musical simulacrum of the Mexican border, he had created his own Mexican hyper-reality: for so many Americans, his Mexico became the only Mexico they knew.

"The Lonely Bull" was the first piece of U.S. pop culture to turn imaginary Tijuana into a commercial global export: Tijuana without Tijuana. In some of the group's early concerts, they would play, always in their bullfighter get-ups, in front of a massive illustrated backdrop littered with Old Mexico silhouettes—adobe houses, sombreros, the word "Amor." This was Carey McWilliams' "fantasy heri-

tage” revived for the 1960s, a massive Mexicanization of American pop culture that, once again, left Mexicans as mere silhouettes, shadowy profiles on an ancient horizon who were there only to give color, but never allowed to come to life.

1965’s *Going Places* added more momentum to the Brass’ run of chart-topping Tijuana forgeries—odes to Tijuana taxis and Spanish fleas that were doused in jerking horns and warbling marimbas. Penned for Alpert by his favorite pusher of instrumental Mexi-pop Sol Lake—the one who originally gave him “Twinkle Star”—“Spanish Flea” became an unavoidable buzz in America’s ear as the theme to *The Dating Game* (it came complete with clock-ticking and think-about-your-answer interludes), where it joined another Alpert tune, “Whipped Cream,” already in place as bachelorette music. “Spanish Flea” and “Tijuana Taxi” were the Tijuana Sound templates: a bright upbeat melody honked by swaying horns, a rhythm line that tended toward thumping and knocking, and a dash of symbolic Mexicanness courtesy of marimbas or strums on a Spanish guitar.

After 1965, the image of the lonely bull in the bullring was replaced by the out of control “Tijuana Taxi,”—the taxi cab ride that took him there. The song became an instant top-40 hit and an instant Tijuana Brass anthem, helped along by the popularity of Tom Daniel’s Tijuana Taxi model cars that were now a staple of mid-60s pop culture. Essentially an old stagecoach cab mounted atop a hot-rod dune buggy chassis, the miniature taxis, what Daniel called “south of the border traps,” came stock with chrome trim, custom mag wheels, upholstered seats, and a Pontiac engine. And because this was a Tijuana taxi, the trunk shared space with a chicken coop. Daniel advertised his taxis with a portrait of a howling Mexican in a sombrero and the slogan, “Tijuana Taxi. It’s more fun wherever you are!”²⁰ Alpert started using his own fantasy of the Tijuana Taxi in his live shows (even throwing a “Tijuana Taxi” sign on the side of a convertible when the Brass went back to the Tijuana bullring for a concert). When the Brass were invited to play the half-time show of the 1966 USC-Notre Dame game, promoter Sherwin Bass made it clear to Alpert that he didn’t just want the music, he wanted the taxis: “at some point during the presentation, the TJB and yourself would come driving on to the field in one or two old automobiles, decorated to look like Tijuana Taxis.”²¹

Alpert has said that he wrote “Tijuana Taxi” as an homage to a dangerous taxi ride he had in Tijuana, proof that “driving” in the United States certainly wasn’t what was meant by “driving” in Mexico. The Tijuana Taxi, then, became pop shorthand for the barbarism of emergent Mexican urbanity, a myth that would soon come to dominate the American imagination for the rest of the twentieth century. Before narco-bosses and random kidnappings, there were Tijuana Taxis, emblems of just how dangerous it can be “down there,” emblems of just how different “they” still were from “us” even if they had some paved roads—the Mexican greaser on the untamed frontier of yore recast as the mercenary *taxista* let loose on the city streets. The cartoonish nature of the Tijuana Taxi craze—the goofy Wild West signs, the model cars, the muffler-coughing of old jalopies—was a mechanism of fear management, a way of containing and processing an exotic world that was too close, just across the line, for comfort. So most Tijuana Taxi riffs were playful, not tinged with the danger that Alpert felt in the backseat. When

the Jonah Jones Quartet did their *Tijuana Taxi* album for Decca, Jones “comes out of the shade, dons his big sombrero, sounds his horn loud and clear, and whisks you away in the Tijuana Taxi.”²²

For all of the Tijuana Brass’ popularity, the critics weren’t kind to them. The *New York Times* didn’t like the music’s thump and twang. The *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote them off as a south of the border minstrel show. *Time* called it a “middle-aged man’s answer to rock and roll” even when teenagers were pushing the albums up the charts, even when Alpert was only twenty-nine.²³ It didn’t much matter. Suddenly everybody wanted a piece of “the Tijuana sound.” The first to chime in was Alpert-devised spin-off by Tijuana Brass marimba player Julius Wechter, the Baja Marimba Band. They donned wide-brimmed Zapata sombreros and stuck on big *bandido* mustaches. While at first Alpert tried to mask his Mexican masquerade, the Baja Marimba were openly, comically, impostors, surrounding themselves with props and set pieces that looked like leftovers from Hollywood westerns about the Mexican Revolution. On their third LP, *For Animals Only*, the group dispensed with reality all together and appeared on the cover as actual cartoons: mariachis, cavalry men, sheriffs, signs for tacos, hot tamales, and enchiladas, all part of a Wild West meets south of the border gallery of types and clichés. In his notes for the LP, Gary Owens describes Wechter as “Baja Marimba Sr.” who sits down “at his desk filled with frijoles and inexpensive num-nums.”²⁴ It was the Tijuana Ridiculous without the Tijuana Sublime, and it was just the beginning.

“The happiest sound in musical years came across the border—and it’s here to stay.”²⁵ That’s how Trumpets Unlimited billed their album, *Sounds Tijuana!* which was full of new versions of Alpert hits, plus faux-Brass versions of other pop hits of the day—an endless string of imitations of imitations, replicas of replicas, masks over masks. The Tequila Brass, billing themselves as “one of the leading groups playing Tijuana music,” even attempted a brief history of “The Tijuana Sound” on their *A Taste of Tijuana* album that neatly sums up the way Alpert’s land of musical make-believe began to be accepted as real:

Tijuana is often described as “Mexican,” but it is in fact on the border of Lower California and Mexico, on the West Coast, south of San Diego. It is a medium-sized town that has achieved international fame through the most extraordinary medium—the mariachi trumpet. Ever since Herb Alpert produced his first Mexican sound nearly three years ago, the foot-tapping music of the Mexican fiesta has grown in popularity, until it is now the most exciting dancing sound in the world... The sound produced is as exciting and colorful as a day in Tijuana itself.²⁶

Los Norte Americanos recorded the *The Band I Heard in Tijuana*, an album that included covers of Alpert tunes done in Dixieland and light-jazz styles, songs they insisted were “born in the garish and colorful border town of Tijuana, Mex where anything can happen and usually does.”²⁷ There was the Border Brass and their *Tijuana Christmas* album. There was Trumpets Unlimited and their *Sounds Tijuana* album. There were The Tijuana Beatles and more than enough *Lennon*

and McCartney Play Tijuana attempts. There was *Tijuana Bach* and *Tijuana Handel* and *Tijuana Mozart*. Then there were all the cash-ins by artists who scanned Mexican and U.S. maps for band names. Guadalajara Brass, Mexicali Brass, Monterey Brass, Acapulco Brass, Nashville Brass, Waikiki Brass. While most brass clones featured un-billed musicians, the Mariachi Brass were led by jazz trumpet giant Chet Baker on an album produced by legendary pop producer Jack Nitzsche. Not even their talents can save “Tiawannabe” takes on “Speedy Gonzales,” “Tequila,” and the Marty Robbins Texas border staple “El Paso.”



Figure 12.3 The Border Brass' *Tijuana Christmas*.

The impact of Alpert's musicalization of Tijuana also seeped into the advertising world thanks to Anaheim-based producer George Garabedian. The Armenian immigrant's Mark 56 label cut sponsorship deals with any company that thought newly recorded versions of Alpert's familiar "Tijuana Taxi" or "Spanish Flea" could help sell gasoline or groceries: Pet Ice Cream, Phillips 66, AlphaBeta, Der Wienerschnitzel, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. On KFC's *Tijuana Picnic* album, Colonel Sanders has a summer picnic with a nice white family on the front while the back cover's notes sing the praises of the Colonel's bean salad and use the hearty reputation of Tijuana to affirm his own vitality: "Although 76 years old, the Colonel is still alive, perky, full of life and fun. Just as the Tijuana sounds are."²⁸ (Figure 12.4) Even the Squirt soft drink company thought Tijuana could help so they released *Squirt Does Its Thing: Soft Music in Tijuana Style*. It was a viral outbreak of Tijuana audio clones and in the 1960s; there was nowhere to

hide. Years later, Tijuana scholar Jorge Bustamante would come up with a name for all this Alpert-inspired simulacra and its birth of Tijuana as a globally recognized musical meaningful brand. He called it “the Tijuana syndrome,” the long history of Tijuana misrepresentation.²⁹

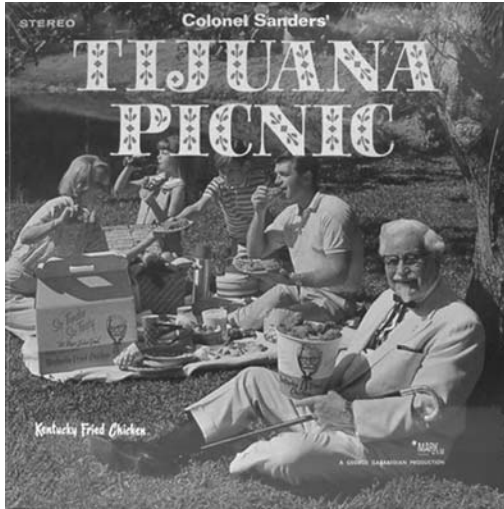


Figure 12.4 KFC's *Tijuana Picnic*.

THE SOUNDS OF TWO TIJUANAS

The LPs of the Tijuana syndrome were right about one thing. In the 1960s, Tijuana was a *mañana* town, but not the *mañana* of sleepy Mexicans and napping *burros*, but the *mañana* of the urban, industrial future. Tijuana in the 1960s could not have been farther from the Tijuana conjured up by the Tijuana Sound. When the U.S. photographer Harry Crosby visited Tijuana on assignment for San Diego's *California Review* magazine in 1964, he was confronted by the cross-border misrepresentation, and called it “the duality of Tijuana.”³⁰ There was the mythography of tourist Tijuana and then there was a Tijuana nobody in the United States ever saw, a Tijuana, he wrote, “that looks inward and is preoccupied with the daily concerns of domestic and national Mexican life.”³¹ Yet as a city that for all of its renown as a must-see outpost of “Old Mexico,” it was really not so traditionally or typically Mexican at all: there was English everywhere, you could watch TV channels from San Diego, the city grid was modeled more after Indianapolis than Mexico City, and there was a population used to crossing the border every week for work and shopping in U.S. supermarkets and shopping centers. By 1962, Tijuana already had Centro Maya, a U.S.-style shopping mall with a bowling alley, bar, restaurant, and beauty salon and by 1964, Tijuana's Carnitas Uruapan was already a Southern California style drive-through.

It was also a city in the prime of industrialization. The very years that shaped the success of the Tijuana Brass and the rise of the Tijuana Sound were the very years that saw Tijuana being opened to new campaigns for social and economic development, transnational manufacturing and global investment. Mexican president López Mateos launched PRONAF, the National Border Program, in 1961, to encourage Mexican businesses and investors to see the border region as site of national economic possibility. It was followed in 1965—the same year Alpert and the Tijuana Brass' album *South of the Border* hit the top ten of the U.S. charts—by the Border Industrialization Program, a desperate economic rescue effort designed to meet the rising demand for jobs created by the end of the U.S. Bracero Program a year earlier and converting the border into “a dynamic growth pole for the whole northern region, if not the whole country” by opening it up to foreign maquiladora factories.³² Mexican workers previously recruited as legal labor by the U.S. government suddenly found themselves illegal once more, deported by the dozens from where they were only recently invited. Tijuana suddenly found itself on the receiving end of a whole new population of migrants—those who came to cross and never did, those who crossed and were kicked back south—all needing work. All the new migration eventually led to new roads and new infrastructure as well as the neighborhoods those new roads would never reach: the sardine-packed *colonias* that sprung up like muddy flowers all over Tijuana's hillsides and riverbeds, withering on arrival without fresh water, electricity, or drainage. The Border Industrialization Program's green light for factories and tariff-free manufacturing was a federal response to this local emergency and it would forever change the character, infrastructure, and future of Tijuana's newly industrialized urban profile.

The program set the stage for the opening of thousands of foreign-owned manufacturing and assembly plants that would become the impetus for Tijuana's plummeting unemployment rate, a rising middle class equipped with their own cars, and an unprecedented city growth spurt. In 1960, there were 165,000 people in Tijuana; in 1964, there were 235,000. The onslaught of new migrants (Tijuana had the highest percentage of migrants in all of Mexico) were arriving in a city where state-owned petroleum and gas companies were opening for the first time, and the city's controversial urbanization was also in full swing, with the government bringing in a U.S. planning team to turn the Tijuana river into what is now Zona Rio, a commercial center designed specifically for high automobile traffic and centralized office complexes.

The real population numbers, of course, were estimated to be far higher. The official counts were only of the Tijuana residents that the government recognized; the poorest of Tijuana's poor and the most temporary of its temporary were then, and remain so now, its shadow population, the one that defines the city's character and urban profile but nobody admits is there. Governor Eligio Esquivel made this divide between the recognized city and the unrecognized city official in 1961 when he drew a boundary line beneath the boundary line. The new line, *el límite del distrito urbano*, the limit of the urban district, cut Tijuana virtually in half, divided into three new zones of civic regulation that, clumped together, formed a

Texas-like geometry. Everything inside the boundary got pipes full of water. Everything outside the boundary—all the neighborhoods on the mesas, all the shantytowns on the city's southern hillsides—were left to deal with their own thirst and waste. In the sixties, nearly half of Tijuana's residents were migrants who had either come north to look for work in the United States or to look for work in Tijuana itself. The city was on its way to being a central part of what Berumen has described as the border as a “cultural laboratory,” under economic globalization, a site that “allows the production of new texts and generates different cultural expressions.” In the face of drastic economic transformation.³³ No longer simply a line or a limit, the border had become “a protagonist of sociocultural change.”

I emphasize this counter-context precisely to signal the fact that Alpert's Tijuana Sound heard Tijuana as a nationally sealed city instead of a border city caught between industrial flows of labor and capital. That is, Alpert's own transnationalized sound—a Tijuana Brass forged in a Los Angeles garage—was built on the idea of the border as a temporal security fence, a Janus-faced divide between the Mexican past and the American future with Tijuana as the symbol of everything temporally and culturally static, a city of the romantic Mexican past. Yet it was precisely in the 1960s that Tijuana was being transformed by both the transnationalization of industry and communication technologies, especially radio and television that brought U.S. media into Tijuana homes alongside domestic Mexican broadcasts. The result was the creation of a new countercultural movement of young people attuned to what José Agustín dubbed “the new classical music” of rock and its “sentiments of progress, love, and happiness.”³⁴

When the Tijuana poet Roberto Castillo—Mexico's first translator of Charles Bukowski and leading literary voice of Baja counterculture—looked back on his teenage years in the 1960s in his 2006 collection of musical memories *Banquete de pordioseros*, it was not the Tijuana Sound of Herb Alpert he heard, but the Tijuana sound of blues and rock crossing urban borders. He remembers Wolfman Jack “chatting with Blacks and Latinos,” playing Percy Sledge and James Brown, his raspy voice cutting through the air above Baja California seducing young *tijuanenses* and *cachanillas*: “Are your peaches sweet, baby? auuuuuuuuuu...do you remember?”³⁵ Castillo's Tijuana sounds are rock bands, from the Doors and the Rolling Stones to Donovan and Janis Joplin. Instead of the silent *señoritas* waiting for tourists beneath Spanish arches who were the poster girls of the Tijuana Sound, Castillo remembers Ginny Silva, Tijuana's afro-wearing soul queen who channeled Martha Reeves, Diana Ross, and Aretha Franklin so perfectly that, as local legend likes to tell it, Jim Morrison would come down from Los Angeles just to listen to her at Mike's Bar.

It was a cultural world given a boost by Tijuana's burgeoning industrialism, one that quickly earned Tijuana rock the reputation as the most modern in Mexico. “Tijuana was the place all of us wanted to be because it was considered the center of modern music in Mexico,” remembers Rudy Cabanillas, a member of the 1960s band from Sonora, The Walkers. “The golden dream of every young musician in Mexico was to make it in Tijuana.” The rise of this modern music in this modern-

izing border city forged a new community of cultural consumers who used popular music to negotiate new relationships to Mexican cultural citizenship. Tijuana's rock counterculture—its fans, its practitioners, its promoters, its nightclubs—created what Néstor García Canclini has called an “interpretive community of consumers,” which he defines as an “ensemble of people who share tastes and interpretive pacts in relation to certain commodities that provide the basis for shared identities.”³⁶

One origin point for the birth of this community can be traced to the rise of so-called “border blaster” radio stations over the Baja California airwaves. In an effort to skirt broadcast restrictions and regulations, outlaw U.S. radio broadcasters moved their stations south of the Mexican border in order to broadcast over frequencies that ended up north of the border and in Baja that included XEC, XEAZ, and XERB among others. The lower California stations may have aimed their towers at upper California markets, but the music was in the air above Tijuana, ready for the taking, drifting back and forth across the borderline just waiting to fall on open Tijuana ears. Michelle Hilmes has persuasively argued that as a communications technology based on the bridging of distance through the transmission of waves over frequencies, radio was particularly apt to be seized as a nationalizing force of American culture—a wireless imagined community, a republic of the air—but with border blaster stations this formulation goes slightly awry. For when radio broadcasters headed to Mexico in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, they opened up the possibility for this American voice to, accidentally, fall upon non-American ears.³⁷ So that no matter who Fats Domino and Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and T-Bone Walker were intended for, in the 1950s, they rang through the Tijuana skies on XEAZ and XEC, dropping stories about Lucille and Blueberry Hill on eager Tijuana ears. The presence of black music on border blaster radios stations led to the creation of a border community who imagined themselves out of a bi-national audio thicket, balancing African-American voices with Mexican voices, and to grow up in this was to learn some of the most basic lessons of border life: how to speak in forked tongues, how to import and appropriate and combine and reinvent, how to be who you are using somebody else's stuff, how to sing the blues when José Alfredo Jiménez has said all that can he say. For Alpert, Tijuana was a city of mariachis; for Tijuana's youth culture, it was a city of aspiring blues and rock musicians.

The blues and rock bombs dropped by U.S. radio transmitters put Tijuana ahead of the Latin American curve. They heard the newest songs and the newest artists at the same time L.A. or New York did. They didn't have to suffer the continental delay that kept the rest of Mexico trailing by three to six months. When The Beatles hit America, they hit Tijuana at the same time. When “Satisfaction” blared from U.S. jukeboxes, Tijuana cover bands were already doing their best Jagger imitations. When it came to music, the boundary line was as invisible as it was before 1848, and that freedom of sound quickly made Tijuana into the capital of Mexican rock and roll. When U.S. rock trickled down to Mexico City and Guadalajara, it was the rock of six months ago, and usually just the rock that RCA and Columbia had decided to ship south. Mexico City bands copied Bill

Haley and Pat Boone. Tijuana bands copied Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup, Elmore James, and Sonny Boy Williamson. When Elvis hit Tijuana, they knew "the king of rock and roll" crown was ironic. They recognized the black shadow in his sound, knew it intimately from all those late nights with their ears pressed against the transistor speaker.

As a result, Tijuana was where Mexican rock was truly born, stripped of the neat blazers and group dance moves of Los Hooligans, rid of its associations with the middle-class civility of the Mexican national family that Eric Zolov has chronicled, and let out of its cage of politeness into the beer-stink wilds of open-all-night dive bars and street corner hustling. By the time the 1960s were in full swing and Tijuana was as full of as many hippies as San Francisco, the center of national Mexican rock was no longer down south in the center, but at the country's northernmost edge. Thanks to American blues played on Mexican radio, the center was now at the border, now Tijuana was the city that the national scale was measured against, the home base of all things rock and roll authentic. The most important and innovative of Mexican rock bands in the 1960s all had some connection to Tijuana—Los TJs, Los Tijuana Five, Los Rockin' Devils, Los Nite Owls, The Fairline's, Los Duendes, Memo y sus Latinos, Los Dug Dug's, Los Moonlights, Los Hotcakes, Love Army, El Ritual, Five Fingers, Tequila, Los Stukas, Freeway—and Tijuana's proliferation of rock clubs crowded Revolución Avenue: Tiyéis, El Tequila, El Blue Note, El Mike's, San Souci, El Bambi Club, El Unicornio, El Aloha, El Circo, Salon Smirna, and more. The tributes abounded: the ultimate 1960s Mexican hippie flick, *Bikinis y Rock*, featured Tijuana's own Peace and Love; the 1978 rock odyssey film *Los triunfadores* focused on a Tijuana rock band trying to make it in the United States; and in *Las jiras*, the 1973 novel by rocker-turned-writer Federico Arana (he used to play with Los Sinners), the band Los Hijos del Ácido aims for the United States but ends up staying south of the border, hanging out with fictional bands like "Los TJ's 7" and playing gigs at the Pink Fox club on Revolución.

The influence of U.S. rock and blues on Tijuana musicians was plainly audible in virtually every band born from the border city's club culture. One of Tijuana's earliest garage bands turned recording stars, Los Rockin' Devils, were champions of the "re-frito," or musical re-fry, famous for turning "Hang on Sloopy" into "Hang on Lupe," "Satisfaction" into "Satisfecho," "Lollipop" into "Mi amor Lollipop." But often they managed to not just re-fry but Tijuana-fry rock hits. Their cover of Them's 1965 hit "Gloria" left the spelling-bee chorus in its original English but switched the verses to Spanish so that they changed the girl-watching coordinates; Gloria is specifically American, her admirer specifically Mexican: *Yo conocí una gringa, muy linda de verdad*. Moves like this got the Rockin' Devils pegged as "un auténtico grupo a-go-go," hailed in the teeny-bopper rock press as northern ambassadors of "modern music" and self-hyped as "the representatives of Mexican youth" (they even hosted a Tijuana rock radio show they named "La Hora de la Juventud," the Youth Hour). So much so that Los Rockin' Devils went on to do a psychedelic cover of Miriam Makeba's South African hit "Pata Pata" and put a Tijuana spin on Francois Hardy with their "La Chica Ye Ye."

Not far behind were Javier Bátiz and the Famous Finks—a name taken in direct and open homage to James Brown and the Famous Flames—who kept all of The Rivas’ “California Sun” in English but did a location hijack. Not that California, this California: “Going way back out on the coast, where the Tijuana girls are really the most... They’re out here having fun in the warm Tijuana sun... The girls are pretty in a old TJ, and the good sunshine gives them more that way.” All of the song’s original walking, talking, twisting, and shimmying, it’s just that now it’s happening in Tijuana.

Bátiz’s role in forming Tijuana’s own “Tijuana Sound” in the sixties cannot be overstated. Bátiz grew up listening to American blues—Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson, John Lee Hooker—on border station XEC like it was a transmission from another galaxy. “Since I was a kid, I was bombarded by black music because we lived so close to the borderline,” he said.³⁸ He had been training to become a mariachi guitarist, but his radio days turned his mariachi acoustic into a six-string electric that cried through fried-out amps. As a teenager he hung out at Tijuana’s legendary Convoy Club, a strip club on Revolución Avenue where bands played for locals and San Diego sailors between pole-shimmying girls who couldn’t wait to get off shift, and blue comics who walked the wire without a rim shot.

In 1957, the bar’s owner Lauro Saavedra hired New Orleans blues piano player and guitarist Gene Ross to come south and set up shop. Bátiz received hands-on blues training from Ross and in 1958 when he was just fourteen, he formed Tijuana’s first rock band Los TJs, who became the house act at the Convoy. They were born of the line and born of the blues, a Mexican band playing for strippers and Marines on the busiest tourist drag in North America. They recorded their first song that same year, “Noches tristes,” a low-and-slow blues weeper, then in 1959 a 45rpm record that paid tribute to Bátiz’s R&B heroes: a take on James Brown’s “(Do The) Mashed Potatoes” on the A-side and a version of Hank Ballard’s “The Twist” done as “El twist despacio,” where Bátiz assured listeners that they were already dancing The Twist in Tijuana. In 1960, the band cut their first album for RCA Victor, in a studio that used to be The Foreign Club, one of prohibition Tijuana’s most worshipped temples, where as a kid Bátiz studied the timing and crowd skills of Jerry Lewis and Sammy Davis Jr.

Bátiz soon took on an eleven-year-old bass player who nobody thought much of at the time—Carlos Santana. Santana was born south in Autlán, Jalisco, but his family had moved up to Tijuana, like so many in those days, to reap some of the benefits of wartime industry that had been trickling south across the border. “In Tijuana, I spent a lot of time on Revolution Ave saying *Song mister, 50 cents a song*,” Santana remembers, “I played Mexican songs like “Allá en el rancho grande,” but I already had a little taste of American music because of growing up in Tijuana and because in San Diego all that music was there and we heard it all the time. Mexican music was the past for me, the modern music was the newest stuff.”³⁹ When Santana heard Bátiz play the blues on his electric guitar, the rest of his life was handed to him. He played with Los Tjs until 1963—learning from Bátiz what Bátiz learned from Gene Ross and the radio—and then played with another local Tijuana rock outfit, El Tribu, over at club Sans Souci, all before leaving one former

Spanish mission city for another and starting his own band north of the line at the top of Alta California in San Francisco where he would change the sound of American rock and put Tijuana blues into the heart of Woodstock.

TIJUANA DREAM

Less than a decade after Alpert sat in the stands at El Toreo de Tijuana, owners of another of the city's bullrings, the bullring by the sea, decided to host their own version of Woodstock and Monterey Pop—the Tijuana Pop Festival in October of 1972. Iron Butterfly, Chicago, and Eric Burdon all played, as did one Tijuana band, Peace and Love. They were a psychedelic funk-rock outfit and bragged about being the first Mexican rock band with a horn section and the highest-paid band on the border (thirty bucks a gig). They were pure flower power and lived collectively as devout vegetarians, yoga-philes, and LSD freaks. RCA Victor and Capitol both offered them deals but the band refused to do covers; their first full-length, released in 1971 on the Mexican label Cisne-Raff, was Mexican rock's first major statement of self-composed material. They wrote songs like "Marihuana," "Tenemos el poder," and "Latin Feeling." They sang in English and Spanish. For their second LP, Peace and Love crucified themselves on the top of a Tijuana hillside. It was also a funeral of sorts for The Tijuana Sound—a funeral with roots in The Famous Finks turning the California Sun into the Tijuana Sun and Los Tijuana Five making the California dream a Tijuana dream—the death of the Tijuana syndrome's most musical decade. Or to borrow a framework from the Mexican art critic Víctor Zamudio-Taylor, this was Tijuana going "from parasite" to an "actual site," a hub of increasingly autonomous cultural production born of the cultural networks and ecologies of border life.⁴⁰

From the seaside bullring stage of the Tijuana Pop Festival, Peace and Love gave voice to their city in song, as if they were about to leave it forever, as if it were driving them out, off the urban grid into underground invisibility. "Tijuana, I will return to Tijuana," they sang over hiccupping saxophone solos, blistering conga runs, and neck stroked guitars that blew technicolor bubbles of high-watt electricity. "I want to come back to Tijuaaaaaanaaa." They stretched the city's name out like it was the last time they'd say it, savoring the geography of its pronunciation—its flat plains, its sudden sunken valleys, and its hillsides that rise like rocky citadels out of kingdoms of dirt.

Notes

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2. See Kathryn Kopinak, ed., *The Social Costs of Industrial Growth in Northern Mexico* (La Jolla: UCSD Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2006).
3. Virginia Kerns, *Scenes from the High Desert: Julian Steward's Life and Theory* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.
4. Kazys Varnelis *The Infrastructural City: Networked Ecologies in Los Angeles* (New York: Actar, 2008), 4–18.

5. Humberto Félix Berumen, *La frontera en el centro* (Mexicali: UABC, 2004), 30.
6. Norma Klahn, "Writing the Border: The Languages and Limits of Representation," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, Nos. 1, 2 (1999), 31.
7. José Agustín, *La nueva música clásica* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de la Juventud, 1968), 7.
8. José Manuel Valenzuela and Gloria González, eds., *Oye como va: recuento del rock tijuanaense* (Tijuana: Centro Cultural Tijuana, 1999), 98.
9. *Ibid.*, 70.
10. William Anthony Nericcio, *Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 15.
11. See Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Subculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9; and Federico Arana, *Huaraches de ante azul: Historia del rock en México* (Mexico City: Posada, 1985).
12. Omar Foglio, "Formación de Agentes y Prácticas de Cultura en la Vida Cotidiana: Rock en Tijuana," *Razón y Palabra*, <http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/mcluhan/rock.htm> (accessed August 29, 2010).
13. Jesús López Gastelúm, "Estado 29," in *La Bajacaliforniada: antología de textos literarios publicados por la UABC*, ed. by Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz and Angel Norzagaray (Mexicali: UABC, 2006), 47.
14. Herb Alpert and The Tijuana Brass, *The Lonely Bull*, A&M records, 1962.
15. "The Newest Sound," *Time*, February 12, 1965, at <http://bit.ly/6o8aZg> (accessed August 29, 2010).
16. Bill Dana, *Jose Jimenez in Orbit*, Kapp, 1961.
17. A&M Records Archives. UCLA. Collection 269, Series 7. Folders 4 and 6.
18. "The Newest Sound."
19. Dan Sullivan, "From Corridos to Concertos," *New York Times*, April 17, 1966, 131.
20. Tijuana Taxi advertisement. Collection of the author.
21. A&M Records Archives. UCLA. Collection 269, Series 7. Folders 4 and 6.
22. Jonah Jones, Tijuana Taxi (Decca, 1966).
23. "The Newest Sound."
24. Baja Marimba Band, *For Animals Only*, A&M Records, 1965.
25. Trumpets Unlimited, *Sounds Tijuana!* Pickwick International, 1960s.
26. The Tequila Brass, *A Taste of Tijuana*, Saga, 1967.
27. Los Norte Americanos, *The Band I Heard in Tijuana*, Somerset, 1960s.
28. Colonel Sanders, *Tijuana Picnic*, Mark 56, 1960s.
29. See Jorge A. Bustamante, "Etnicidad en la frontera México-Estados Unidos: Una línea hecha de paradojas," in *Reflexiones sobre la identidad de los pueblos*, eds., Ramón Eduardo Ruiz and Olivia Ruiz (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1996).
30. Paul Ganster, ed., *Tijuana 1964: A Photographic and Historic View* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 2000), 3.
31. *Ibid.*, 3.
32. Leslie Sklair, *Assembling for Development: The Maquila Industry in Mexico and the United States* (Boston and London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 27.
33. Berumen, *La frontera en el centro*, 19–20.

34. Agustín, *La nueva música clásica*, 6.
35. Valenzuela and González, *Oye como va*, 102.
36. Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflict* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 43.
37. See Michele Himes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (University of Minnesota, 1997); and Gene Fowler, *Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Pitchmen, Psychics, and Other Amazing Broadcasters of the American Airwaves* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).
38. Valenzuela and González, *Oye como va*, 102.
39. Valenzuela and González, *Oye como va*, 76.
40. Victor Zamudio-Taylor, “Whipped Cream & Other Delights, or If You are Mean Enough to Steal from the Blind, Help Yourself,” *Art Lies*, No. 48 (2005) at <http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1272&issue=48&s=1> (accessed August 29, 2010).

La avanzada regia

Monterrey's Alternative Music Scene and the Aesthetics of Transnationalism

IGNACIO CORONA ■

At the turn of the century, a new musical movement took shape in Monterrey, a sprawling city about two hours south from the U.S.-Mexico border and Mexico's industrial capital.¹ Known as *La avanzada regia*,² such a movement could not have provided a starker ideological contrast to *rock en español's* cultural discourse. The latter had succeeded in becoming the first pan-Hispanic musical movement based on a rock idiom and on enabling unprecedented musical dialogues with the popular and the folkloric throughout Spanish America. Consequently *la avanzada regia's* musical output could be regarded as representing dissimilar aesthetic and ideological premises, and as responding to quite different political and socioeconomic dynamics. Nevertheless, while useful for historiographic purposes, on closer examination the contrast between these movements appears much more blurred within a matrix of musical cross-fertilization, ultimately framed by similar production values. And yet, as an analytical possibility, it allows the exploration of a host of cultural issues linked to the cultural-political dimension of transnationalism. Inherent to the logic of globalization, this phenomenon is commonly understood as the establishment of multiple social, economic, political, and cultural links between two or more countries, including but not limited to actual physical movement.³ It manifests itself at different levels, from the cross-border operation of multinational corporations to the transit of goods, information, capital, and people through national territories. What an examination of Monterrey's alternative music scene reveals, then, against the backdrop of *rock en español*, is the workings of a transnational mode of production (i.e., producing, recording, mixing,

masterizing, promoting, and distributing music across geopolitical borders) and its symbolic manifestation through an aesthetic of transnationalism. Such an aesthetic poses a problem for traditional representations of place and national identity as well as for those scholarly views of transnationalism that assume the actual displacement of the subjects of study—i.e., migrants, refugees, displaced and stateless persons who, in their condition, challenge ordinary notions of political and cultural citizenship. This is not the case of the participants of *la avanzada regia*, who remain “territorialized,” in spite of the fact that their work responds to cultural unboundedness and nonunitary identities, which are characteristic of transnationalism. If their legal status is not transnational per se, like that of migrants or dual citizens, or like those Mexican pop artists who have relocated to Miami or Southern California, they operate in a transnational space. As migrant workers sell their physical labor across borders, they sell the product of their intellectual or artistic labor in the same way. To that extent, they perform transnationalism. And yet, their cultural practice, which disregards political borders and conveys no particular desire for the nation-state, acquires prominence in the international market of cultural goods as enunciated from a site-specific position. For the *avanzada regia* movement, then, a territorially grounded definition of identity appears as relevant. While some of the factors that may help to explain the aforementioned contrast originate in the social and economic dynamics that have placed Monterrey in even closer contact with U.S. culture and society, the alternative music scene constitutes a cultural response to the broader impact of globalization on the local society. In that sense, such a musical scenario conveys more complex and flexible identitary positions than their musical predecessors, which calls for a combined sociocultural and ethnomusicological analysis.

In identifying the most salient characteristics of an aesthetic of transnationalism, the first element that stands out is that aesthetic practices symbolically reproduce the actual movements of displaced peoples and, in particular, the rhizomatic and deterritorialized connections that they establish through diverse social, cultural, and geopolitical spaces. A second element is a strategic use of ethnic insignnia, symbols of regional popular culture, and class markers, which are significantly resignified as exchange value, in a strategy of engagement and participation in the global market of cultural goods.⁴ A third element is constituted by linguistic crossings, in particular between English and Spanish, which become a prevalent post-rock *en tu idioma* cultural practice to highlight their transnational sense. The groups examined in this chapter implicitly assume the English language as the world's *lingua franca* and henceforth as an icon of globalization. They recognize its symbolic capital in identitarian discourses, given the social or cultural status assigned to it as a sort of transnational master “code,” or “imperial” language (in terms of Hardt and Negri). The use of bilingual lyrics acknowledges the mere sociological fact that as English is ubiquitous in contemporary Hispanic culture, Spanish is also present in the United States, whose Hispanic population now exceeds 40 million people and whose economic importance is considerable. Bilingualism—or token multilingualism, as that of *Plastilina Mosh*—symbolizes an undeniable cultural facet of transnationalism.⁵ Finally, cultural production, music in particular, is deliberately

conceived to become a “cultural commodity in national and international markets and intended for consumption transnationally.”⁶ In effect, albums are carefully designed for more than one music market at once.

These elements, discernible in an aesthetic of transnationalism—and which I enunciate in a provisional manner—are present in an important sector of contemporary popular music in Mexico as elsewhere in Latin America. This is a topic that I will explore through an interpretation of the music of Plastilina Mosh, Control Machete, and Kinky, all three bands from Monterrey. My goal is to focus on the ways transnationalism is articulated and negotiated through cultural production and, at the same time, how cultural production articulates and negotiates a politics of transnationalism. In an aesthetic sense, the transnational is, in the first place, a choice. Local musicians aspire to position their music in a transnational system of production and distribution. In this regard, such transnationalism conveys artistic agency. Second, such an aesthetic is a medium that interrelates local cultural sign markers and nonlocal musical formats and technologies. Nevertheless, there are other economic and cultural factors that intervene in achieving commercial success through this strategy. As the reception of the so called “regional Mexican music” in the United States might evidence, one thing is to be effectively and structurally transnational and participate in *transnational* flows, for example representing a musical trend, such as “pasito duranguense,” which originated in the Mexican communities in the United States and quite another is to be deemed “transnational” as a result of achieving a crossover success that traverses linguistic, cultural, and even ethnic borders. Most groups of the *avanzada regia* movement are then fully aware that an aesthetic of transnationalism also means cultural negotiation and not simply effacing of all forms of national, regional, or local identification.

PERFORMING REGIONALISM IN “PITTSBURGH, MEXICO”

As historian Lester D. Langley reminds us about the Mexican city he compared with Pittsburgh: “even before . . . the thirty-five year rule of the authoritarian don Porfirio Díaz, who is largely credited with initiating the modern Mexican industrial state, Monterrey had emerged as a vigorous commercial center.”⁷ That move toward an industrial economy, backed by capital originally generated by commerce, signaled a direction of development that most other regions in the country only dreamt about. And yet, in a rabidly centralist nation, regional successes have often been suspected and even discouraged. During the past century, the federal government was not always willing or interested in following Monterrey’s industrial *familias* (families) in their plans to chart Mexico’s economic future—a fact that became acutely evident in the public confrontation between President Luis Echeverría and the city’s most powerful economic group in the early 1970s.

Monterrey’s contemporary music scene has to be understood in relation to its economic importance prior to and after NAFTA. In effect, it is necessary to establish a structural relationship between an increased economic development (a seemingly necessary requirement for the emergence of a fully developed

regionalist cultural discourse), technological innovation, and an expanded market for cultural goods.⁸ These structural elements unavoidably shape the links between the economy of globalization and contemporary music production and distribution as a symbolic expression of the circulation of capital. Monterrey's undisputed title as Mexico's prime industrial center came up in the process of meeting several of the country's industrial needs starting in the early twentieth century. In recent decades, the city has complemented that economic role with a turn toward the world's largest economy, that of the United States. In that regard, its geographic position has been crucial, as the south end of important industrial corridors linking Monterrey with the largest Texan urban centers, such as San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth. Its commercial links across the border only add to the city's reputation of being the country's most transnational and outward-oriented city after Tijuana.⁹ The fact is that its economy has withstood the recurrent crises that have marked the country's end of the modernizing period better than most other municipal and regional economies. Given its prominent position, the city has dominated the northern region's cultural scene. It is currently home to some of the country's most important companies, industrial consortiums, and educational institutions, all of which have underpinned the city's political clout in national affairs since postrevolutionary times. More recently, municipal administrations and business leaders have tried to craft the city's image as the country's most developed and cosmopolitan city, with its 40-hectare Macropiazza as its emblem. It has hosted the World Forum of Cultures, taking the baton from Barcelona, its sister city, as the world's center of cultural expressions. Such a grandiose event may exemplify the local bourgeoisie's aspirations of universality, long embedded in its model of industrial development. These aspirations are hardly new. In fact, they could be best represented by the city's most celebrated literary figure, Alfonso Reyes, whose erudite and cosmopolitan work was praised by the founding figures of Latin American modernism. Monterrey has positioned itself as an alternative cultural scene to Mexico City's centuries-old dominance of national culture and to Guadalajara, the country's second largest city.¹⁰ In a Debordian fashion, aspirations to cosmopolitanism and universality may also be pursued by "spectacularity," by staging huge media events where world records are broken; that may give the city banal titles, but they invariably attract world attention to the place.¹¹ Amid globalization, such self-representation of Monterrey as a new site of simulacra and eventfulness—a Las Vegas of world records where the natural limits of daily-life objects and common social experiences are surpassed and/or enlarged hyperbolically—may well represent the desire for an increased participation in the global circuits of economy, culture, information and, of course, spectacle.

These diverse aspirations of modernity and cosmopolitanism are complemented by a renewed sense of regionalism, which has transcended its traditional class-based support. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, the city has amalgamated a folkloric diversity prominently placed on the topography of Mexican nationalism. It is at the center of one of the cultural landscapes that characterize the country's diverse cultural panorama: *norteña* culture. This is the

culture that has historically represented the values of individualism, resourcefulness, and entrepreneurship. But it has also represented the experience of the cowboy and rural working-class culture. As such, it is connected to a distinctive *norteña* music soundscape that traverses the region. As an expression of a working-class culture, it has been an alien cultural space for the elites on both sides of the border.¹² For this spatial conceptualization of music, I turn to the work of critics such as Lawrence Grossberg, Deleuze and Guattari, George Lipsitz, Josh Kun, and Jody Berland to refer to music production and consumption as involving spatial and social class demarcations.¹³ In seeking a nonlocal musical experience in recent decades, the elites and upper middle classes have been charting other soundscapes, from classical to pop—either Anglo-American pop or pop in Spanish, promoted by Televisa’s giant media consortium—and everything in between, to distance themselves from the soundings—in the form of *norteña* and *cumbia*—of the rural and urban working-class communities. Clearly, music supports intra- and inter-class differentiation, as it organizes cultural and social meaning as much as it defines lifestyles. Across the border, such class-demarcations in musical terms have been equally evident. Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa referred to the strong links between musical experience, class prejudice, and cultural identity in her seminal *Borderlands/La frontera*. She explored the social perceptions that this music generates in a cultural context of racial differentiation. Her sense of personal appreciation and enjoyment was conflicted by her awareness of the perceived working-class and racialized status of this music north of the U.S.-Mexico border:

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn’t stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.¹⁴

However, in spite of its “class image” and supposed lack of sophistication, *norteña* music is perhaps the most transnational of all regional musics in Mexico, given that German and Czech polka is the least Hispanic or indigenous music in origin. Even most of the African-influenced music that arrived in the country since colonial times had already been filtered and mixed via the Caribbean. So then the evolution of this music was truly a blend of a Hispanic with a non-Hispanic music well before rock music came into being several decades later. As Anzaldúa reminds us, *norteño* conjuntos adapted instruments and blended polka music with different regional traditions, most noticeably with *corridos*—old vocal expressions of rural traditions—to create a sense of regional identity. At the heart of a cultural area that encompasses the Lower Rio Grande Valley region and the Mexican states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León and Chihuahua, Monterrey became the most important hub of cultural flows between Texas and northern Mexico. From there, further bidirectional flows would connect that border cultural universe with Mexico

City.¹⁵ As a magnet for migration, Monterrey became a cradle of musical adaptation as a melting pot mixing central Europe and northern Mexico. But if *norteña* music is originally linked to European migration, its rapid diffusion and popularity along the vast expansion of lands stretching in the arid north and as south as San Luis Potosí, Durango and Zacatecas, is also connected to internal migration.¹⁶

Throughout the twentieth century, the city's low unemployment rate continued drawing immigrants from elsewhere in Mexico and abroad. These new arrivals have added diverse musical elements to the existing core of *norteña*—additions which also imply collision and, most certainly, coexistence of musical cultures. In effect, *norteña* has also coexisted for decades with tropical rhythms, in particular, regional adaptations of Colombian cumbia, somehow connected to the continuous arrival of immigrants from the country's central and eastern coastal regions as well as from other Latin American countries. So the city has become a site where inland and coastal cultures have come in contact with the local urban culture as well as with the more cosmopolitan upper-class patterns of cultural production and consumption. Different musical cultures have then cross-pollinated in the city's well-equipped recording studios. This circumstance may help to explain how, without an immediate geographic connection to the south Caribbean basin, the city has provided the platform for the introduction, adoption, and transformation of cumbia, from Tamaulipas' Rigo Tovar back in the 1970s, to a more traditionalist approach by Celso Piña—not to mention nearby Corpus Christi's Selena y Los Dinos and their brand of techno-cumbia in the early 1990s. All of these workings with the Colombian genre have greatly influenced contemporary bands such as El Gran Silencio or Vatos Regios.¹⁷

Between these two traditions of popular music—*norteña* and cumbia—which have also represented resistance to the hegemonic spread of U.S. pop among the popular classes, the *avanzada regia* movement emerged to accompany Monterrey's entry into the new century. The resultant alternative music scene opened up the traditional conservatism of the city's cultural climate. Since this diversification of the cultural offer occurred after NAFTA came into effect, a link between such a cultural production and diversification of the economy could be suggested as a topic of further research. The turn toward rock and electronic music was actually preceded by new expressions in pop music, somehow influenced by the ascent of rock en español since the late 1980s. For Monterrey's musicians, it was preceded by a pop starlet with a post-punk rocker attitude, Gloria Trevi, who drew attention to rebellious female youth and their new social and cultural demands. Singing in Spanish songs of sexual and moral liberation, Trevi became a popular figure and was soon catapulted to international exposure by Televisa. As many artists before her, she had to pursue her musical career in Mexico City and record in Los Angeles; and yet Trevi was the first sign of an emergent alternative scene in Monterrey. Years later, Ely Guerra offered a more musically accomplished version of female singer-songwriter, minus the rebellion and the scandalous life that sent Trevi to prison on charges of corruption of minors. Although Guerra made her career in Guadalajara and Mexico City, she has maintained close relationships with her native city's musical movement to the point that many consider her its main female figure.¹⁸

However, it was not until the first recordings by Control Machete and Plastilina Mosh achieved commercial success that the expression “la avanzada regia” acquired its proper scope and meaning, placing Monterrey as an innovative pole in the country’s rock and hip hop map. In addition to those two groups, others that are or have been part of the movement are Genitallica, El Gran Silencio, La Verbena Popular, Plomo, Vaquero, Sofa, Cabrito Vudú, Jumbo, Panda, Resorte, Zurdok, La Flor del Lingo, Volován, Pulsión, Cartel de Santa, Inspector, Kinky, and Abeja. While there is a diversity of styles and even ideological positions, what they have in common is a commitment to transnationalism as a creative strategy and cultural discourse. Such a discourse undermines the authority of the center by disregarding its approval and seeking approval from abroad first.¹⁹ Another element in common is the cohesiveness of the movement. Observers are surprised by the abundance of mutual support and solidarity among the city’s musicians, which turns the acknowledgment section of album covers into a long list of names of local artists and collaborators. Beyond its musical contribution, la avanzada regia has been responsible for placing Monterrey among the main centers of contemporary popular music in Mexico (Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Tijuana). In fact no current discussion of rock or alternative music in the country is possible nowadays without taking into account what these musicians have achieved in terms of cultural regionalism in just a decade. I will briefly refer to the work of three of the local bands that have garnered critical acclaim in the international press and which clearly represent the aesthetics of transnationalism.

BLAXICAN HIP HOP AND THE IDEOLOGICAL MOSAIC OF CONTROL MACHETE

In the Mexican rock en español scene, monopolized by groups from Mexico City and Guadalajara, the turn toward hip hop represented a break with the recent past. The emergence of rap and hip hop in Spanish and/or in bilingual form would soon acquire prominence in the alternative sector of popular music in the country and among the Mexican communities in the United States. Taking their cues from U.S. Latino artists like Cypress Hill and Kid Frost, but also from Rage Against the Machine and The Beastie Boys, Control Machete (Fermín Caballero Elizondo, Patricio “Pato” Chapa Elizalde, and Antonio “Toy” Hernández) would lead the alternative Mexican rap/hip hop movement beginning in 1996. They invited California producer Jason Roberts to produce their first album, and thus became pioneers of a new trend, that of the transnational mode of production. By doing that instead of going to Mexico City and trying to be signed by local representatives of a major label, they were charting new territory. The move was simple but turned out to be crucial as it gave unusual agency to a yet unknown group. They eventually signed a contract with Universal and are still considered the most commercially successful hip hop band from Monterrey and possibly the country.

The switch from traditional rock to a rap-hip hop musical mix began with their first album, *Mucho barato* (1997). In addition to this musical base, Control Machete

has also resorted to other genres well represented in *la avanzada regia*, such as rock, ska, cumbia, techno, and even electro-lounge. While most of Control Machete's lyrics are in Spanish, their use of Spanglish and/or English seems to criticize the manipulative use of linguistic purity by the country's elites and is akin to a postcolonial critique.²⁰ As represented by the title of their first album (with a Spanish lexicon and English syntax), they address the border experience by switching linguistic codes and bending their rules. For the social experience they refer to, that of the migrant communities in the north and the sending communities in the south, linguistic conflict, overlapping, and interference are a fact of life. Their own language politics defies the prison house of narrow-minded nationalism. In this way, they may personify those populations excluded from the traditional mechanisms of social mobility such as institutions of higher education, acting as *bricoleurs* of cultural discourses and practices across the U.S.-Mexico border. Control Machete's lyrics allude to the difficult social and economic conditions in the Mexican barrios across the United States, not much different to those in the disenfranchised neighborhoods of Mexican cities and so, the group implicitly establishes a process of cultural recognition and connections of solidarity with *la raza* on both sides of the border.

In a post-NAFTA context of increasing economic polarization, the political reading expressed in some of the tracks of the group's first two albums, depicting the urban youth's struggles, their way of life, and their frustrations, are similar to other characterizations of an unadorned, changing, and predominantly urban Mexico in current films (for example, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* or Alfonso Cuarón's *Sólo con tu pareja*) and literature (e.g., Guillermo Fadanelli's novels). By doing that, Mexican rap and hip hop led by Control Machete placed itself on the underside of globalization to capture the mood, taste, travails and disenchantment toward politics of large sectors of Mexican and Mexican-American youth. Their music came to complement the ascent of *banda*, *pasito duranguense*, and other *norteña* music genres that represented the rural exodus and the provincial colonization of the migrants' transnational circuits. However, in their turn to rap and hip hop, Control Machete reminds us that everyday contact between Mexicans and Latinos in general and U.S. culture in the transnational space of migration occurs less in predominantly white suburbs than in the inner city and in those working-class areas in which Latinos and blacks coexist and face some of the same economic challenges and social problems. Chicano essayist Richard Rodriguez has even coined a term for this cultural or ethnic mix of U.S. black and Mexican culture: "Blaxican."²¹ Indeed, the social interaction of the Mexican population in the United States is a lot more plural than usually assumed, as it is mostly characterized by the interaction and conflicts with the dominant Anglo-American group.

Just like *rock en español*, amid a new wave of modernization projects that marked the turn toward neoliberalism throughout Spanish America, contested notions of assimilation as well as outdated notions of cultural imperialism or mimicry in neocolonial contexts, hip hop represents another case of both contestation and transculturation. This time, it comes from the other side of the racial

divide of popular music in the contemporary United States proposed by Andrew Ross, who suggests that rock and heavy metal are associated with white and mostly male culture, and rap and hip hop are dominant expressions of black culture.²² The link between Mexican and Afro-American culture is the result of a different case of transnationalism, one that surpasses one-way and top-down notions of cultural imposition from the dominant culture. The use of hip hop by similarly disenfranchised youth groups in contiguous barrios and ghettos in the United States becomes a cultural response to analogous collective and individual pressures and, therefore, a more horizontal cultural interaction. In this context, the Mexicanization of hip hop by Control Machete and Mexico City's Molotov can be interpreted as a continuation of political and social concerns that address the mostly hollow sociopolitical core of Mexican pop. Their position is one of defiance of the monolith of national culture and denunciation of the international forces that inside and outside Mexico are eroding community life and the lives of millions of individuals. Their outspoken lyrics in playful Spanglish then provide continuity to protest music, but they are not monovalent either, as they speak to the diversity of experiences, including those negative attitudes, beliefs, and practices that reproduce violence, sexism, and other discriminatory practices within the Mexican community.

The narrative form of some rap songs in Control Machete is analogous to the typical narrative structure of *corridos norteños*. The alternating voices introduce a first person point of view, symbolically intervening in the public sphere by referring to issues whose true significance lie beyond the individual level. The rappers are aware of history in the making, to which they give a voice and a (unified) point of view. The narration of the events alternates with repetitive choruses that summarize, reaffirm, or qualify the main claims or statements. Such a narration, however, develops without a necessary logical ending. Unlike corridos, they tend toward an indefinite present with no foreseeable conclusion on the horizon. In *Mucho barato*, the deep, scratchy, and forceful way of singing by both Pato and Fermín, often delivered with a tinge of mordacity, irony, or sarcasm to amplify their emotional impact, attempts to capture the almost ominous tone of someone who is witness to the rough urban experience of the place s/he is (they are) coming from. As modern day griots, the vocalists seem to play an almost testimonial role by referring to "epic" turf wars in neighborhoods deprived of public safety or adequate public services, in areas plagued with drugs, gang violence, and poverty, where the main evidence of the existence of the government in neoliberal times is through the images of smiling political candidates on public walls and the occasional circulation of police cars.

From the very first moment, the musicians were aware of the cultural break they represented with rock en español. This switch from rock to hip hop demanded assurances to the Mexican audience to establish links of solidarity. That is why the album's first song, "Control Machete," literally introduces the group and their ideological position vis à vis the discourse of Mexican nationalism and centralism. The album positions itself on the side of tradition by using sounds of mariachi and films from the golden era to resort to tropes of "Mexican popular culture," as a

common language with a Mexico City audience. Such a gesture states that their position is on “this side” of cultural identity “*no lo sientas extraño hermano, porque soy mexicano*” (do not consider it foreign [my chant], brother, because I am Mexican). Once they self-declare their identity as *norteños* or Mexicans, the lyrics go across the border back and forth, just like a migrant that always returns to the motherland or the “*patria chica*” *norteña* to refer to issues on both sides. Following a hip hop-corrado form, Fermín and Pato introduce the group and provide information as to their place of origin, their affects, and their intentions. The appeal to Mexican identity includes references to a common cultural archive that contains religion (*guadalupano*), national origin (*paisano*), and the use of popular humor to establish connections with their audience, in order to usher them into a new musical territory in which their cultural identity will not be threatened, but actually reaffirmed. This is the case of the song “Humanos mexicanos,” which criticizes the discriminatory practices and the anti-Mexican stances of current U.S. policies of migration. As in Chicano culture, the term “*raza*” both conveys a sense of solidarity and cultural affirmation as a response to racial prejudice and discrimination. The song adopts a nationalistic posture. It rejects the attitude of the “*pinche güero*” (damn blond [Anglo]), whose idea of erecting a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border implicitly seems retrograde in a context of globalization, and warns him that “the wall will not stop us,” “we know how to drill,” and “we will laugh in your face.” This is a symbolic retaliation mostly aimed at a national audience, given the use of Spanish throughout the lyrics.

“Comprendes Mendes” (Do you understand Stan?) and “Andamos armados” (We go around armed) on the contrary are odes to gang-related violence. They offer the perspective of those involved in turf wars for the control of urban territory, either in California or Mexico. The participants are those excluded from the gains of the restructuring of the economy and the descendants of the historically oppressed in Mexico where, as has always been the case, most of the population lives at the poverty level. Beyond the customary link between rap and gang lifestyle, the listener is reminded that the country is one of the most violent ones on the planet and that the poor young are easy targets for recruitment by organized crime. This social group is personified by the character of the existentialist “*Así son mis días*” (My days are like this). Amid a grim urban reality that denies him of opportunities, the only solidarity he receives comes from his *carnales* (buddies), *la banda* (the larger group of friends).

In “La Lupita,” symbolic gender violence permeates the song. In it patriarchal values are confronted by female subversion. Entirely sung from a male point of view, the character insults his former girlfriend, who abandoned him for a woman. The verbal barrage suggests that her action also represents an escape from national machismo, as the girlfriend crossed the border only to conquer blondes. “La Lupita” articulates the mentality of the macho not as Octavio Paz’s *chingón* (kick ass fucker), but as the hurt male in which the *chingona* was actually her Lupita (little Guadalupe or Lupe). The ironical use of the diminutive destabilizes the usual power asymmetry codified in the double meaning of diminutives as expressing endearment and belittling the (female) Other. The song indirectly reminds the

audience that the word “machete” in the group’s name, “Control Machete,” is charged with meaning. It refers simultaneously to the microphone and to a tool used in agriculture that is also a basic weapon. In addition, in sexual jargon machete refers to the male organ, as it alludes metonymically to the action of breaking open. Therefore the name of the group implies a relationship with agency: to be in control of the mike, of the weapon, but also in a polysemic sense to be in control of aggressive and/or libidinal impulses. The double act of symbolic self-defense coupled with aggression, focuses on the importance of sexual politics as a complement to power discourse. The epithets are a reminder that gender violence is extensively reproduced in popular music circuits, as is the case of numerous norteña bands and other hip hop acts (e.g., Molotov). Since “La Lupita” is seemingly deprived of satire or any ironic twists, it literally reproduces a social tension or male anxiety regarding changes in traditional gender roles.

Musical experimentation using samples of the main sound sources that pervade the music of Control Machete are prominent in other tracks of the album. “¿Te aprovechas del límite?” (Do you take advantage of the limit?) for instance, is an instrumental song in which electronic hip hop (using synthesizers, tapes, loops, and electronic drum machines) interacts with the accordion sounds that are typical of norteña music, but the rhythm and melody are that of a cumbia. The song constitutes a good example of the sonic remixings that are the basis of the band’s style. The song begins with an identification of a tropical radio station, La Caliente (“the hot one”). By juxtaposing ambient sounds and cumbia, it does not erase border divisions by proposing a musical fusion, but links cultures and communities across the border in an act of re-encountering. The music represents coexistence and alternation of sensibilities—not necessarily tending toward hybridity—as possibilities of cultural interaction and as musical dialogues. Musical taste is then shaped by social experience in different settings at different moments. “Cheve,” celebrating both consumerism and the carnivalesque through the ubiquity of beer in norteña culture, is another heavily digitalized song, but with a cumbia element to allude to the typical sounds of cantinas, where beer drinking accompanied by that kind of music is part of a social experience for the working class. The subtle presence of cumbia is then stylized as part of the “internationalization” required by an aesthetic of transnationalism, in which musical taste is also re-classified for an international audience focusing on rap and hip hop.

Control Machete’s second album includes musically unexpected contributions by members of Café Tacuba and the Buena Vista Social Club in “Danzón,” which shows the ways in which hip hop connects with other musical genres in the Latin American cultural horizon, especially those of the African diaspora. Entitled *Artillería pesada*, like the album’s central song, it contains their most commercially successful songs so far. “Amores perros” and “Sí señor” were both used in the soundtrack of González Iñárritu’s film *Amores perros* (2000), another “text” articulated by a sense of the transnational. “Amores perros” is a rap song that has the peculiarity of using acoustic guitars, which creates a certain atmosphere of intimacy needed for the soundtrack, but is at odds with U.S. rap music. “Sí señor” had

a tremendous exposure in a Levi's commercial, "Crazy Legs," broadcast during the TV coverage of the 2002 Super Bowl. The song articulates contrasting views of nightlife in Monterrey, framed by the recording of a local reporter (Joel Sampayo Climaco) talking to his radio-audience. The song's music video shows him in a helicopter reporting on the city's nocturnal goings-on. The reporter, as a new Benjaminian Angel of History, is a suggestive choice, as journalists have played a crucial role in a changing Mexican society, in particular because recent important events have been dominated by crime news. Against an intermittent playful claxon-like sound and a deep drum-n-bass line, Fermín takes the lead vocals to refer to intersecting planes in the lives of those who have chosen the night for some untold activities. Again, the song uses a corrido-like opening to situate the main subjects and their feelings of attachment for their hometown (San Pedro, a well-to-do city that is part of the Monterrey metropolitan area). Pato's repetitive "Sí señor" interacts with Fermín's meditative and almost dark monologue and subjects it to an implicit dialogic perspective, one in which the listener has to fill the gaps in information about the exact topic of the conversation. Again, it is the possibility of underground lives and the changing face of a city growing and becoming, like any other major urban center, a place of opportunities but also of danger.²³

By 2002, the trio became a duo as Fermín left to pursue a solo career and collaborations with U.S. musicians. Rumors of breaking up ended with the release of their third record for Universal Music. *Uno, dos: bandera* (2003) abandons the dominant sociopolitical thematic of their previous albums and turns toward more intimist songs, reminiscent of "Así son mis días." From the cover to the music videos, the duo experiments visually with technology, science fiction, and cartoons.

The accompanying DVD also experiments with the thematic dependency of music videos to the lyrics' content to further certain semi-autonomy, if not a rupture in the order of representation. Control Machete explores a diversity of topics often from a conflictive locus of enunciation (sexual abuse or corruption of minors; "political" protest, gambling, etc.,) and yet details are kept to a minimum. This minimalist narrativity represents a denial of the blatant political meaning of their previous albums. The narrative lines are mere suggestions; references are vague. In "Quemo bandera," for instance, the listener is left with more questions than answers, e.g., has the eagle of the Mexican flag been replaced by the Texas lone star? The video is not less ambivalent regarding a possible allusion by presenting a fictional flag with one star and three vertical color sections. The album presents the group's typical approach to voice in which voice becomes another instrument with repetitive short phrases and few narrative lines. Pato's low register vocals sound acerbic and ironic, continuously imitating the scratches and marking the songs' slow tempo. Those vocal staccatos against fragments of conversations suggest a borderline experience that combines fragmented memories, stream of consciousness, daydreaming, and awareness. Language itself is chosen for its musical qualities, resisting the logic of narrativity.²⁴ In effect, tone, rhythm, and pronunciation, as in avant-garde poetry, end up being more significant than

the meaning of sentences and phrases, which are merely suggestions, allusions, and incomplete thoughts. The rapper is deprived of a story to tell, not even within the “MTV logic” of narrativity. In some of the lyrics verbal connectors are eliminated to the maximum in order to focus on the acoustic qualities of nouns and verbs. There is a considerable degree of condensation and metonymic displacement. The effect is not one of speeding up, but rather slowing the pace of reality, as in “Nociones (En alta).” In “Bien, bien” the repetition of monosyllables acquire a percussive quality, and in “Verbos,” nouns and verbs accumulate in asyndetons in which verbs in their infinitive form are pronounced with an exaggerated lengthening of their final *r* sound, and this is followed by an exhalation that emphasizes the toxic effects of living in the city and the escape toward the sea, where it can be possible “*respirarrrrrr y caminarrrrrr*” (to breathe and to walk). By contrast, those songs with a story or discernible topic like “Nostalgia,” or “El apostador,” with Mexico City’s singer Natalia Lafourcade as a guest in the chorus, are more conventional. The alternation between meaning (story) and sense (musical language) occurs in the rapping of *Uno, dos: bandera*. The last track, “El genio del dub,” with the collaboration of Blanquito Man and the use of tropical sounds and rhythms, does make explicit an opposition to war, repression, and pollution. It is the album’s more “political” song: “listen to what the genie of the dub is about to tell: love and consciousness is not for sale.” Accordingly, the accompanying video ends with the image of sub-comandante Marcos in affinity with Rage Against the Machine and many groups from the rock en español movement. In this limited fashion, Control Machete continues to envision a more just Mexican society. Finally, Control Machete has founded the label Machete Music, as a subsidiary of Universal Music. They have begun to sign U.S. musicians, among them the L.A. Latin rap duo Akwid, in a tacit performance of transnationalism, but from the other end of musical production.

THE HAPPY SIDE OF GLOBALIZATION: PLASTILINA MOSH

Our outlook and lifestyle is more global than just Mexican.

It’s the best of all worlds.

JONAS FROM PLASTILINA MOSH

The spatial or horizontal dimension produced by the arguable “flatness” of the contemporary world,²⁵ manifests itself in cultural production in the coexistence, overlapping, and conflict as much as in the hybridization of a diversity of styles and artistic genres from the world over. In popular music, musicians everywhere pursue new syntheses and fusions, often with the goal of transforming diverse influences into hybrid styles or new genres. Alejandro Rosso and Juan José González (Jonas), aka Plastilina Mosh, have remained uninterested in that pursuit. In a trajectory of over a decade, the duo, who met for the first time playing Nintendo at a Wal-Mart in Monterrey, have even avoided defining a style for their eclectic kind of music, let alone creating a new genre.²⁶ Their music reflects

movement: a constant exploration or rather revisitation of the soundscapes of pop music, without the intention of establishing roots in any particular place or—to continue with the spatial metaphor—building a new one. For this reason, in *Plastilina Mosh* there are no syntheses: there is coexistence and ephemeral encounters of styles and genres. In an acoustic manifestation of postmodernism, the cultural expression or logic of late capitalism, according to the well-known formulation by Fredric Jameson, *Plastilina Mosh's* technologically infused pastiches and mixings explore the latest tendencies in pop music and youth culture.²⁷ Precisely the name of the group, *Plastilina* (Play-Doh) and *Mosh* (to push and slam into each other), suggests something plastic or tending toward plasticity. The acoustic collage is like the collage of pop art, not aspiring to a new hybrid mix, but pursuing horizontal and rhizomatic relations through soundscapes in a supposedly borderless experience.

Since space is also organized by socioeconomic relations, *Plastilina Mosh's* music also connotes a particular class experience through that musical traveling. But no matter how many musical sources they resort to, their music is invariably related to genres popularized, if not fully concocted, in the English-speaking world, from jazz to rap, lounge to funk, rock to hip hop, pop to punk, etc. Musically speaking, the duo has crossed the U.S.-Mexico border many times, but most of their musical baggage—and their symbolic capital—has traveled from north to south, and from the latter it has returned as “local” creative mixings concocted under Monterrey's sun. And yet, a certain bi-national perspective, enhanced by a constant layer of bilingual lyrics, taped conversations, and miscellaneous voice materials, is then apparent in the cultural topoi and musical diversity recognizable to listeners from one or the other country. As a postmodern pastiche, Guillermo Gómez-Peña calls it a “vernacular postmodernism,”²⁸ glimpses of the global are an integral part of the musical experience. But this idea of the global in *Plastilina Mosh* is viewed mostly through a Eurocentric lens. An example could be found in “Celeste” from *Hola chicuelos* (2003), in which a brief female-male verbal exchange in Japanese—possibly occurring at a restaurant—is heard over the sonic background of a chic electro-lounge. This aural context suggests a musical reference to travel, that is, an experience of “exotic” places from the Western point of view. The presence of Otherness is always mediated; the elements of exoticism are kept to the minimum and have no direct bearings on the music. For the cosmopolitan traveler as for the cosmopolitan listener, the world may be broad, but not alien (contradicting in part the title of an indigenista novel by Peruvian writer Ciro Alegría). The “travel experience” occurs through safe and comfortable spaces around the globe. There is no need for a style or a territorialized identity, when individual identity can be multiple and free, and one can experience the whole world. That is to say, to be able to cross borders and enjoy the experience not from the position of a migrant, but from that of an upper or upper-middle class traveler, the same class that typically constitutes the tourist class the world over. In the unique spatial experience that commands globalization, *Plastilina Mosh's* music constitutes the soundtrack of a number of experiences that connect sites and spaces just like musical travel.

In that sense, the transnational in *Plastilina Mosh* follows the trace of capital flows, just as cosmopolitan travel looks for different scenarios in places already incorporated to the “global” and experienced within a dominant cultural framework, which includes levels of comfort similar to those in the metropolises. In most tracks of their *ouvre* so far (*Aquamosh* [1998], *Juan Manuel* [2000], *Hola chicuelos* [2003], *All U Need is Mosh* [2008]), the experience of the “global” and transnational culture is also attained by peppering their musical mixes with phrases, dialogues, and lyrics in French, Italian, and Portuguese, besides the default languages English and Spanish. The resulting cosmopolitanism is also an expression of class consciousness: that of a transnational and multilingual consumer. On the back cover of *Aquamosh*, they include an oblique poetic statement—by recycling phrases from its lyrics—about their seemingly alter ego, Mr. P. Mosh, as the music soul that connects with the cosmopolitan subjectivity of a “polyglot” listener (who is assumed as someone who will not notice nor care for proper syntax or written accents in Spanish; elements that could only convey unnecessary cultural specificity or even a certain foreignness):

<i>Me acostumbre a ti tan</i>	<i>amor es dolor</i> I’ve got that
<i>solo porque el momento</i>	melancholic feeling
<i>de ser feliz es ahora hoy</i>	heey!! It’s made in Japan
<i>es la revolucion desde tu</i>	My little heart <i>timbalero</i>
<i>television recuerda soy el</i>	<i>Pa’bailar suelta suave el</i>
<i>resultado de tu ingenio de</i>	<i>animal viennois mon cheri</i>
<i>autora mosh part in the</i>	<i>viennois avec moi</i> this is
<i>sea of love mi amor es azul</i>	my real life way its my
<i>aunque intenta buscar</i>	reality <i>no estamos solos</i>
<i>amores de 16 bites mi</i>	with love. Mr. P.Mosh

Although these references to transnationalism suggest physical movement through space, it is actually through virtual space that the trip takes place. Generated by globalized media, video and TV, as creators of images, experiences, lifestyles, etc., this “travel” may then explain a certain affinity between video game and travel through cyberspace without actually leaving the lounge.²⁹ *Plastilina Mosh*’s act is greatly influenced by the intensity of video culture, just as the presence of radio is an important sound backing and framing in *Control Machete*’s songs. Flipping through TV inspires the change of scenarios and moods that characterize *Plastilina Mosh*’s music. If TV was once the main radiating nucleus of mass culture across borders, among the younger generations it has encountered stiff competition from newer audiovisual technologies (i.e., the Internet, videos, and video games), for structuring the leisure time of entire sectors of the population.

Across all age-groups, however, the “magical or idiot box”—depending on the critic—is still the unrivaled center of meaning generation of contemporary reality (in terms of politics, economy, and culture), and it continues to be the virtual battleground of ideological and cultural wars between the state and its competitors for the control of the airwaves, be they social institutions, private interests, foreign sources, or unauthorized emitters. Regarding its social impact, critic David Marc’s view on the subject is still relevant: “Television, for bad or worse, is the national culture of twentieth-century America. To deny the fact is poor research. To ignore the fact is suicidal politics.”³⁰ Such a statement is certainly valid if applied to the specific period that goes from the second half of the past century to the present. It is also true for Latin America, as it could be inferred from the influential work of Renato Ortiz, García Canclini, Martín-Barbero, Beatriz Sarlo, Carlos Monsiváis, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, among other critics in the field of Latin American cultural and media studies. In the world of TV culture, music videos are a significant segment of total TV production. In fact, since the 1980s considerable music dissemination and promotion around the globe has been done by and through music videos. They carry out symbolic operations of complementation, extension, conflict, and feedback between music and visual culture.³¹

Plastilina Mosh’s music cannot be understood without the cultural frame provided by such a TV culture, especially one intersected by parameters (and programming) from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Their music often alludes to video games and TV, and it is in turn influenced by them. In their debut album, recorded for the EMI label in several cities in the United States and Mexico with participation of producers from both countries, TV is ubiquitous as a symbol of representation or substitution of reality. According to critic Donna Freydkin, “‘Aquamosh’ is the musical potpourri of two young guys raised on Nintendo and replicating the vivid, psychedelic nature of video games in their music.”³² In that sense, the duo actually performs the ethos of TV and video culture at the heart of contemporary mass culture. As such, it prominently appears on the cover, on the lyrics, and on the music videos created for the promotion of the album. Its presence is that of a mediated culture, in which reality is to be seen as a more or less distant spectacle rather than an authentically experienced one. No wonder many critics of mass culture have traditionally claimed, in an Adornian fashion, that TV generates individual passivity and even social apathy. Just like Kinky does in “Again and So On,” one of Plastilina Mosh’s most popular tracks, “Afroman,” refers to that mediated spectacle:

<i>Entre luces y colores</i>	Among lights and colors
<i>y siluetas de ilusiones</i>	and silhouettes of illusions
<i>de infecciones</i>	of infections
<i>de emociones</i>	of emotions
<i>si es la revolución</i>	if it is the revolution
<i>desde tu televisión</i>	from your television

In the apolitical world of Plastilina Mosh, revolution may not acquire the resonances it has in rock's rhetoric. It may simply refer to the corporeal movements infused with contagious afro-rhythms, like in the respective music video. As this electronic enhanced rock-funk piece makes evident, Plastilina Mosh's music would not exist as such without the computer. The hyper-reality of the mediated spectacle also replaces the dream-work of the imaginary through the commonplaces of pop culture, whose icons codify sensations, emotions, and affects. These reactions are generated automatically, as in operant or Pavlovian conditioning. An obvious reference to this world of fantasy and TV, as a sort of medium between the Lacanian imaginary and the symbolic, is the track co-produced by Cypress Hill's producer, Jason Roberts, "Mr. P Mosh" from their debut album. In one of the most broadcast videos in the history of MTV Latin America, the fetish of "high heels" and "mini-skirt" can generate a world of images of a life of pleasures normally absent from the dull existence of two convenience store clerks, who are personified in the music video by Rosso and Jonas themselves.³³ As elements of a codified syntagm, this combined fetish triggers a hormonal reaction that subjects the duo to the escape of a fantasy—and therefore unreality, similar to that one offered by TV. The physical look of the characters in the video contradicts the content of the lyrics, whose subject self-describes himself as someone much older: "yo era el dueño de estos bailes pero todo terminó." It is not a mere coincidence that the song includes a swing-style section. While time does not pass in the unreality of a fantasy, just like in TV, where icons maintain their youth, the "real" images reveal that time has indeed passed outside the fantasy. It is a self-reflexive parody in which time past is visually represented by an aging vedette from Mexico's golden age of burlesque, in contrast with the duo in their early twenties, about the same age as the six young models with blond wigs who appear in the pool scene. However, Lyn May's presence is also a reminder that TV culture through its reruns, intertextuality, and self-referentiality is also a timeless culture and that iconography and symbols of "good life" reproduce infinitely in pop culture. The video is also a transnational exercise of juxtaposed iconographies. Regardless of her age, Lyn May represents a more voluptuous standard of female beauty for a Latin audience that contrasts with the slim Barbie-like blonde models, in the standard promoted by Hollywood. The two characters—like the majority of young Mexicans who are typically exposed to both standards—mingle them in the fantasy work of their imaginary. The promise of U.S. mass culture—including women; fast food; and a Californian lifestyle with the ubiquitous swimming pool, dancing, parties, complete with Hawaiian motifs and mariachi sounds à la Herb Alpert—is counterposed to their ordinary life. Such a promise entails living a fantasy in which comfort, sex, and a hedonistic lifestyle is similar to the affordable fantasy-escape provided by TV in lieu of the dream-work of the *imaginario*. Recorded audience laughs, as artificial as those used in TV shows, reinforce the ambient of fabrication of a pop culture that follows an established format, a given syntax. This is at once metonymically and symbolically represented by the illustration of the song's words ("1-2-3-4!") in the video by means of cardboard numbers, which like clues for trained reactions introduce the visual representation of the title of the song

("Mr. P Mosh") on diverse surfaces. A *mise en abyme* of the duo watching TV, on which they are themselves projected, may indicate not only self-referentiality, but also the fact that everything that there is, is referred to on TV as a consumable spectacle. This is how TV and U.S. pop culture have contributed to create an *imago mundi* comparable to other not less hegemonic world views throughout history. Like in many other Plastilina Mosh's songs, this video offers a kitsch view of pop as the prime symbol of mass culture and the way it is disseminated through the world. This is a pop culture that is ubiquitous and an integral part of Mexican cultural reality, in which the musicians, as producers and consumers, live. This is also the topic of the catchy "Peligroso pop," which resembles teenage pop.³⁴ Accordingly, the song is upbeat dance music with a female chorus in rock format. While pop is pure play, as a cultural phenomenon it is also sublimation (or domestication) of libidinal impulses (and hormonal changes) in this sector of the population. It creates a socially unconcerned (light) and self-centered subjectivity in the way. Then the song may allude to possible "dangerous" effects: a willing suspension or abortion of reality in the addictive effect of play. That is to say, the endless compulsion generated by reality (or the world) as play, may deceive the satisfaction of true personal needs.

Plastilina Mosh's music, however, is not about cautionary tales. It is rather about changing scenarios and changing mood and emotional states, always within a pop sensibility. In effect, emotion constitutes another entry into the sociological articulation of Plastilina Mosh's music to a world pop scenario. It is the individual's subjective experience that matters.³⁵ It is not a coincidence that one of the most popular Internet sites for popular music allmusic.com, lists "mood" besides the ordinary musicological categories of "genre" and "style." Mood becomes then a tacit musicological category. While Plastilina Mosh belongs in the genre: "pop/rock"; and style: "Latin"; "Rock en español"; "alternative Latin," the moods that their music elicits, stimulates, or enhances are: "carefree," "whimsical," "trippy," "witty," "playful," and "gleeful." Gleeful indeed, as Rosso has explained that: "We had fun creating the songs and basically, we made the music to make ourselves happy. It's just happy music."³⁶ So, Plastilina Mosh is pop music as a whimsical play and endless accommodation of the syntax and iconographies of pop culture for pure emotional and corporeal *jouissance*: the happy side of globalization. "Naranjada" ("*Hola chicuelos!*") is its definitive anthem:

Happy like the children in the sunny playground,
happy like the fish swimming back in the sea,
Happy like an ice cream cone in summer
Happy cuz' we're traveling around together
in a world that is friendly
and good and green and blue
And belongs to me . . . and you

Interspersed among the upbeat compositions are quiet moments of nostalgia and melancholy, in which jazz, lounge, and bossa nova, among other genres, temporarily

provide respite from frenetic dancing rhythms, as in “Ode to Mauricio Garcés,” “That Milton Pacheco Kinda’ Feeling,” or “Bareta 89,” with their sexy down tempos. The range of moods and emotions may fall in lapses of confusion or explode in outbursts of anger and uncontrolled rage, for which the duo turns to punk or grunge, for instance in “Mexican Peso.” In the general context of their music, such performance seems unconvincing, as Gómez-Peña has observed in reference to a certain “commodification of anger” in the Mexican public sphere, and which he finds present in groups like *Plastilina Mosh* and *Molotov*, who “are more about the performance of anger than the content behind the anger.”³⁷ On the contrary, *Plastilina Mosh*’s music is mostly humorous in tone. In their world vision, in which lightness is always preferred to seriousness and heaviness, they rarely refer to pressing social realities. In that sense, their sometimes sarcastic humor is not necessarily acerbic, as it might be the case of rock en español bands famous for their use of parody and social satire, noticeably Mexico City’s *Botellita de Jerez* and Guadalajara’s *El personal*.

Plastilina Mosh’s work reminds the listener that music creation in a globalized scenario has a lot to do with music consumption. In their postmodern euphony, *Plastilina Mosh* showcases technology-enhanced audio assemblages, following a logic of recombination and rearrangement, as a kind of sound collage or pastiche of diverse musical sources. As such, originality is seemingly defined by the degree of surprise contained in their playful mixtures and musical “quotations.”³⁸ “Niño bomba” from their debut album could be one of many examples, given the way the song mixes rap, funk, acid jazz, and dance music, in a sort of juxtaposition of heterogeneous social and cultural spaces that are therefore abruptly put together, in a way not unlike what critic Josh Kun has called “audiotopia.”³⁹ As a connecting device through music genres and cultural territories, their music represents a transnational aesthetic. Inasmuch as *Plastilina Mosh* implies decisions from a multiplicity of (sonic) options, they mimic the role of the well-off consumer who has at his or her disposal an almost endless variety of items for consumption.⁴⁰ The symbolic connection with a discerning (yuppie) upper-middle-class consumer is unavoidable. Consumption as a creative act implies not only being in the condition of selecting and discriminating from a large number of options, but also assuming a multi-positionality, since consumers (as a sort of nomadic subjects) freely traverse real and artificial borders. The economic link between globalization and musical transnationalism is not accidental. Even that well-known biographical anecdote of their first encounter, as mentioned above, is less a chance encounter than an apt metaphor for how their music is part of the experience of a sector of the Mexican population in conditions of enjoying a heightened commercial offer brought about by globalization, from “pornoshops” to “monster trucks,” two of the subjects of their musical compositions.

From a musical standpoint, there is no perceivable evolution in their trajectory as a group, mainly because they have remained faithful to Jonas’s proposal “not to be entrapped by technical issues.”⁴¹ From their first album—co-produced by another successfully eclectic band, *Café Tacuba*—to the last one, they have pursued a similar solid formula, and worked with a steady group of musicians and

back-up singers. Such a formula can remain unaltered indefinitely, as in the transnational reservoir of popular music the availability of mixable options for Plastilina Mosh's sonic collages just keeps growing. And from a reception standpoint, there are no reasons to change it either. Their "trans-style," "trans-genre," or simply "collage music" has been critically acclaimed in both the United States and Mexico. They have been featured in radio programming in the United States and Latin America, obtained an MTV award, and been close to cross-over success. And yet, such success must be placed within a larger context of cultural politics, in spite of the duo's reluctance to politicize their music and upset their shiny vision of globalization, a vision that is fundamentally linked to the dominant and perhaps more optimistic "regio" middle and upper-class discourse in its pervasive embrace of American culture and unconcern for or disregard of the nearby geopolitical border. Nevertheless, the political unconscious of the border, whose shadow might obscure that shiny scenario returns in the broader discourse in which their music is incorporated. In fact, in her CNN review of *Aquamosh*, critic Donna Freydkin followed the common scheme of comparing Latin artists with their Anglo-American counterparts. Alluding to similar reviews in an interview with U.S.-based Mexican performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña, the foremost critic of Latin rock Josh Kun recounted that:

When U.S. publicity for...hip hop/lounge/ electronic duo Plastilina Mosh started rolling out, they were the "Beck of Mexico" or the "Mexican Beastie Boys." That kind of comparison may serve some degree of purpose in terms of cross-cultural translation, but it also works to elide the very real and important fact that in Latin America the kind of pastiche and recycling that both the Beastie Boys and Beck practice have been fundamental aesthetic strategies for centuries, if not from the very moment of colonization itself. So suddenly all that history is erased and Plastilina Mosh is just some Mexican copy of a first world original.⁴²

In placing such comparisons within that broader context of cultural politics, Kun rightly concludes that: "There is never a way to talk about it that upsets the balance of cultural power. It keeps them exotic, foreign, and marginal and always reinstates colonialist hierarchies of representation."⁴³ In the transnational circuits of music dissemination, an aesthetic commitment toward collages, superimpositions, and pastiches that implicitly question the aura of the original, does not necessarily mean that this one will lose its symbolic power. As Kun suggests, it will still be invoked by critics (and consumers) to try to put every cultural producer in its (bordered) place.

HEMISPHERIC BEATS AND THE ELECTRONIC TRANS-AVANT-GARDE OF KINKY

While Monterrey's economy has long depended on industrial development and technological innovation, it was not until the arrival of *la avanzada regia* that

technology—in the form of electronic sounds—began to play a truly significant musical role in a city known mostly for the timbres of norteña instrumentation: *tarola* accordion, and *bajo sexto*. A similar cultural phenomenon was occurring in Tijuana, where the dominant sound of norteña music had long accompanied the tourism industry, historically the city's main source of income. As Tijuana became a global assembly site of micro-chips, TV equipment, and computer monitors, cultural changes and the construction of new identity discourses began to unravel. In the late 1990s, in the face of a global cultural market ever more attentive to the range of “world identities,” local musicians began to mix traditional sounds with the very symbols of industrial capitalism: computers and electronics. The corresponding homologies of accelerated and mechanized processes of production, subordinated to control (and close supervision) characteristic of the *maquiladora* industry, were somehow incorporated into the mix as well. Out of this came a distinctive, instrumental sound mostly expressed as danceable music, given the rhythmic imperative that guides the underlying experimentation. For over a decade, Tijuana's Nortec Collective has remained the best known example of this musical trend on the international scene. They are acutely aware not only of the regional cultural context in which they locate themselves, but also of the particular socioeconomic dynamics that their music responds to.⁴⁴ As Corona and Madrid have argued, their efforts for internationalization have only been possible by targeting the supposed impersonality of electronic music in order to inscribe “cultural markers,” as a way to indicate locality, i.e., sounds from Sinaloan banda or norteña music.⁴⁵ Cultural identity is so exerted as positionality amid transnational fluxes in that global cultural market exemplifying the interrelationship among globalization, economy, and culture. Monterrey's alternative scene draws some parallels with Tijuana's musicians as some electronically inclined groups also inscribe “locality” by incorporating the surrounding sounds of norteña and cumbia music among other elements. Kinky, one of the most critically acclaimed bands of the avanzada regia, with several Grammy nominations, provides a good example of this procedure. Formed in 1998 by Gilberto Cerezo, Ulises Lozano, Carlos Cháirez, Omar Góngora, and César Pliego, it has greater affinity with traditional rock-group formations than either Control Machete or Plastilina Mosh. Their subtle treatment of “ethnic” or “cultural” difference is analogous to Nortec Collective's, as the respective sonic markers are unobtrusive with respect to the musical form of electronic rock/pop, and which as a whole constitute one more musical element to be added to the multilayered final product. To evidence that connection with their *tijuanenses* counterparts, *Rarities* (2007) includes a remix by Bostich, a member of the Nortec Collective, of “Soun tha mi primer amor,” from their first album. Both groups then contribute to articulate a post-NAFTA cultural politics to show what an aesthetic of transnationalism in music sounds like.

“We are the Galaxy,” the soccer anthem commissioned to Kinky by the MLS L.A. Galaxy team, may also exemplify such a musical strategy and how the “ethnic” or “local” sound markers are discretely used by the band. In this piece, the *tarola* sound from the norteña music ensemble plays more than a purely musical role, as it subtly becomes a symbolic link between the Mexican community of L.A. and

the U.S. team. This strategy of seeking crossover appeal is representative of both the transnational framework they operate in and the aesthetic they pursue, in which artistic and commercial interests aim at and respond to more than one music market and national audience. Such a strategy permeates other elements at the content and production levels of their music. In their first album, *Kinky* (2002), the lyrics are in Spanish, but some titles are in English, such as “Great Spot,” “Field-Goal,” “Cornman,” and “Anorexic Freaks.” Beginning with their second album, they go a step further in their goal of internationalization by including not only bilingual titles, but lyrics in both languages, in a fashion similar to that of *Plastilina Mosh*. Their negotiated or split use of Spanish—the most important sign of “cultural difference” in the *rock en español* movement—lies in the obvious expectation of getting simultaneous access to the English- and Spanish-speaking markets, as opposed to the more traditional strategy of producing an album exclusively or mostly for the Anglo market, as pursued by numerous other Hispanic artists, from Julio Iglesias to the ill-fated Selena. The obvious expectation is that songs in Spanish will have a stronger commercial appeal in the Hispanic market and vice versa, which may not always be the case, as evidenced by postings of customers’ reviews on the Amazon.com Web site that criticize the use of English, either for the supposedly awkward syntax of the lyrics or the vocalist’s (Gil Cerezo) accent.⁴⁶ This frequent line of criticism does not take into account the simple fact that within transnational modes of production, markers of “cultural difference,” including language, are available—just like floating signifiers—to any cultural producer without the necessary claims of a given cultural citizenship. This is the case when U.S. non-Hispanic bands sprinkle their songs or raps with Spanish, or when they creatively use “ethnic” sonic markers from across the border (i.e., mariachi sounds) like *Calexico*. Another element that responds to this mode of production is the actual site of manufacturing. *Kinky*’s first albums are also made in the United States, avoiding in this way the label “import”—with its consequent impact on the price tag. And yet, bilingualism and material site of production may not suffice to offset ingrained values and beliefs that perpetuate notions of “exoticism” and “foreignness” and reject any attempt to penetrate the ethnic divide that protects the whiteness of Anglo-American rock especially by a band that may have an accent and/or sound like “another U.S. band.”

Music is certainly a fertile site for “the construction and organization of difference,” just like Argentine historian Ricardo Salvatore has argued with respect to travel narratives.⁴⁷ And yet music—as any other cultural production—serves also the purpose of erasing or obliterating that same construction. This paradox coalesces within an aesthetic of transnationalism that becomes a new site of identification, recognition, and participation in the global market of regional differences. *Norteñidad* in *Kinky* is incorporated musically and nonmusically. The samplers of accordion and tarola, for instance, are enhanced by the participation of actual practitioners of the *norteña* genre, like Intocable’s accordionist Ricardo Muñoz, in *Reina* (2008). In this way, they further emphasize that connection between local *norteña* culture and the new alternative music scene that has emerged

from that cultural caldron. That is the same sense projected by other cultural insignia like specific attire, especially by the bassist, César Pliego, who physically performs that connection to place. With the ever-present norteño hat and cowboy boots, he marks his Northernness, just like Dicky Betts (former lead guitar of Allman Brothers Band, the most representative band of so-called Southern rock) highlights his Southernness wearing exactly the same items. And yet, Kinky, even more than the other two groups discussed in this chapter, crafts for itself an aura of ultramodernity, which culturally fits neatly within the aspirations of modernity and cosmopolitanism by some sectors of Monterrey's society, as mentioned before. Experimenting with diverse digitized sonorities, Kinky blends rock, dance, electronica, techno, funk, Brazilian and Caribbean rhythms. Amid this truly hemispheric "music package," the distinctive sound of norteña instrumentation becomes audible, like brief glimpses of the surrounding cultural landscape. Its incorporation to a technologized space dominated by electronica, and constructed with the Westernized idioms of techno, dance, and rock, produces the symbolical operation of lifting the social prestige of a music traditionally linked to the taste of the working class. Those sounds are then subjected to a new class/ification. They are "re-classified," as anthropologist Michael Kearney would say with respect to similar cultural transformations (e.g., the history of tango) in the context of neocolonialism.⁴⁸ It is then, after the same insignias and class markers are appropriated, "re-classified," and exported, that they are sought after and consumed by the upper social classes.

The remarkable hemispheric beat of the first album has characterized the band's sound since then, with a recurrence to rhythms from dance or disco, samba, funk, techno, and rock. Appearing in a commercial spot on Mexican TV for Indio beer in the summer of 2008, they speak in front of the camera, as if interviewed by the viewer, and briefly refer to their own music by saying that they are not afraid of mixing everything—cumbia, rock—whatever they like. They add that their music is the result of their different personalities.⁴⁹ Such a musical philosophy of creative mixings has a hemispheric imprint: South American and Caribbean rhythms, peppered with norteña sounds or a few cumbia keyboard riffs, and converted into the structural form provided by rock and dance music. Unlike the sporadic nostalgic or lounge moments in *Plastilina Mosh*, or *Control Machete's* latest album, there is hardly a plunge into meditative moments or slow tempos to explore emotional overtones. Kinky's music is driven by a rhythmic imperative, which in a crude homology could be compared to the fast life and industrial processes in cities like Monterrey or L.A. Their typical compositional procedure emphasizes start-stop dynamics and complex rhythmic structures that the group deftly combines, amid the sonic density provided by electronic effects, samplers, synth loops, scratches, and recurrent pop choruses. While roughly a third of their tracks are instrumentals, the constant presence of vocals is part of their rock sound, in spite of the fact that Gilberto Cerezo's warm voice is comparable to Gilberto Gil's and perhaps more apt for bossa nova or lounge than the forceful singing commonly associated to rock. A good example of such interplay between high density sound with conspicuous dance beats and mellow vocal harmonies is "Pos que se vengan" ("Then they rush at us") from their second album *Atlas*.

In general, the group's energetic music seems to be ideal for live venues—in fact, they have played in massive concerts in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Their music has been frequently chosen as well to create vivid and upbeat soundtracks for diverse cultural productions. A long list of U.S. films, ads, and video games in which it has been used appears in the liner notes of *Rarities*. Through the group's infectious groove, they have interpreted some of the accelerated rhythms that govern a parcel of the media, especially entertainment industry productions that demand sensorial stimulation and the symbolization of fast-pace processes, in particular those that link the new technologies with the human. Therefore, they have hit a market niche for sonorous enhancement.

The commercial for Indio beer, mentioned earlier, is symptomatic of how culture becomes part of economic schemes in a neoliberal context in which culture is increasingly promoted by the private sector. Monterrey's most important brewery, Cervecería Cuauhtémoc Moctezuma, an icon of the local economy (though recently acquired by Holland's Heineken), uses the group's popularity to link it to its product in a typical publicity semiotic proposition. At the same time, it is a metaphor of how cultural producers learn to navigate the new economic waters to retain a certain degree of agency. In that sense they are using the commercial to let a national TV audience know about their musical philosophy. Their reference to their own music may represent a self-serving purpose, in a twofold relation between cultural and economic interests, as a sort of sum-sum game. That is why on the already mentioned liner notes, Kinky thank those "musical supervisors out there," who have sourced their music, acknowledging that it has been used in U.S. TV spots by emblematic transnational companies, such as Honda, Motorola, Smirnoff, and Nissan, as well as in films and video games. This connection between transnational economy and popular music is but one more sign of the transformations of the cultural "sphere" throughout Latin America. Cultural producers are working new deals with transnational capital, given the scarcity of governmental patronage and the withdrawal of the public sector from many activities of promotion of culture. The result is, in some cases, a cultural work that implicitly responds to that changing panorama within which the authors are perceived as *rupturistas* (who have broken) with traditional national discourses.

In a similar fashion to Plastilina Mosh's postnational discourse and recurrent bilingualism, Kinky also constructs a (transnational) audiotopia in which new identity markers are enacted and performed. Such a space defies traditional expectations of place, identity, and culture, and this befuddles many listeners. As some postings from customers' reviews at the Amazon.com Web site may make evident, most negative reactions are not based on musical criteria per se, but on how the band had too little of a "south of the border" or "*muy caliente*" flavor and sounded more like a "sophisticate" north of the border group. Others comment that the band has become too Americanized, or that it was in denial of their cultural roots, or totally oriented toward the North American listener, or that the presence of Cake's John McCrea co-writer and guest singer in "The Headphonist" (*Atlas*) sounded like a marketing plot. The common expectations of exoticism underlie the charges of identity denial and reflect a lack of understanding of the complexity of Latin

American culture. Reacting against magical realism and the mostly agrarian views of the region, cultural producers in different fields have deconstructed those stereotypical views and produced a work oriented more toward cosmopolitanism than toward provincialism; more toward urban consumerism than toward rural traditionalism. The turn implicitly recognizes the basic demographic fact that the region is undergoing the world's fastest rate of urbanization. It is the case of many young filmmakers and of the Crack and McOndo literary groups, whose fictions occur in faraway places, a reason for which they have even been accused of anti-Latin Americanism. This group of cultural producers operates in a context in which neoliberal discourses have seriously made a dent in nationalism-based identity discourses throughout the region. Unavoidably, cultural globalism often resembles and feeds back economic globalism.

Kinky's breakthrough occurred with their successful debut album co-produced by Coldplay's producer, Chris Allison, who signed the group for his Sonic 360 label (Netzwerk America) in 2002. Their colorful musical palette, characterized by vibrant and intense rhythms, seamlessly blends samba with rock and elements of salsa and techno music, as in the *batucada* "Sol." This song is a good example of how a certain image of cosmopolitanism captures diverse musical cultures (Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States) somehow connected in a musical trip to sun-drenched places: "I have a raft outside waiting to sail towards the sun / I will navigate the seven skies with my voice." This techno-batucada represents the kind of lively music that fits equally in TV commercials, film soundtracks, and discotheques. "Cornman," "Field Goal," "Great Spot," "Mirando de lado," combining house, club, or disco music with predominant synthesized sounds, all incorporate the norteña tarola or accordion, and as in "Field Goal" samplers of timbales. Vocals are not the main musical focus of the album. In most tracks, they are but one more element added for its harmonic qualities. Short phrases basically mark the beat and accompany the music as a chorus.

The opening track is also the band's most representative song. "Más" has somehow come to symbolize the structural link between the economy, cultural production, libidinal impulses, and aesthetic practices, whether the content itself supports such an interpretation or not. Like most of the album's lyrics, "Más" writing style tends toward a minimalist expression: "*Voz va, viene, voz se va, va por / debajo va, la voz se va*" (The voice goes, comes, the voice goes away / Goes underneath, goes, the voice leaves). Its simple rhyme structure, sung in a higher tone at every repetition, seemingly associates pure desire and realization or consummation without constraints in a possible sexual allusion.⁵⁰ However, after a decade of radical economic liberalization that engendered the largest fortunes the country had ever known, it actually seems logical to interpret the song as a sort of anthem of neoliberalism. The ineffable meaning of "más" is concretized in a realm of material consumption and accumulation ad infinitum through formal and/or informal economic regimes. This is precisely the sense captured by *Kingpin*, a TV mini-series about a Mexican drug trafficker and his family broadcast by NBC in 2003, which used the song for the TV publicity of the series. Such an interpretation of the ideal self of neoliberalism from the "open-meaning" lyrics is musically expressed through a global mix of digitized sounds and musical genres,

which in that regard erases geographical boundaries. The real-life processes that may be suggested know no borders.

Introduced by expressive voices *in vibrato*, the song is led by a crisp and heavy bass line, followed by delirious repetitions of electro-drum machine and cymbal sounds to acoustically convey a certain notion of an endless echo. The percussion's fiery rhythms and the song's dynamics, with its interplay of high density and sudden stops, also create a certain feeling of euphoria that goes *in crescendo* at every new start. The song combines U.S. rock-funk and a jazzy or salsa melodic line by the lead guitar's *wah wah*, with the characteristic rhythm of a Brazilian batucada, a Caribbean-style play of congas and timbales, and German techno sounds. Similar combinations of genres, the use of electric and electronic instrumentation, and minimalist lyrics are present in the rest of the selections of the album. In the wake of their success the group embarked on an international tour of 180 concerts, including appearances on popular TV programs like *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

Atlas (2003) turned out to be more cohesive album and followed a slightly different formula. The band used a predominantly rock format rather than techno, so the previous emphasis on synthesizers and electronic samplers, bass, and inventive percussion gave way to vocals and electric guitars as the leading elements. Bass, electronics, and percussion were then used basically to enrich the sound. What they gained in cohesiveness and better-crafted songs, they lost in terms of the eclectic experimentalism and flashes of brilliance in their first album. References to art, myth, and literary culture are now decidedly recognizable. The whole concept may remind the Italian *transvanguardia* movement of the early 1980s, but in musical terms. In yet another symptom or expression of the crisis of the avant-garde within the postmodern framework, critic Achille Bonito Oliva coined that term to conceptualize the work of painters opposed to *art povera* and conceptual art. Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Mimmo Paladino, and others proposed a return to a subjective eclecticism and classical pictorial art. Their aesthetic proposition defended not only the use of an intense chromatism, but also the revisitation of classical mythology. Most of all, the artists defended the idea of a certain artistic nomadism in which intertextuality, fragmentation, citation of different artistic periods and iconographies were absolutely endorsed. Kinky's playful "Minotauro" invites analogies to that intertextual procedure, reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges' literary vision of the minotaur. The underlying theme of isolation and confinement gives a contemporary twist as personified by the frustration of a middle-class employee, for whom a small cubicle, with a computer and office paraphernalia, amounts to a labyrinth without hopes of professional progress. Just as in Plastilina Mosh, direct or indirect political commentaries, frequent in rock en español groups, are mostly discarded from the range of musical themes. However, "Presidente," a dance-pop rock song with an infectious chorus, has been interpreted by some listeners as a codified political reference. Such a possibility does not go beyond a few phrases: "*¿de qué color es nuestro presidente? / verde, blanco o rojo es el presente*" (what color is our president? / green, white, red is the present). The result is a certain chromatic symbolism, which combined with the upbeat

rhythm actually dissipates any serious consideration of a critical reading. In “The Headphonist,” sounds of norteño accordion sprinkle John McCrea vocals, along with retro organ riffs in combination with percussion and timbales and digitized violin chords. “María José” combines acoustic guitar and riveting electronic effects in a samba song, with rock sections, and “magical realist” lyrics in which the female character drinks a bottle of tequila, with worm and all, and after dreaming for seven days gives birth to a butterfly. A similar sonic combination and imaginative lyrics appears in “Semillas de menta,” the last track of the album, an unusual slow-tempo piece that resembles Café Tacuba’s approach to rock ballads.

In *Rarities*, further connections with the Caribbean rim and Latin cultures in the United States are pursued by including two versions of Tito Puente’s “Oye cómo va,” basically establishing a musical dialogue with the Nuyorican timbale master, Santana’s rock version, and their own technology-infused remix. For their third studio album, *Reina* (2008), they created their own recording company “Reina,” distributed by the multinational label Universal, in yet another deliberate attempt to obtain a crossover hit at the same time that they continued to succeed in the Spanish-speaking market. Of *Reina*’s thirteen tracks, six are sung in English, three in Spanish, and two are bilingual, including a vibrant and ironic cover of Wall of Voodoo’s college-radio hit “Mexican Radio.” The rest of the tracks are upbeat instrumentals with the characteristic electronic rock twists that reconnect with the electronic sound of *Kinky*. Of the singles chosen for the U.S. market, “Uruapan Breaks” is an instrumental piece with a stylization of digitized tuba and banda sounds devoured by a fast-paced disco rhythm with their trademark dynamics of starts and stops. The other U.S. single, “Sister Twisted,” whose title inverts the name of a well-known U.S. heavy metal band, is a piece focused on the sound of synthesizers and sung in English. On the other side of their double-market strategy, the songs “¿A dónde van los muertos?” “León,” and “Una línea de luz,” all with lyrics in Spanish, have been radio hits throughout Latin America. *Kinky*’s “Mexican radio” version, used in video games, keeps the lyrics, the upbeat rhythm, and the characteristic “mariachi” harmonica sound of the original, but they add some words in Spanish alluding to a common U.S.-Mexico border experience: the typical questions asked by immigration officers at ports of entry at the border. The reply in heavily accented Spanish, as if spoken by an English-speaking tourist, “I don’t understand; there is a lot of noise,” clearly alludes to the need of better communication between the two cultures as well as the inevitable pain of crossing the border. For the transnational experience that *Kinky* represents, the border is more about fluxes and traffic and less about stasis and militaristic deterrence of movement, as the act of crossing geopolitical and cultural borders is for them both a creative necessity and a source of inspiration.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored the condition of transnationality as a relevant way in which the musical production and the identity discourses these musicians

endorse are related. Monterrey's main alternative bands have turned to transnationalism as an act of musical self-definition. Supported by essential backing from multinational labels, la avanzada regia groups have been much more oriented to transnational fluxes than other Mexican bands in the past. The implicit centripetal force of rock en español is then replaced in la avanzada regia by a twofold movement that imagines a postnational and globalized scenario, while admitting the importance of a regional site of enunciation. Their cultural production aligns with a renewed interest in regional culture and unprecedented construction of regional cultural identity as "glocal": both local and global. Beyond the negative publicity that the region has received as a consequence of the violence related to drug-trafficking, from Tijuana, Baja California, to Reynosa, Tamaulipas, a Mexican border culture is perhaps for the first time considered "in" or even "chic." There is a norteño trend in literature (Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, Elmer Mendoza, David Toscana, Daniel Sada, Gabriel Trujillo, Rosina Conde, Eduardo A. Parra, Rosario Sanmiguel, etc.), as there is a norteño trend in music. There are Plastilina Mosh and Kinky and their forays into the path that promises arrival at modernity and internationalism, which include a mix of electronics, danceable rhythms, textured sound layers and, in the case of Plastilina Mosh, the supposed intimacy afforded by lounge and electro-lounge. There is Control Machete and their defiant blend of hip hop, rap, electronic, and rock music that challenges class identifications and resorts to social commentary uncommon in most representatives of la avanzada regia. Along with several others, these bands constitute some of Mexico's most innovative acts in popular music today.

Notes

1. This chapter benefited a great deal from the helpful comments and suggestions made by Jorge Guitart, Nora Guzmán, Esteban Loustaunau, and Jaime Yamaguchi.
2. The adjective "*regiomontano/a*," shortened to "*regio/a*" (royal), derives from the etymology of the name of the city: *monte* (mount) and *rey* (king). "*Avanzada*" is, of course, a term from military language (avant-garde) incorporated to art criticism early in the twentieth century. Thus, "*avanzada regia*" roughly means "the avant-garde from Monterrey."
3. Sarah Mahler and Patricia R. Pesar, "Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender across Transnational Places," *Identities*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (2001), 441–459.
4. In their conceptualization of an ideology of the world market, Hardt and Negri recognize that "[c]irculation, mobility, diversity, and mixture are its very conditions of possibility. Trade brings differences together and the more the merrier! Differences (of commodities, populations, cultures, and so forth) seem to multiply infinitely in the world market," Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 150.
5. Such a diversity of positions within the current politics of language calls for a reformulation of the thesis of cultural imperialism, in order to capture the new scenarios, ambivalent positioning, complex identitarian demarcations and fluxes across the U.S.-Mexico border.

6. Josh Kun, "Rock's *Reconquista*," in *Rock over the Edge*, eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 278.
7. Lester D. Langley, *MexAmerica. Two Countries, One Future* (New York: Crown Publications, 1988), 185.
8. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 55.
9. In fact, the U.S. pro-business inclination of the local elites has often been criticized elsewhere in Mexico as detrimental to national interests. A political commentator, the late Alvaro González de Mendoza, a popular broadcaster for Radio Universidad de Guadalajara, would refer to the state of Nuevo León, where Monterrey is located, as "New Lion," to emphasize that point.
10. In fact, it competes with Guadalajara by reproducing some of its cultural activity—organization of similar artistic and cultural events, International Book Fairs, Film Festivals, etc., promoting others, i.e., the Monterrey Tennis Open—and by its influence on the international business community on the basis of its more robust economy and modern infrastructure.
11. The city's diverse promoters have sought to bolster its public image in the most surprising ways, such as those derived from Guinness World Records' certification of the planet's biggest hug, the world's longest hot dog, the world's largest *rosca de reyes*, etc. Even the U.S. TV documentaries about Manuel Uribe, an ex-migrant and *The World's Heaviest Man*, in his desperate efforts to lose weight fit in that promotional pattern. Ironically, what the Discovery Channel production that covered the story failed to highlight was the implicit link found by many researchers between U.S. style-modernization, which includes a drastic change of diet, and obesity. Uribe himself blamed his years of living in the United States for his weight problem. In fact, as of 2010, the whole country suffers from the same problem as Uribe's, with the planet's second-highest ratio of obese people, both adult and children, just after the United States.
12. Norteña music also had key promoters among the elites. One was Bonifacio Salinas Leal, governor of Nuevo León in the 1940s, who understood that in the sounds of norteña, there was a regional alternative to mariachi (ranchera) music as Mexico's national music. Later, a national projection of norteño culture was popularized by film figures, such as the plain talker and humorous Eulalio González "El Piporro," who would be competing against the encumbrance of the *charro* as the national icon. See Cathy Ragland's article in this volume.
13. See Jody Berland, "Locating Listening: Technological Space, Popular Music, and Canadian Mediations," in *The Place of Music*, eds. Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, George Revill (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 129–150; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Lawrence Grossberg, "The Space of Culture, the Power of Space," in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, eds. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 166–188; Josh Kun, "The Sun Never Sets on MTV. Tijuana No! and the Border of Music Video," in *Latino/a popular culture*, eds. Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero (New

- York: New York University Press, 2002), 102–116; and George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads. Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1997).
14. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 83.
 15. The mere creation of what in Texas is mostly known as Texan conjunto music and in northern Mexico as *norteña* music is still a matter of discussion on both sides of the border. Some believe that what became a new genre originated in the south Texas valley in which Santiago Jiménez Sr., the father of legendary accordion player Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez, became as important as Antonio Tanguma in Monterrey, for those who believe he was the creator of the new music based on the musical dialogue between accordion and bajo sexto. However, since Tanguma spent some time in Texas as an agricultural worker, the speculation on the true origins of conjunto or *norteña* music will continue. What is sure is that the stricter enforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border, which had crossed that southern Texas-northern Mexico “cultural universe,” has not stopped the intense transnational flows between the two areas that exist up to this day.
 16. The local history of economic success is intrinsically tied to the region’s social history, generated by different cycles of immigration, since the old *haciendas* rural proletariat became the working force needed by the industrialization spearheaded by the Fundidora de Fierro y Acero (a steel factory) during the late Porfiriato.
 17. Norteña and cumbia are not abandoned but revisited by these two groups and others in the movement. Evidently, the combination of traditional sounds and genres with new rhythms is more the result of a postmodern conceptualization (“time-in-culture / time-in-space”) than a sort of teleological development toward “musical modernity.” See Jesús Ramos-Kittrell’s essay in this volume.
 18. One of Ely Guerra’s first recordings, *Lotofire*, was edited by Higher Octave, a U.S. New Age/contemporary adult label.
 19. On this point, Plastilina Mosh’s Jonas stated in a 2000 interview with *The Austin Chronicle* that Monterrey “has more musicians and is better than Mexico City right now . . . In the past, success meant a 450-mile move to [the capital city] and the prospect of competing with hundreds of bands in an already overcrowded music market. Now all of this is changing.” See Melissa Sattley, “The Kings of Monterrey,” *The Austin Chronicle*, June 16, 2000 at <http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=oid:77604> (accessed March 13, 2010).
 20. As mentioned earlier, the use of Spanish was an act of cultural self-definition for the Mexican bands of rock en español, such as El Tri, Caifanes and Maldita Vecindad y los Hijos del Quinto Patio. Control Machete then subjects the dominant language to a transnational negotiation.
 21. Richard Rodriguez, *Brown. The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Viking, 2002), 221.
 22. Andrew Ross, *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10.
 23. The lyrics of “Sí señor” could be found in the following links: http://www.tsrocks.com/m/machete_control_texts/si_senor.html (accessed August 29,

- 2010) and <http://www.lyrics007.com/Machete%20Control%20Lyrics/Si%20Senor%20Lyrics.html> (accessed August 29, 2010).
24. The lyrical quality of language in these songs might be better understood by a rebellion of the “semiotic” against the Lacanian “symbolic” regime of language, in terms of Julia Kristeva’s *semanalysis*. According to Lacan, the symbolic is dominated by the meaning of words, which are subjected to an order of culture dominated by patriarchy. For Kristeva, the semiotic is what escapes the order of the symbolic (the Law of the Father in Lacanian terms) and manifested in verbal language by those performative aspects that are not codified in the meaning of words nor ruled by their logic.
 25. See Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).
 26. In an interview with Costa Rica’s *La Nación* (posted on the *Rock en español* Web site), Jonas stated that the group: “no tiene un estilo de música definido [and] no se puede encasillar, tiene un carácter definido; de ligereza, desenfadado, de falta de respeto hacia todo. Eso es lo bueno de esta banda, que la cuestión técnica no nos encierra.” At <http://www.rockenespanol.com/?artists/plastilina-mosh/2915> (accessed March 13, 2010).
 27. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review*, No. 146 (1984), 53–92.
 28. Kun, “Rock’s Reconquista,” 279.
 29. Unlike musicians for whom travel is a source of inspiration, it is significant that for Plastilina Mosh travel becomes an obstacle to musical creation. Rosso has actually expressed worries about the impact of so much traveling on their work: “The single biggest change for us has been having to sacrifice a lot of our personal life. I don’t know the effect it will have on our music in the future, but all of our inspirations are missing because we are on the road a lot.” See Donna Freydkin, “Plastilina Dancing in Mexico’s Mosh Pit,” *CNN Interactive*, November 6, 1998, at <http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Music/9811/06/plastilina.mosh/> (accessed March 13, 2010).
 30. David Marc, “TV Critic’s Code,” in *Popular Culture in America*, ed. Paul Buhle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.
 31. Although videos for the three bands studied in this chapter are close to semi-autonomous creations with their own logic and aesthetic values, they could not exist without the music and are subordinated as products to it. Sometimes music videos clarify or amplify the meaning of a song; in other occasions they obscure it and add a layer of meaning instability, ambivalence or polyvalence, and even vagueness. In such a case, they seem to highlight the cultural divide among means of artistic expression upholding a relative autonomy in the cultural sphere which is truer for music than for video for the above reason. For further discussion on these and similar topics, see Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
 32. Freydkin, “Plastilina Dancing.”
 33. The proliferation of convenience stores, such as the U.S. chain 7-Eleven, all over Mexico is not a gratuitous contextual detail. They represent the displacement of the typical mom-and-pop stores. These businesses, prior to the

neoliberal transformation of small-scale commerce, used to be informal gathering-information and/ or social contact sites in countless barrios of Mexican towns and cities. The new standardized supermarket, with its emphasis on efficiency, limited, and homogeneous offerings from the same transnational suppliers, and impersonality—usually, the employees are not from the same barrio—has profoundly altered those patterns of urban city life. This is more evidence of “time passed” that the video alludes to.

34. “Teenage and pre-teenage pop” were popularized in Latin America by the likes of the young Ricky Martin, Luis Miguel, Los Chamos, Menudo, Magneto, etc., and they are responsible for creating a new musical market for the respective age-bracket in the 1980s.
35. In that sense, contemporary critical work that predominantly focuses on affect and emotion in a so-called postideological age may be analogous to the flushing out of politics or sociology as usual from the realm of popular culture.
36. Freydkin, “Plastilina Dancing.”
37. Josh Kun, “Chihuahuas, Rockeros, and Zoot Suits: Notes on Multiculturalism without People of Color. A Conversation with Guillermo Gómez-Peña,” in *Dangerous Border-Crossers: The Artist Talks Back*, ed. Guillermo Gómez-Peña (London: Routledge, 2000), 206.
38. The music consumer is aware of the implicit marketing proposition and the ethos of the times. Even the country’s most visible record-store chain is appropriately called “Mix up” (in English), which is partially owned by Grupo Carso, Mexico’s biggest business group founded and chaired by the world’s current wealthiest person, Carlos Slim Helú.
39. Critic Josh Kun defines this term as “sonic spaces of effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and mapping of geographical space that music makes possible.” Kun, “Rock’s *Reconquista*,” 259.
40. The metaphor of art as consumption is not new in Latin America’s critical discourses, in particular in reference to the theorization provided by Oswald de Andrade and the Brazilian modernists, which has also been linked to interpretive frameworks by theorists of transculturation and hybridity as fundamental cultural processes in the region’s history. In *Plastilina Mosh*, however, there are no aspirations to new hybrid forms or cultural mestizaje claims, as acts of self-affirmation of the postcolonial subject, but rather the conviction of acting as transnational cultural producers-consumers. Neither is there the type of instrumental (and linguistic) translation of genres that is so popular in “world music.” A recent example of that could be the “cannibalization” of rock and pop songs by mariachi groups from the state of Jalisco in *Mariachi Rock-O. Sonidos de Jalisco* (still unpublished due to license issues but available in the Internet). Of course, while this musical exercise is not as iconoclastic as it may appear, it can certainly render the indirect benefit of renewing the mariachi repertoires.
41. Freydkin, “Plastilina Dancing.”
42. Kun, “Chihuahuas, Rockeros, and Zoot Suits,” 200.
43. Ibid.

44. Somehow invoking that link between music and economic context, some Nortec fans even attend the group's concerts and rave parties with outfits modeled after the factory robes used in *maquiladoras*.
45. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, "Ideology, Flux, and Identity in Tijuana's Nor-tec Music," in *Postnational Musical Identities. Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, eds. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 111.
46. A posting titled "*Es Muy Bueno, Chicos... En Serio*" at Amazon.com signed by N. Hohman may represent this line of criticisms: "And yes, they do use quite a bit of English on Atlas, unlike the first album. And yes, it can be somewhat distracting (in the sense that you might find yourself asking: Why is this band from Monterrey, Mexico singing in English when it sounds so much cooler when they use their native Spanish?" Posted on January 2, 2004, <http://www.amazon.com/Atlas-Kinky/dp/B0000E6XGR> (accessed March 13, 2010).
47. Ricardo D. Salvatore, "North American Travel Narratives and the Ordering/Othering of South America (c. 1810–1860)," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 9, No.1 (1996), 86.
48. Michael Kearney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, No. 24 (1995), 527.
49. Aired on Televisa's Channel 2 on July 4, 2008; 11:20 P.M.
50. In a remix of the song included in the album *Rarities*, a male voice expresses, in a tone of disbelief, "surreal!" to be immediately corrected by a female voice that assures him "it is real, it is real."

PART SIX

Contested Identities

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New Mexico and ‘*Manitos* at the Borderlands of Popular Music in Greater Mexico

BRENDA M. ROMERO ■

When the rock music phenomenon swept the United States by storm in the 1950s, it didn't skip New Mexico. In this autobiographical essay, in which I am both researcher and ethnographic subject, I describe the development of popular music as I saw it as a child and teenager growing up in northern New Mexico, and how I see it now that I have lived elsewhere for most of my adult life (the last twenty-four years in Colorado) and as an ethnomusicologist. I will argue that New Mexico and southern Colorado ‘*Manitos* have both absorbed and resisted popular U.S. mainstream music as they have struggled to maintain the integrity of the Spanish language and their four-hundred year old roots in the region, establishing over time a borderlands tendency to look south, rather than north, for ongoing musical traditions. In this essay, I speak from the diaspora as a self-identified ‘*Manita*.¹

The majority of the people I am calling ‘*Manitos* were already mestizos, mixed Spanish and Native, when they settled in the region (beginning in 1598). This had imparted to them a sense of being an indigenous people to the Southwest by the time of the influx of Anglo-Americans from the north (largely after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848).² Social elites were conscious of their color and status as *criollos*, and adopted a Hispanophile discourse that benefited under U.S. rule by distancing themselves from Mexico and whitening themselves further by idealizing Spain. The elite ruling class retained Hispanophile prejudices and perpetuated a traditional Spanish value system; however, at least superficially, everyone in the old culture was united by Catholic fundamentalism. Thus, the term ‘*Manito* is particularly useful for delineating the focus of this essay, insofar

as my use of the term reflects cultural and religious (more specifically *Penitente*) core values that extend south to Mexico and other parts of the Americas.³ Following the “Americanization” of the U.S.-Mexico border, the ‘Manito land base gradually eroded and starting in the 1930s the war industry based in Los Alamos transformed New Mexico from an agrarian society with a mixed Spanish and Indian character to a capitalist-based economy. Forms of status hundreds of years old fell to the wayside, and by the 1980s cemeteries were filled with young men, in particular, many having drunk themselves to death, casualties of the ongoing processes of displacement. The next twenty years only replaced or accompanied alcohol with hard drugs due to New Mexico’s proximity to recently established cartels in the states along Mexico’s northern border. In this essay I propose that what has happened musically is not only a working-class resistance to the U.S. mainstream consequent to a harsh historical past, but is as much or more a reflection of religious core beliefs and a reliance on the Spanish language as emblems of identity and survival.

Spain, having delegated its finances to Jewish experts and managers prior to their expulsion, was in dire straits when most of the Jews left in 1492. The absence of financial expertise, in addition to the huge debts that Spain paid off, and the poverty (especially among women and children) consequent to fighting a five-hundred-year war against the Moors, left Spain decimated and seemingly the weakest country in Western Europe for a long time. In the Western classical music establishment, Spanish art music is the least performed, possibly because its sonic associations with the Arab (Moorish) Emirate of Granada in Al-Andalus prior to 1492 have situated Spain as Other in the social imaginary. Perhaps these perceptions, the association of an impoverished Spain with New Mexico, and the general poverty of New Mexico itself have served to erase the state from the national picture of the American Dream. Nonetheless, New Mexico has learned to market its difference. It is a last stop short of traveling to Mexico, but ground travel to Mexico has become nearly impossible as a result of the violence associated with drug trafficking, as previously mentioned. This provides an interesting context for new musical development in New Mexico, just as the state is poised to extend itself to a transnational political stage because its cultural capital allows it to do so.

‘MANITOS AND PENITENTES IN NEW MEXICO AND SOUTHERN COLORADO

The U.S. citizenry is known in the Spanish of Greater Mexico by a variety of names, among them, *gringos*, *Norteamericanos* or simply *Americanos* (although Mexico is also a part of North America and the United States is part of the Americas),⁴ *Estadounidenses* (United Statesians), and (formerly) *Yankis*. Latino subgroups may also be identified as *Chicanos*, *Nuyorikans*, and *Tejanos*. Less known or understood, the colloquial term “Manito” became a way of identifying contemporary descendants of Spanish colonists of New Mexico living anywhere else,⁵ particularly in the surrounding states, but the term was known as far away as California.⁶ It referred to the *gente*, the people, but not always in flattering terms, as my cousin Phil Miera recalls:

The only time I remember the term “*manito*” was during the many times we visited Juarez [*sic*]-at the Mercados. I would often hear the Mercado vendors refer to us or to other New Mexicans as the “*manitos mirones que no compran nada*.” I remember hearing the Mercado vendors joking and laughing at the way we *manitos* spoke our own New Mexican Spanish. “*Que pendejos*, we are New Mexicans not Mexicans,” I would think to myself. I remember the first time I came across the term “*manito*,” other than in Juarez [*sic*], was in some magazine article that was written in Santa Fe, by some author that had just moved there—I was a senior in high school when I read the article.⁷

In this chapter, I seek to reappropriate the term, useful in summarizing a characteristically New Mexican religious piety rooted in abject poverty and a quixotic past, as one of endearment. I am not the first to do so, however. In 1976, New Mexico native, Juan Sevedeo Lucero, released “*Soy manito*,” (“I am manito”) a song that was popular in the state throughout the late 1970s.⁸

In Colorado, I first heard the term ‘Manito in reference to members of the old Hispano culture in the southern part of Colorado (adjacent to northern New Mexico), the northernmost part of the region also known as Greater Mexico (a term coined by Américo Paredes).⁹ The term ‘Manito originates from “little brother,” *hermanito*, in the loving overtones of the diminutive, and it is still common to hear traditional and elderly Hispanos use it as a term of endearment when speaking about their neighbors, as in “*el ‘manito Juan*.” The term is an indirect reference to *Los Hermanos*, the Brothers, or *Cofrados* (Confraternities, or secular brotherhoods),¹⁰ perhaps more notorious for their penitential devotions than for their vital contributions to community welfare and the governance of resources relating to agriculture, land, and water. The *Cofradía de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* or brotherhood of Our Father Jesus the Nazarene assumed a predominant role in populated and more dispersed frontier communities, especially following independence from Spain in 1821. The brothers themselves prefer the term *Hermanos* to the term *Penitente*. Although not everyone was or is a practicing *Hermano*, the oldest layer of Spanish-Mexican culture in New Mexico and southern Colorado is defined by penitent beliefs and practices, and these extend south beyond the political border. Finally, it is important to note that I am using ‘Manito rather than *Nuevo Mexicano* (New Mexican) or “Hispanic” to represent the old Hispano culture, as *Nuevo Mexicano* can potentially include anyone who lives in New Mexico and “Hispanic” is a government imposed umbrella term for anyone in any area colonized by Spain. In this essay I also extend the term ‘Manito to include contemporary descendents whose ties to the old culture are no longer very meaningful, but who claim a regional (New Mexico and southern Colorado) Hispano identity.

This is my native culture; I am a ‘Manita from northern New Mexico. The musicians came on my mother’s side and she claims they were not liked because they didn’t work the fields. My uncle on mom’s side, who lived next door, was both musician and *Hermano*. My mother, Eufelia, too was a musician—a singer—but because gender roles were strongly divided, my mother sang only in church and at home, except once

at age ninety-one, when I brought her onstage at the Lensic Theater in Santa Fe for us to sing together the locally beloved hymn “Bendito sea Dios” (“Blessed Be God”). The audience wept, and so perhaps it was best that she had not sung in public before. She was as much a Penitente as women could be; women did not participate in the physical forms of penance but through daily self-sacrifice and prayer. My father, on the other hand, had had enough punishment from working the fields for my grandparents as a child and was not interested in being a Penitente. In his thirties, he worked at the labs in Los Alamos, and, according to my mother, he may have helped transport the first atomic bomb from Los Alamos to its detonation test site at Trinity Air Force Base near Alamogordo, New Mexico.¹¹ It is unclear when or why exactly he began to show the signs of paralysis in his hands that gradually overtook him entirely before he died at the age of eighty-three, a complete invalid.¹² Like many disenfranchised ‘Manitos today, he suffered, but not by choice.

I grew up with funeral and Easter observances in which mournful laments, the *alabados* intoned since ancient times in Spain, echoed across the sparse New Mexico hillsides and in unadorned adobe chapels called *moradas*. These austere praise songs graphically describe the Passion of Christ, and symbolize the Penitente social code, that meditation on the sufferings of Christ brings us as close as we can get to God in this life.¹³ These traditions are still considered sacred and thus ‘Manitos share a sense of the sacred with similar Christian sects found throughout Greater Mexico, as well as with neighboring Pueblo peoples, whose own traditions are based on man’s sacred relationship to the earth and date back to antiquity. Pueblo Indians did not practice self-mortification, however, nor have they participated in Penitente rites (with some exceptions).¹⁴ Encouraged by the Chicano movement’s emphasis on reclaiming indigenous heritage, and as ‘Manitos have lost more and more of their land base, many ‘Manitos have adopted the Pueblo beliefs in the sacredness of the land (without the associated Pueblo religion).¹⁵

At various times before and after the Domínguez Expedition of 1776, the Hermanos served in unofficial religious capacities. They helped marry the *gente*, accompanied by local musicians playing wedding music like “La entriega de los novios,” (“The Presentation of the Newlyweds”), still a part of traditional weddings today, but back then it could also serve as part of a colloquial Spanish wedding ritual.¹⁶ (Note the old Spanish spelling of *entrega*.) The Penitentes also modeled brotherly love by burying the dead, helping widows, and by teaching mutual aid. According to a Web site posted by “El jefe Ramón,”¹⁷ in 1900 Celedonio Mondragón and others (men and women) founded the SPMDTU, or Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (Society for Mutual Protection of United Workers), in Antonito, Colorado, in order to help strengthen the community against Anglo discrimination. Hundreds of chapters soon sprang up in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.¹⁸

Because the majority of pious men of those days were typically Hermanos, many of them were also members of the SPMDTU. One such Hermano operated a roller-skating rink at the SPMDTU building in the 1930s, “paying \$4.00 a month to the SPMDTU Supreme Council for the hall rental.”¹⁹ Perhaps word spread of the rink in Antonito (which borders northern New Mexico), because in

the mid-1950s, although not a member of the SPMDTU, my father Juan Pedro (Pete) Romero (1913–1997),²⁰ a social worker at the Española Welfare Department (as it was called in those days), took it on himself to transform an abandoned dance hall (who knows its dance hall history?) in our home village of Velarde into a recreation center that alternated dancing to early rock LPs (stacks of 45s) with bingo and roller skating. I remember watching the teenagers dancing to English language rock 'n' roll hits, much as we saw on *American Bandstand* on television.

In spite of a general awareness of the cultural mixing that has made blood relatives of Hispanos and members of regional indigenous nations,²¹ the bulk of the popular music that is the subject of this essay does not reflect indigeneity. Both the reservation system and local enmities have preserved divisions between outsiders and local First Nations.²² Rather, the popular music largely reflects an intersection with mainstream U.S. and Mexican media culture, as well as with live, local country western and Mexican and other Latino dance bands. An important exception is Chicano rock guitarist and vocalist A. Michael Martinez (aka A. Michael Martín, in the older New Mexican spelling). From an old 'Manito family, a Chicano whose great-grandmother was Laguna Puebloan, Martinez formed the band Lincoln Street Exit in 1967, when he was a senior at Valley High School in Albuquerque. Martinez identifies as Chicano and mixed-blood. His 1976 "Pachucos" (never recorded) is about his older brothers and friends in the neighborhood where he grew up in Albuquerque. Everyone else in the band identifies as New Mexican native, except for the guitarist, R.C. Garriss (mixed Native from Oklahoma). Mac Suazo, the bass player, is Taos Puebloan, from Pilar, New Mexico; Lee Herrera, the drummer, is mixed Puebloan, and grew up mostly in California and Albuquerque.

In 1971, under the management of Tom Bee, a Lakota native who grew up in Gallup, New Mexico, the band changed its name to XIT and began to focus largely on political issues that impacted Native Americans, performing often at benefits and rallies. They recorded their first LP, *Plight of the Redman*, which Motown released, with the credits going to manager Tom Bee and producer Mike Valvano for their lyrics. Martinez left the band and Bee took over, singing some of Martinez's songs in *Silent Warrior*, also released by Motown. In 1976, Bee got the original group back together to do *Color Me Red*, a compilation of previously recorded XIT material he owned.

In 2003, Martinez and Suazo began writing again, and with Herrera, subsequently reformed the band as the Original XIT (aka Original XIT Boys and the OX Boys), and released four CDs in six years. Their 2009 CD, *Next Exit* features two of XIT's most popular songs, "I Am Happy about You" (mostly in Navajo, with one verse in English) and "Reservation of Education" using Tom Bee's lyrics. They call their style "Native Rock": rock and roll with Native instruments, chanting, and imagery. XIT was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 1999 Native American Music Awards (Nammys). The Original XIT have performed live one time, at the New Mexico Music Awards, May 23, 2010, at the Pyramid Hotel in Albuquerque. The same year they were nominated for the Nammys' Best Producer award, and although they did not win they were prominently featured at the award ceremony.²³

THE PERSISTENCE OF SPANISH AS AN EMBLEM OF 'MANITO IDENTITY

Until recently, 'Manitos, residing throughout New Mexico and southern Colorado since 1598—the Arkansas River, near Pueblo, Colorado, was the northern border of New Spain—have been largely invisible in the fabric of “American” subcultures. In part, this is due to the obstinate local insistence on preserving the archaic seventeenth-century colloquialisms of the early Spanish-European settlers, while furthering contemporary forms of Spanish speaking in New Mexico.²⁴ One could argue that in earlier decades this was the continuing colonial legacy of a Hispanophile elite (and this still reverberates in local politics), but at least the rhetoric among the state's culture workers indicates that they are aware of the need to embrace the many immigrants who have found work in New Mexico as an increasingly important constituency. A glance into contemporary New Mexico reveals an infrastructure with some influence from Spanish cultural institutions, as, for example, the Cervantes Institute, situated as part of the National Hispanic Cultural Center (NHCC) in Albuquerque²⁵ to provide Spanish classes for the public. In spite of this appearance of an emphasis on Spain, however, the Cervantes Institute also teaches Mexican Spanish and the NHCC lends itself to supporting programming that reflects a widespread Hispano diaspora, including Spain (flamenco), the Philippines (an exhibit in 2009 on the Silk Road, the *Nao de China*), and the crypto Jewish presence.²⁶ The Center highlights popular Afro-Caribbean music and musicians, but appeals to Mexican audiences by hosting a yearly Fiesta Guadalupana and occasional performances by Mexican performers who live locally, for the most part.

In summer 2009 I toured the NHCC, located in the Barelás neighborhood on Albuquerque's south side. I met the current chair of the NHCC Board of Directors, Daniel Ortega, a law professor at the University of New Mexico, from an old 'Manito family, who was once posted at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid as special assistant to Edward Romero, former ambassador to Spain and Andorra.²⁷ (I also learned that my stern fourth-grade teacher, still living, is his great aunt.) Center personnel assured and reassured me that the NHCC seeks programming that will attract local Mexican constituencies, but Mexican culture is only one of many the program directors choose from, with no special emphasis placed on the strong local immigrant population. A recent art exhibition featured contemporary Mexican glass pop sculpture and a recent lecture, “The Seven Warrior Foods of the Mexica People,” by Michael Heralda, was billed as “a community celebration of shared Indo-Hispano cultural traditions focusing on food-ways and wellness.”²⁸ These are obviously aimed at cultivated audiences; it is unlikely that either would have had much appeal to working-class immigrants. Although the NHCC is aware of its responsibilities to its Mexican constituencies, programming is, for the most part, within elite and gentrified categories.

In contrast, according to “El Jaguar,” a local culture worker, commercial venues in Albuquerque feature Mexican music for the masses, including one *banda* group that resides in Albuquerque and a few other well-known *banda* groups, *música norteña* (Ramón Ayala, Los Tigres del Norte, and others), and even

Mexican *rock en español*. The biggest gathering of Mexican musicians occurs at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on November 12, her feast day, with up to forty groups, including danza azteca, banda, norteña, mariachi, trios, conjunto, and various rock and hip hop groups. All of them sing in Spanish, and because many (like myself) are devotees of la Virgen de Guadalupe, participants include many 'Manitos. Additionally, the César Chávez Annual Celebration on March 27, is gathering more and more momentum, and attracts a variety of groups and participants.²⁹ One of the sites for this celebration is the NHCC.

In recent years the NHCC has focused heavily on the local Spanish flamenco scene, which originated with María Benítez in Santa Fe during the 1960s. Flamenco eventually found a home in the University of New Mexico Dance Department, with Eva Encinias as the dance instructor. Subsequently, the National Conservatory of Flamenco Arts opened in Albuquerque. There is evidence, however, that the music of flamenco in Greater Mexico dates further back than the 1960s. Alfonso Ayala Duarte refers to the late nineteenth century in Monterrey:

"In addition to the polka, waltz, redova, and mazurka repertoire included Mexican huapangos, North American foxtrots, the cha-cha-cha, Cuban *danzón*, and Spanish flamenco."³⁰

The NHCC regularly features workshops and concerts with flamenco artists and teachers from Spain, in addition to local and locally trained flamenco artists. (Notably, some of these artists are openly gay, and thus provide a rare opportunity to sensitize the public to Hispano homosexuality.) Many 'Manitos who have lost the older religious value system still hold on to their Spanish heritage through flamenco. This identification is seemingly loaded with contradictions, as evidenced by Juan Ortíz,³¹ a 'Manito from southern Colorado, thirty-nine years of age:

J.O.: My feeling is that a lot of 'Manitos don't identify with Mexicans, or they identify with Mexicans when it's convenient and with Spanish when it's convenient. It was easier to say "I'm Spanish" because you could pass for a white European. People will identify as Spanish to a gringo and as Mexican when they are among themselves. A lot of people just say "Spanish," period. That's how I grew up, calling ourselves "Spanish." When I lost my great-grandmother and started searching for my identity, we had never learned Spanish, and I thought how different New Mexican Spanish is and went on a quest of learning *mexicano*, as they would say.

B.R.: Can you talk about how and why Spanish Gypsy flamenco works in NM?

J.O.: First of all, flamenco is associated with the Gypsies and vice versa, but there are so many non-Gypsies doing it that the question is problematic and I would just say "flamenco." I think the appeal is that you've got that tetrachord that is so Spanish in character—it has worked its way into the music of the diaspora. You get this A minor-G-F-E major (harmonic progression) from Mexico to Argentina. I think the 'Manitos that associate with that just kind of feel at home with it to begin with. Everyone comes to flamenco from different places, but I know that guitarists come to it

because of the guitar first. When I was doing it there were a lot of guitarists who had lost their culture, or aspects of their culture, so that they went there to learn flamenco. I think too, I just liked flamenco, but as I got more into it, it continued the search for my identity and took me down a much different path than I would have taken otherwise. Actually that is a path—when you start learning flamenco you have to study Spanish, because at some time you will study with Spanish artists. But I think people kind of use that as a way to search for their lost identity. If they didn't study flamenco, they might never study Spanish, they might not even care about Spanish, but they study Spanish to enhance the flamenco experience. It is associated with the Gypsies, but there are many good musicians learning flamenco that are professional players. You can never become a Gypsy, but you can fit in the flamenco culture and that is why a lot of Hispanics who have lost their identities in the West, and in Florida and California who have had similar experiences, gravitate to flamenco.

Juan's observation that a harmonic progression can resonate as an aspect of identity is interesting, as is the idea that serious study of the music will inevitably lead to learning the language. Evidently flamenco offers a way to redefine oneself when one has lost faith or rebelled against tradition, and this testifies to the aesthetic appeal of the genre, which arguably has been appropriated over time from the Gypsies, but also from mainstream Spaniards and aficionados the world over. Flamenco does express some Spanish values that characterize the obstinate 'Manito (and might explain some of my own quixotic character) in ways I always took for granted growing up in New Mexico in an old 'Manito family: "The same sense of futility arising out of repeated failures to vanquish the powers-that-be, which nonetheless are challenged over and over again, pervades the spirit of both flamenco and the bullfight."³²

The NHCC includes 'Manito music as part of regular programming, largely due to the strong interest among scholars in the University of New Mexico and aficionados in the community at large, like the prominent politician, folksinger, and songwriter Roberto Mondragón, who is a member of the NHCC Board of Directors. Mondragón is also a fierce champion of the Spanish language and a regular performer throughout New Mexico; he is sometimes featured at the NHCC. Cipriano Vigil is another local 'Manito culture bearer and scholar who is often featured performing in a combination of local and Latin American styles like Nueva Canción. There are many other young performers who are walking in these two men's footsteps in one way or another. In general, however, 'Manitos complain that there is not enough local culture in NHCC programming. Tomás Lozano, a Spaniard born in Andalucía and a self-made ethnomusicologist, is sometimes featured singing traditional 'Manito songs that he has learned as part of a long-term project in the study of New Mexican folk music,³³ juxtaposed with similar songs from Spain.³⁴

Contemporary 'Manito songs are typically in Spanish, some in English, and yet others in Spanglish, a local mixed dialect.³⁵ Additionally, many newly-composed popular songs in Spanish consciously preserve the sixteenth- and seventeenth-

century lyrics that arrived with the earliest colonists, and so continue to be recycled among 'Manitos. The persistence of the Spanish language in the region has had a tremendous impact on the ongoing 'Manito popular music scene in New Mexico and southern Colorado. Not only has the language reaffirmed local Hispanophile traditions, but local musicians have gradually merged their styles with Mexican conjunto and norteña dance music, celebratory mariachi, and Afro-Caribbean popular music, at the same time that flamenco has appealed to a broad audience of amateurs and cultivated listeners alike.

Certainly Catholicism also perpetuates worship in Spanish, representing different local constituencies and honoring cultural distinctions, as reflected in colloquial expressions like upbeat Mexican Mariachi Masses, as well as in the deeply moving funeral rosary that Penitentes sing in the traditional alabado lament style that is heard exclusively among 'Manitos and their friends, who today more often than not include a few gringos and an occasional indio.³⁶

'MANITOS, 1950S MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES, AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

In contrast to the sluggish accommodation and acceptance of Mexican and Latino music cultures among a majority of the national populace, popular New Mexican and southern Colorado music has developed in a unique way, adopting Mexican genres and musical elements while retaining fragments (or more) of centuries-old Iberian folksongs. Culturally, 'Manitos are tied to Greater Mexican concepts of the sacredness of brotherhood, in which it is OK to weep and to feel pain, for suffering is known to be a constant in the life of the Christian warrior.³⁷ Flamenco too continues an aesthetic of suffering that is easily seen in its texts and performance styles³⁸ and could almost be seen as a secular relative of the sacred 'Manito alabados (called *saetas* in Spain). In addition, since the 1940s 'Manito popular music has uniquely incorporated mainstream elements in intersection with Mexican popular music largely imported into the local imaginary via film, radio, and television (although more and more 'Manitos are among the first in their families to reach an economic ability to travel and experience the outside world first hand).

'Manito popular music has maintained vintage dance styles that define 'Manitos as "Spanish," or "Mexican-American," Spanish-speaking or skilled in Spanglish, with rootedness in agrarian New Mexico and southern Colorado's light and space, as in a deep faith.³⁹ Additionally, like the norteño's propensity to retain the corrido in música norteña (unlike conjunto),⁴⁰ a reliance on the old 'Manito songs reaffirms an identity that struggles for survival. In documenting this unique flowering of 'Manito popular music, I will call upon the songs of popular 'Manito artists Tiny Morrie (Amador Mauricio Sánchez) and his children, Lorenzo Antonio and the group Sparx (Verónica, Rosamaría, Kristyna y Carolina Sánchez), Roberto Griego, and Al Hurricane (Alberto Nelson Sánchez) as well as Mexican artist José Alfredo Jiménez and Tejano artists, Little Joe and La Familia, who are beloved by 'Manitos. I examine also the roles of television and radio stations in reaffirming local cultural identities.

Many believe that rock music was not a part of New Mexican culture in the 1950s, but, judging from my childhood experiences, this is because 'Manitos tended to be austere, fiercely proud, private, and fearful and/or scornful of outsiders (both gringos and indios). There were few opportunities for intercultural mingling, although intermarriage with Anglos became more common after the 1950s as 'Manitos, considered themselves Spanish (read white) for the most part. Yet the overwhelming majority married other 'Manitos and continued the familiar ancestral traditions even after the 1950s, calling themselves Mexicanos in Spanish.⁴¹ Following the economic boom that the war industry brought to New Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s, by the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s many 'Manitos were able to purchase radios and then televisions, and with this came a connection to Mexican popular music through radio and an identification with mainstream U.S. rock culture via television broadcasts like Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*.

A prominent figure in New Mexican television of the late 1950s was the singing or otherwise romantic cowboy, heralding norteño (North Mexico) cowboy styles common today. There was a local cowboy show host, Dick Bills, who crooned: "Ridin' down the trail from Aaaalbuquerque, saddle bags all filled with beeeens and jerky..." Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Dale Evans all run together in my memory with a bullfrog puppet named "Froggy, the Gremlin," known for being disrespectful of authority on the *Smilin' Ed's Gang Show*, later *Andy's Gang*,⁴² hosted by Andy Devine, and where one also saw *The Little Rascals*. Smilin' Ed: "Plunk your magic twanger, Froggy!" To which, Froggy would respond: "Hiya kids! Hiya! Hiya!"⁴³ Ironically, in those days there were still giant bullfrogs all along the *acequias*, irrigation ditches that crisscross both sides of the Río Grande throughout New Mexico and southern Colorado. Bullfrogs disappeared along with fireflies, seemingly with the advent of DDT in the mid-1950s,⁴⁴ marking the beginning of a radical transformation of traditional 'Manito culture as well.

A decade later everyone watched *Bonanza* and sometimes only *Bonanza* (as my elderly *tía* (Aunt) Delubina said of our neighbors, criticizing their narrow tastes when new cowboy series began to appear). The TV cowboy fascinated 'Manito farmers and ranchers as much as it did norteños. For teenage 'Manitos of the 1950s and 1960s there was something more exciting than all of this, however: rock 'n' roll. But the country western sound entered roughly at the same time and is clearly heard in many *rancheras*, ranch songs, danced in the same fast two-step of *tejano* and country western dancing. Of course it can be argued that, earlier, the influence was the other way around, from *rancheras* to country western.

Dance, always a mainstay of Hispano local celebrations, was not the least of what attracted 'Manito teenagers to the national rage for rock 'n' roll. All of the trappings of early rock were transplanted in New Mexico, including the Boogie Woogie and Jitterbug. In the mid-1950s, every girl, whose parents could afford it, wore her pink poodle skirt (with multiple petticoats underneath) and black-and-white oxford lace-up shoes. After my father opened the recreation center mentioned earlier, even indulged little kids (as I apparently was) proudly wore the poodle skirts and oxfords to school! A little further north, in Pueblo, Colorado, 'Manito baby boomers remember getting together at someone's home to listen to rock and learn the new dance styles. Public dances were called "sock

hops,” as elsewhere in the United States, but something was different: you didn’t only hear top-40 covers but also the popular rancheras and corridos, and the dancing included long lines of couples linked by arms around the waist and moving back and forth in tandem.

In those days, the school settings were always in English and everyone was listening to (among others) Fats Domino, Little Richard, Bobby Darren, Paul Anka, Neal Sedaka, and of course Buddy Holly and Richie Valens. Even though I don’t remember consciously thinking that Richie Valens was Mexican-American, the sound of his voice and his signature “La bamba” were soul music and brought excitement to our lives like nothing before. Some, like my cousin Phil and my brother Pete, played in small dance bands. Phil recalls the group he formed when he and my brother were students at the Spanish American Normal High School, a boarding school in El Rito.⁴⁵

I organized the band, not as part of the school band, but only to play gigs to make some \$\$, and that we did, at the last Prom dance we played for in Cuba, NM, I charged the Cuba Junior/Senior class \$750. We were Seniors, Robert was a Junior; by this time we were getting good and were very popular, played in El Rito and area, played in Espanola, Santa Fe, Taos, and twice in Albuquerque. We played lots of Rock & Roll, lots of Rancheras—Pete and I were very good on our golden trumpets, but, we could also play traditional walses, and of course the Wedding march—too bad, no recorders [recording equipment] around.⁴⁶

A few of them had nicknames; they included my cousin Phil (born in 1938) on first trumpet; my brother Pete (1938–1988) on second trumpet; joined briefly that day by my brother Albert (born in 1941) (“Humphrey” because he was chubby like the comic strip character) on trombone; Art Sanchez (“Cabra,” (“Goat”) because of his goatee) on tenor saxophone; Joe Ortega on alto sax; David Baca (“Sodapop”) on drums; and Robert Archuleta on guitar. I heard the band only once, on the day of my holy communion at the age of nine. They played in the living room and were amplified. I remember Pérez Prado’s “Cherry Pink” and “Apple Blossom White,” and “Tequila,” “Blueberry Hill,” and other songs of similar vintage and danceability. One of my special memories of that day was the feeling of listening to the band from the swing that hung from an apple tree in full pink and white blossoms. Life was good—and it had a soundtrack!

In Raton, New Mexico, Patsy recalls:

We were listening to Elvis, The Drifters, Paul Anka, Bobby Darren, Neal Sedaka...Can’t remember all the names, but “Teen Angel”...Brenda Lee, Connie Frances...Our local station played rock, but for some reason during the day we couldn’t get it, so at night we listened to KOMA in Oklahoma City.⁴⁷

Albuquerque was significant because, until the late 1960s, Route 66 went right through town, with bars with dancehalls featuring local and national acts that brought the new music home.

From Fourth Street to Central and down to Bridge [in] Barelás, there were dance halls, thriving commercial areas, [and] cosmopolitan bars that catered to immigrants and tourists from the entire country. In addition to Hispanics there were lots of Poles and Slovenians because of the railroads.⁴⁸

Patsy of Raton later moved to Albuquerque and recalls that the local military base, Sandia Base, was also a context for the dissemination of early rock by way of dances provided for young servicemen to meet local women:

Weddings and showers had live bands. We'd go to the base to dance, mostly rock 'n' roll. A lot of Chicanos there ... we tended to gravitate more to them ... On Friday to the enlisted men's club and Saturday to the Officer's Club. It was free. We'd meet guys there and then invite them out to other dances as well.⁴⁹

I spent most of the 1960s in western New Mexico, living in Gallup, where my father had been relocated in 1959.⁵⁰ In contrast to our cozy northern New Mexico rural hamlet, Gallup was an urban setting, with two well-delineated sides of the railroad tracks. But it seemed like teenagers of all classes and ethnicities listened to the same mainstream rock, and I was no exception. Local dances were common once four of our white schoolmates formed a rock band, the Eliminators. The lead singer became my boyfriend. We twisted and rocked 'n' rolled and learned all of the popular dances we saw on *American Bandstand*. Just about everyone was also into R&B, but especially Chicanos on the north side of the tracks. We listened to popular singers like José Feliciano and Roy Orbison. Of course The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and other popular mainstream rock groups took everyone by storm starting in the late 1960s.

In 1967 I left home for college and that same fall my fourteen-year old brother (one of twins) died following an accidental shooting. Seeking answers to existentialist dilemmas, I set off to explore the world on a shoestring, hitchhiking in Europe the next summer; then to California, where two of my siblings lived, in 1969; and returning home in 1976 after three years in Australia.⁵¹ Many things occurred during the time I was away, most significantly Reies Tijerina's Poor People's Campaign and the Alianza Federal de Mercedes Land Grant Struggle he led in New Mexico, and the Chicano movement in Colorado, where, in 1974 a local dance instructor died in Denver, and six young Chicano activists died in Boulder. I leave it to a future article or another scholar to fill in this eight-year gap in my account of the popular music scene among 'Manitos. By the 1980s, there was Café Mocha, a salsa band in Albuquerque led by Yvonne Ulibarri, a Chicana vocalist. Since then, there has been a proliferation of musical groups of all kinds, but northern New Mexico and southern Colorado 'Manito groups have continued to recycle 1950s and 1960s rock covers, country western favorites like Willie Nelson's "Crazy" (popularized by Patsy Cline in 1961), and others, and, most interestingly, many old Iberian songs and lyrics.

The most recent venues for the dissemination of rock in New Mexico are the upscale performance halls in the Native-operated casinos that dot the main New

Mexican roadways. Popular 'Manito dance bands regularly perform there, but few Mexican groups other than mariachi are featured, although some casinos in the Albuquerque area feature a great deal of Mexican music, as do the Route 66 Casino and the Sandia Casino. Others, like the Isleta Casino offer mostly mainstream and Vegas (Nevada) rock styles.⁵² No doubt casinos are rapidly becoming harbingers of popular musical change in the state; their impact on local styles remains to be seen.

THEORY MEETING PRACTICE AT THE ASA MEETING IN 2008

My interest in this subject developed out of my panel presentation, at the American Studies Association meeting held in Albuquerque in October, 2008, in collaboration with other scholars and the guest curators—Michelle Habell-Pallan, Shannon Dudley, and Marisol Berrios-Miranda—of the “American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music” exhibition.⁵³ New Mexico was not to be one of the stops of the traveling exhibition due in part to the scarcity of information on the subject of rock in New Mexico. Thus, the ASA meeting provided an opportunity to fill this lacuna and a context for opening the conversation to a larger scholarly audience. The motivations for this essay were stimulated by this collaboration, as outlined in the roundtable abstract.⁵⁴ Included in the goals of the project was an attempt to discuss “the challenges of constructing a ‘sound’ methodology that centers the actual instruments and rhythmic patterns of pop music in its analysis of power relations” and “the cultural connections between ‘America’ and ‘Las Américas.’”

CONSTRUCTING A “SOUND” METHODOLOGY: DANCE AND ITS RHYTHMS

Communal celebrations were always common in the agrarian villages scattered throughout the New Mexican landscape. Much as in Mexico, Catholic feast days continue to provide occasions for local fiestas, if meagerly in comparison to the Mexican contexts. Dance has a long historical importance among Latinos,⁵⁵ and 'Manitos are no exception. So, it is that New Mexican households tended to have very large front rooms that could be readily converted into spaces for dancing a variety of group dances,⁵⁶ some dating from the eighteenth century *cutillio* (*cotillón*), cotillion, and *cuadrilla*, quadrille traditions.⁵⁷ Some New Mexicans, notably Jenny Vincent, Arsenio Córdova and his daughter Theresa, and some Coloradans, notably the Trujillo Family of Southwestern Musicians and Dancers, made it their life's work to preserve the colonial music and dances imported from Europe, including couple dances like “La varsovia” (“The Woman from Warsaw”) “La raspa,” (“The Shuffle”), the *polca* (polka), *chotis* (schottische), and *vals* (waltz) that arrived during the late nineteenth century (having easily traveled north from Monterrey, Mexico, once the railroad was up and running). Of these, the polka and the waltz are ever-present today.

‘Manito dance bands, both in New Mexico and Colorado, have continued to perform upbeat rancheras, to which fast two-step dancing can take place with everyone moving in a circular motion around the room (perhaps stemming from a deep memory of indigenous round dances).⁵⁸ It was in ranchera dancing that it was common to see couples spontaneously linking up in single line, chain formations in traditional ‘Manito celebrations up until the 1970s (and still sometimes today), something probably left over from old Spanish line dances, if not from the cotillions or quadrilles.⁵⁹

New versions of old ‘Manito dance standards alternate with 1950s songs like “Tú y las nubes,” (“You and the Clouds”) and 1950s and 1960s rock covers, with new compositions tending toward older dance styles. It wasn’t until the 1980s that New Mexican dance bands began to include or focus on salsa and other contemporary Latino dance styles, but this music was never meant to replace the local styles. Denver was not much different, as ‘Manitos from both New Mexico and southern Colorado settled there in large numbers and tended to stay away from Mexican and other Latino immigrants. Mariachi was the exception, becoming the popular celebratory music of choice for ‘Manitos since the 1940s,⁶⁰ much as it still is today, but for dancing, there was nothing like a good ranchera and it continues as a ‘Manito dance favorite.

CONSTRUCTING A “SOUND” METHODOLOGY: LYRICS AND A NEW MEXICAN ‘MANITO AESTHETIC

Because lyrics, instruments, and rhythmic patterns become emblematic of people and their identities, they equal cultural capital, and the ways that the popular music scene has developed in New Mexico tells us a great deal about power relations among New Mexican Hispanos. Due to their private nature, (in addition to other factors already mentioned), in addition to white and/or Anglo hegemony following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, ‘Manitos have been largely ignored, with no premium placed on their long presence in the Southwestern United States, which precedes the presence of colonizing European nations that arrived on the eastern seaboard. In his, *Cantemos al Alba*, Tomás Lozano (a Spaniard who considers himself a contemporary *troubadour*, and who lived in New Mexico between 1995 and 2007) documented the importation into New Mexico of early orchestral instruments: dulciens (early bassoons), sackbuts (early trombones), shawms (early oboe types), violins, and so on, for the seventeenth-century mission churches, more often than not established in the center of indigenous Pueblo villages.⁶¹ These orchestras and the polyphonic forms that developed in the early missions were abolished with the famous Pueblo Revolt of 1680, organized by professional Pueblo runners over four hundred miles between Taos and Hopi (in present-day Arizona), and almost nothing is left to evidence that period of musical culture that nurtured the nascent European art music.

Rather, legitimized by the European foot soldiers and troubadours, secular vernacular European musical forms, longstanding staples of the common person, continued to flourish for the next three hundred years by way of battered *can-*

cioneros, songbooks, that also helped preserve reading and writing in Spanish. These included a variety of genres still found throughout the Americas, including the *romance*, ballad; *versos* or *coplas*, four-line, octosyllabic verse in two couplets; *décimas*, ten-line verses, often preferred for improvised dialogue or contest singing, and many others. No doubt the songs, many of them already old at the time, nurtured a sense of refinement and identity that helped to confirm the Spanish right to conquest, and later, when 'Manitos were themselves the targets of Anglo domination, the old songs continued to be recycled, stating and restating cultural pride and identity, as many still do today in the guise of popular music.

Cultural isolation intensified when opportunistic lawyers and politicians gradually eroded the 'Manito land base during the era of "Americanization" after 1848. This was reinforced after the early artists' colonies moved from the East Coast to Santa Fe and championed indigenous cultures, while demonizing their oppressors, the penitent 'Manitos. Connected to the south for centuries by a common language and religion, it was natural to hear Spanish-language radio programs featuring the Mexican trios and other popular Mexican music of the 1950s. But it was equally common for any intimate understanding (or perception) of gringo culture to also develop second-hand, from television and radio shows among the agrarian 'Manitos. It could be argued that the wave of excitement that accompanied 1950s rock in New Mexico, was due to the happy times made possible by the postwar economy and attitudes that permeated the entire United States. The many young 'Manitos who returned from military duty (my father among them) brought back a new sense of belonging to the nation as never before. Popular music was emblematic of the new belonging, but the identification with the mainstream was superficial at best, and the songs that began to emulate early rock continued to engage the themes and dance rhythms of the familiar, and, more often than not, they were sung in Spanish.

Enrique Lamadrid first articulated, via variants of "El corrido de Kansas," a local Indo-Hispano aesthetic as a unique experience of the individual, in which suffering is a kind of transcendence and redemption.⁶² Elsewhere I have written about ways that the Penitentes shaped 'Manito aesthetics.⁶³ The tendency to connect faith with piety has a long history outside of "official" religion, and it is common for the elder generation of 'Manitos to believe that their suffering on this earth will guarantee a place in heaven—a belief that is clearly voiced by my elderly mother (born 1916) today. Following, I discuss the lyrics of three songs to demonstrate how the traditional melancholy has continued to manifest itself in popular 'Manito music.

The first 'Manito pop song to make it big nationally was "Lonely Letter," composed and sung by Tiny Morrie in the late 1950s. No doubt it struck the very soul of the 'Manito serviceman recently returned from the Korean conflict (roughly 1950–1955), but also all of those who traveled to neighboring states to find work: "As I write this lonely letter, I wonder if you think of me." The music echoed the mainstream top 40, was sung in English, with teen sentimentality, "Oo-oo-oo-oo" refrains, simple chordal structures, and walking bass motifs between lines of text.⁶⁴

Less melancholic music began to arrive in New Mexico from Mexico and Texas, having acquired some of the attitudes of German immigrant beer-drinking music brought by the greater mobility the railroad made possible in the late nineteenth

century. The lyrics, however, continued to express the hardships of daily life. The ranchera, “Tú y las nubes”, composed by the famous Mexican songwriter, José Alfredo Jiménez in the 1950s, was quickly adapted as emblematic among ‘Manitos, the triple meter danced in a familiar bouncy waltz step. Its popularity continued for decades and the song is included in Roberto Griego’s 1974 landmark recording, *Un pobre no más* ([I Am] *Only a Poor Man*). Although upbeat, the emphasis of “Tú y las nubes” is on a working-class identification with the value of humility, the clouds a metaphor for the snobbish elites and for the unhappiness the relationship is bringing, as reiterated in the refrain: “*Yo pa’riba volteo muy poco, tu pa’bajo no sabes mirar.*” (I rarely look up, looking down is not something you know).

By the 1970s, the upbeat styles imported from Texas and Mexico characterized much ‘Manito popular music, but the lyrics continued to reveal a local poverty that threatened love itself. The images of a bleeding Christ so commonly portrayed in the Penitente’s sacred alabado repertoires somehow found their way into this popular dance music characterized as local popular music, akin to rock and often alternating with rock covers in live performances. When the 1974 album *Un pobre no más* was re-released as compact disc in the 1990s, Roberto Griego (on the cover wearing a Western-styled suit) featured his signature tune, the title cut, both in the original version, accompanied by his band, as well as a second version accompanied by a mariachi.

The verses are priceless but the refrain says it all: “*te lo digo llorando, y del alma sangrando*” (I tell you this crying, with my soul bleeding).

It is not surprising that the song became a standard for the Mexican norteña group, Los Humildes, said to be “responsible for a movement in musical influence from North to South rather than the other way around, as is more usual in Latin music.”

The brothers Ayala formed the band with accordion and keyboard player Rudy Flores in California in 1972. The membership spread between the towns of Modesto and Turlock. Jose Luis Ayala, Johnny Ayala, and Alfonso Ayala put all the possible bonded energies of brotherhood into their band and in collaboration with Flores, a fine musician, the band went on to score a series of hits between 1972 and 1988, when the original version of the band broke up. “Ambition,” or “Ambición,” was the prophetic title of the band’s first hit on the Tejano scene, a record that also marked the first international smash for the Discos Fanas label as well. The band put out dozens of records on labels such as Phonovisa, RCA, and Thump. In the meantime, what was perceived as the band’s original style spread back to musicians in the Nueva Leon [sic] area of Mexico, where it was adopted as the “Monterey [sic] style.”⁶⁵

We see that looking south is not limited to ‘Manitos, but a feedback network exists on both ends of the geo-continuum.

Evidence of a growing uneasiness with the culture of suffering is found in Little Joe’s “Las nubes” (“The Clouds”) a hit in 1977.⁶⁶ Little Joe—born José María de León Hernández in Temple, Texas (1940)—began to make an impact on ‘Manitos starting with his early 1960 performances in the group Little Joe and the Latinaires,

later renamed Little Joe and La Familia. "Las nubes," are brought back as if continuing the sentiment of Jiménez's earlier "Tú y las nubes," although by the early 1970s, when this song was released, the clouds are no longer sinister and the need to suffer is challenged: "*y a veces que estoy cantando mejor quisiera llorar, para que seguir sufriendo si nada puedo lograr*" (and at times when singing, I would rather cry, why continue to suffer if it gets me nowhere). Challenged too is the culture of drinking alcohol, but in the end there is only an attempt, but no guarantee of rest for this "*pobre corazón*" (poor heart). The music features the familiar fast backbeat associated with rock.

Titles too, perpetuate a 'Manito cultural repertoire and focus. Al Hurricane and his son, Al Hurricane Jr. use similar dated titles in 1995 recordings like "El rebelde" ("The Rebel"), and "La que se fue" ("The One That Left") (in *Sigue... "La Leyenda"!!! Al Hurricane*), or "The Daughters of Don Simon," from the oldest Iberian layer (in Al Hurricane Jr., *Siguiendo los pasos de su padre* (Following in His Father's Steps)). Tunes composed by Al Hurricane's nephew, Tiny Morrie's son, Lorenzo Antonio, featuring his sisters, the group Sparx, singing songs like "Que triste estoy" ("How Sad I Am"), and "Vamos a bailar" ("Let's Dance") (in Sparx, *Mándame flores*) (Send Me Flowers) resonate with the old 'Manito repertoire. A glance at the popular 'Manito dance titles in KANW-FM's CD compilation *New Mexico Music, Lo Mejor de New Mexico Music 2009* is revealing:⁶⁷ all are in Spanish; three songs are about clouds, and "Las nubes" is on the list; four songs are focused on drinking "Tragos amargos" ("Bitter Drinks"), "Borracho y loco" ("Drunk and Crazy"), "Polka de vino" ("Honoring [Toasting] Polka"), and "Saca la botella" ("Break out the Bottle"); one is "Vamos a bailar" one is a tribute to New Mexico; and the rest could easily be titles from the early twentieth century or much earlier.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN "AMERICA" AND "LAS AMÉRICAS": THE ROLES OF MEDIA

Among my best memories are childhood visits to the Santa Fe home of my Uncle Elias and his wife, my *madrina* (godmother), Beatriz, who was part Apache. In their home I could listen to the radio playing beautiful but unfamiliar music: Mexican trio music, as I eventually learned. It was rare for 'Manitos to mingle with outsiders, and Mexican immigrants were not any more welcome than anyone else, with some exceptions (for example, my aunt—my mom's sister—whose husband [my uncle] came from Zacatecas). As a child I only understood that the music was clearly attractive and I yearned to hear it more often. Today 'Manitos may still be prejudiced against Mexican immigrants, but popular Mexican music is readily accepted and intermarriages are increasingly common. In particular, mariachi has been featured in public celebrations since the 1930s. The weeklong Albuquerque Mariachi Spectacular Workshops and Concerts began in 1990 and have continued every year. The celebratory nature of mariachi is an overarching reason for its local popularity, but it also offers new challenges for individuals who want to advance their playing techniques on violin, trumpet, guitar, and on the Mexican

vihuela and *guitarrón*. Enrique Lamadrid looks deeper into mariachi when he writes about the contributions of 'Manito musician Roberto Martínez and his musical family (Lorenzo, Robert, and the late Debbie "La Chicanita") and their group, Los Reyes de Alburquerque:

Another gift to listeners from Los Reyes and the Martínez family is a broader awareness of culture and cultural history. By embracing mariachi music and celebrating its energy, the group reconnects Nuevo Mexicanos to a deeper sense of mexicanidad, the feeling of identity and belonging to a greater bi-national Mexico, despite the barriers that crisscross it.⁶⁸

There are a number of radio stations that specialize in perpetuating New Mexican styles; important among them is 89.1, KANW-FM, which has a well-developed Website.⁶⁹ 'Manito ethnomusicologist Peter J. Garcia shares the following about the situation:

Michael Brasher is archiving commercial music, buying copyright, and reissuing compilations with a KANW label. This music is now for sale; not completely organic, but the local Nuevomexicanos are primarily [the ones] purchasing it...still has not become a complete commodity. New Mexico was not this folk culture vacuum; Al Hurricane more than anybody kept New Mexican ears tuned south. Musical archives are extremely useful to generations that are going to survive into Post-America, an alternative to the poisoned American mainstream culture.⁷⁰

Notably, the KANW online store offers a long list of New Mexican popular music, featuring KANW compilations in which many local musicians are featured performing old standards and mixing a variety of styles on a single CD, including *The Best of New Mexico* series and the more recent *Lo Mejor de New Mexico Music* 2009 or *Los Grandes de Nuevo México* 2008 (CDs and DVD). The list also includes a large collection of the big names like Al Hurricane, Sparx, Lorenzo Antonio, Freddie Brown, and even Roberto Mondragón, who is best known for his contemporary renditions of the old repertoire, like "La entrega de los novios" or long-standing favorites like "Cuatro milpas" ("Four Cornfields") and locally composed songs (some that Mondragón penned or popularized), as, for example "Así es Nuevo México" ("This is New Mexico") by Amadeo Lucero. According to one KANW-FM listener member, "the word '*corazón*' seems to appear in most of the songs on the station...more than 'heart,' it is 'sweetheart,' 'dear,' 'courage,' or 'spirit.'"⁷¹

What comes across from KANW's online store is that Spanish-language titles overwhelmingly represent the catalog, and that vintage and mariachi styles co-exist with contemporary styles in a most amazing eclecticism rooted in a Spanish-speaking culture that clearly embraces a borderlands identity and looks south, rather than north, for its musical identities. Take for instance the song "Celoso" ("Jealous Heart") which is featured on Sparx's official (bilingual) Web site. The opening melody leans heavily on the popular 1960s country song "Paper Roses" (composed and made popular by Anita Bryant), uses a bolero mariachi orchestra-

tion, and is sung first in Spanish and then in English. Another example is Lorenzo Antonio's "De rodillas te pido" ("On My Knees I Ask"). The typical twang of 'Manito guitar announces the Spanish 'Manito styled verses, but the chorus starts out emulating (if not quoting) the 1960s "I Will Follow Him," made popular by fifteen-year-old Peggy March (which had a complicated history even then).⁷²

In Denver, Colorado, KUVU-FM features 'Manito music at the prime time of 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. every Sunday in the Canción Mexicana program, which is followed by La Raza Rocks, which primarily features a larger regional sample of Spanish-language dance music. KUVU also hosts regular Santa Fe and New Mexico tours, and in the 1990s devoted resources to the Canciones del Pasado Project, focused on "Songs of the Past" among 'Manitos of New Mexico and southern Colorado.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that, by virtue of the importance placed on the Spanish language, New Mexico appears to be ideally positioned to serve as broker for Latino arts and cultures from Mexico and Latin America and the Caribbean. It remains to be seen whether or not the "American" government at the state level, and the elite structures it supports, will allow this process to develop in a significant way. The current New Mexico Secretary of Cultural Affairs, Stuart Ashman, is the son of Eastern European immigrants who settled in Cuba, and speaks impeccable (Cuban) Spanish. Moreover, the mestizo Governor Bill Richardson's recent surprising ambassadorial overtures to Cuba (summer 2009) suggest that the business possibilities are not lost on local leadership. It is not surprising then, that despite the vociferous "English Only" advocates in nearby Colorado, the President /CEO of the Chamber of the Americas (COTA) Gilberto Cisneros maintains an active email list with regular announcements about the entrepreneurial potential south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

New Mexico is seemingly a world in and of itself. Judging from its popular music, at least the working-class 'Manitos are preserving a regional identity that is more closely tied to Mexico than it is to mainstream U.S. culture, both of which are widely and primarily understood via television and radio. As early as the late 1950s Al Hurrricane's "Sentimiento" ("Feeling") crossed over to Latin American markets.⁷³ His brother Tiny Morrie, the author of "Lonely Letter," no longer performs, but his children are "superstars" in Mexico.⁷⁴ From the MSN Music Web site's Lorenzo Antonio biography:

Multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Lorenzo Antonio was born in Albuquerque, NM, but his greatest success has come in Latin America where his albums have sold millions of copies. Antonio hails from a musical family. His father, Amador Sanchez, a musician, songwriter, and record producer is best-known as Tiny Morrie, whose songs were covered by Generacion [sic] 2000, Pegasso, Bandido, and Sparx. His mother, Gloria Pohl, is a vocalist who has recorded two albums. His grandmother was a concert producer in Albuquerque who produced shows by Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and James Brown. An uncle, Albert Sánchez

(known as Al Hurricane/the Godfather), was the lead singer and leader of the band Bandido. In April 1982, Antonio launched his musical career by winning a songwriting competition at the festival *Juguemos a Cantar*. He performed his song “Vamos a jugar” with his sisters Carolina, Kristyna, Rosamaria, and Verónica, who continued to perform as the vocal group Sparx.⁷⁵

Their glamour doesn't end there, however. Perhaps taking their cue from the prominent norteña artists Los Tigres del Norte, who are known for their charitable gifts for educational purposes (as to the University of California, Los Angeles, or UCLA), Sparx and Lorenzo Antonio also help to ensure that this tradition will not only continue but will also thrive. Starting in 2001, they have been “providing and encouraging higher education for New Mexico students,” awarding fifty-four scholarships in 2009 and nineteen in 2010.⁷⁶ The resistance tactics reflected in the popular music scene underscore a general awareness that ‘Manitos are subjects of hegemony in the larger picture, but will not back down from the right to speak and think in Spanish; this and shared religion inevitably tie us to the south.

Notes

1. I thank my dear friend and colleague ethnomusicologist Peter J. García for his work and insights on New Mexican popular music and contexts. “Prior to the work of ethnomusicologist Peter García, the history of Spanish-language popular music in postwar New Mexico was largely undocumented.” Enrique Lamadrid, “Cielos del Norte, Alma del Río Arriba: Nuevo Mexicano Folk Music Revivals, Recordings 1943–98,” *Journal of American Folklore*, No. 113 (2000), 315).
2. John R. Chavez, *The Lost Land. The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 22.
3. A discussion of Penitentes in Mexico and the Americas is beyond the scope of this essay.
4. For a discussion on the use of “American” for the United States citizenry, see Malena Kuss’s “Prologue” to *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean, An Encyclopedic History*, Volume 1: *Performing Beliefs: Indigenous Peoples of South America, Central America, and Mexico*, Malena Kuss, ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004:xi.
5. Rick Manzanares, director of the Fort Garland Museum, Fort Garland, Colorado, personal communications. January 2010.
6. Peter J. García, telephone communications. January 2010.
7. Phil Miera Jr., electronic communication. July 12, 2010.
8. See Peter J. García, *Decolonizing Enchantment: Lyricism, Ritual and Popular Nuevomexicano Music* (in press). Juan Sebedeo Lucero is ethnomusicologist Peter J. García’s maternal uncle. See also Enrique Lamadrid, “Cielos del Norte, Alma del Río Arriba: Nuevo Mexicano Folk Music Revivals, Recordings 1943–98,” *Journal of American Folklore*, No. 113 (2000), 314–315.
9. See Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), xiv. Greater Mexico is most certainly a part of North America, with Mexican immigrants in Canada to the

furthest north, the United States, and in the vast southern borderlands overlapping the United States on the north and Mexico in the south. It is also an imaginary without borders that encompasses diasporas in neighboring locations and further south to South America.

10. The proliferating brotherhoods and sodalities (sisterhoods) of northern New Spain were consolidated by the Bourbon Reforms of the 1760s.
11. My mother recounts that dad came home from work one day, describing how he had helped to transport a top secret square box very carefully in a car that went to Alamogordo, New Mexico. There is a photograph at the Los Alamos Historical Museum that resonates with this description, of Herbert Lehr and Harry Daghlían "loading the uranium/plutonium core into the vehicle for transportation to the Tower" where the bomb would be tested. Lehr recounts that the photograph was taken the day after the box arrived in Alamogordo (Herbert Lehr in an email correspondence with Heather McLenahan of the Los Alamos Historical Museum, March 30, 2011). Lehr was an Army sergeant at the time. Daghlían was an Armenian physicist who accidentally irradiated himself a month later and died soon thereafter.
12. He was also the victim of a fall off a second-story scaffold in 1950.
13. Juan Sandoval, "Penitentes." Public lecture at the University of New Mexico, 1985. Cited in my dissertation, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcalde, New Mexico: Contexts and Meanings," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles (1993), 199.
14. Ramón Gutiérrez has applied scholarship on the Aztecs and Mayas to promote his argument that the Pueblos used self-mortification for accessing power. See Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
15. When it appears in this essay, the term Chicano represents a political subject position subsequent to the Chicano movement that not all 'Manitos identity with.
16. Lorenzo A. Trujillo, *Southwestern Musicians and Dancers*, personal communications, 1995. There are many regional recordings of the *Entrega de los novios*. See, for example, *The Best of Roberto Mondragón*, Track 18. See also: Enrique R. Lamadrid, "Las Entriegas: Ceremonial Music and Cultural Resistance on the Upper Rio Grande. Research Notes and Catalog of the Cipriano Vigil Collection, 1985–1987," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 65, 1 (1990), 1–19.
17. "S.P.M.D.T.U. Sociedad Proteccion [sic] Mutua de Trabajadores [sic] Unidos." See <http://www.eljeferuben.com/spmdtu.html> (accessed January 17, 2010).
18. See also José A. Rivera, "Mutual Aid Societies in the Hispanic Southwest: Alternative Sources of Community Empowerment." Research Monograph, Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, University of New Mexico (1984).
19. At <http://www.eljeferuben.com/spmdtu.html> (accessed January 17, 2010).
20. My father was once the village school teacher at La Canova (along the hills west of the Rio Grande and of the town of Velarde) and used to walk two miles every day to the little schoolhouse, "even in the snow," where he taught for fifty cents a day. He was the first of our village to attend college and completed one year at Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

21. See James F. Brooks, *Captive and Cousins, Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2002).
22. One ceremonial exception is the ritual space that ‘Manitos have occupied as musicians for the Matachina ceremonial *danza* in some Pueblos. See Brenda M. Romero, “Cultural Interaction in New Mexico as Illustrated in the Matachines Dance” including performance on accompanying CD, in *Musics of Multicultural America*, eds. Kip Lornell and Anne Rasmussen (New York: Schirmer, 1997); Brenda M. Romero, “La Danza Matachina as New Mexican Heritage,” in *Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory*, ed. Phillip B. Gonzalez (Tempe: University of Arizona Press, 2007); and Brenda M. Romero, “A Scholar Intervenes: Matachines, Ritual Continuity, and Cultural Well Being,” in *Remedies for a New West, Healing Landscapes, Histories, and Cultures*, eds. Paricia Nelson Limerick, Andrew Cowell, and Sharon K. Collinge (Tempe: University of Arizona Press, 2009).
 First Nations in New Mexico primarily include various ancient groups of Puebloans (nineteen locations in New Mexico), various Navajo and Apache—Dineh—groups (Athabascans, originally from the far north), and Utes (originally spread throughout Colorado and Utah). They all speak English and many still speak or understand their Native languages. At least in the Pueblos, the elders still know Spanish.
23. A. Michael Martinez, telephone communication. September 5, 2010 and March 30, 2011.
24. This differs markedly from Colorado and Arizona, where English-only advocates proliferate.
25. The site of the NHCC was purchased in 1998 and the Center opened in 2000.
26. Starting around the 1970s, a growing number of ‘Manitos began to talk about unusual customs preserved in their families, often by women, that seemed to point to their ancestry among Sephardic Jews who were forced to become *conversos*, or converts to Catholicism starting in 1492. Many conversos are believed to have migrated to the Americas in the early colonial period, continuing to practice Judaism in secret, thus the term “crypto” Jewish.
27. “UNM School of Law Faculty News.” At <http://lawschool.unm.edu/faculty/directors/ortega/index.php> (accessed January 17, 2010).
28. “National Hispanic Cultural Center.” At <http://www.nhccnm.org> (accessed January 17, 2010).
29. “El Jaguar” (pseudonym), telephone communication. January 2010.
30. Alfonso Ayala Duarte, “El jazz en Monterrey: los fabulosos años 20s,” in *Tradiciones y costumbres de Nuevo León*, ed. by Celso Garza Guajardo (Monterrey: Grafo Print Editores, 1995), 28. Quoted in Cathy Ragland. *Música Norteña. Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation between Nations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 45.
31. Pseudonym, telephone interview. September 13, 2009.
32. Marion Papenbrok, “The Spiritual World of Flamenco,” in *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia*, ed. by Claus Schreiner (Portland Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 51.

33. See Tomás Lozano, *Cantemos al alba. Origins of Songs, Sounds, and Liturgical Drama of Hispanic New Mexico*, edited and translated by Rima Montoya (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).
34. Copies of my CD of old New Mexican folk music (largely historical recovery) have sold through the NHCC gift shop. See Brenda M. Romero, *Canciones de mis patrias*.
35. Spanglish: any creative combination of Spanish and English that makes sense to the listener.
36. For alabado texts, Thomas J. Steele, editor and translator, *The Alabados of New Mexico*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Numerous 'Manito alabados, with commentaries by Enrique R. Lamadrid, can also be heard on the Juan B. Rael Collection online: "Hispano Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande." At <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/rghhtml/rghome.html> (accessed January 17, 2010).
37. The following laud, composed by Jacopone da Todi of Italy in the thirteenth century, during the time of St. Bonaventure, reveals the Penitente belief and world view:

Love is fixed to the cross
 The cross has taken Him and will not let Him go.
 I run and cling to that cross
 that my anguish may not drive me mad.
 To flee would lead me to despair,
 for my name would be cancelled from the book of Love.

Quoted from Biscoglio, Frances M. "Cross, Tree, Bridegroom, and Circle: Markings in the Mystical Journey of Bonaventure and Jacopone da Todi," in *Studia Mystica*, Vol. 11, 1988:34, cited in Brenda M. Romero, "The Matachines Music and Dance in San Juan Pueblo and Alcalde, New Mexico: Contexts and Meanings," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles (1993), 199.

38. See Steven K. Mullins, "Flamenco Gestures: Musical Meaning in Motion." Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, Boulder (2010).
39. The quality of light and the expansive spaces in the region have often been portrayed and romanticized in the visual arts. As a 'Manita scholar, I see interesting correlations between the austerity of these natural features and the Penitente cultural disposition.
40. See Cathy Ragland. *Música Norteña*.
41. See Charles L. Briggs, *Competence in Performance, the Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).
42. "Froggy the Gremlin in the Buster Brown Show." At <http://michelesworld.net/dmm/frog/gremlin/gremlin.htm> (accessed March 30, 2011). See also, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Froggy_the_Gremlin (accessed September 6, 2009).
43. See also "Froggy the Gremlin Plunk Your Magic Twanger." At <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYZazW9Ja1k&feature=related> (accessed March 30, 2011).
44. Although this coincided in my immediate neighborhood with the advent of DDT in the 1950s, it is more widely accepted that the Rio Grande bullfrog was

- consumed by the Louisiana bullfrog (Courtesy of Armando Lamadrid via Enrique R. Lamadrid, electronic communication. September 6, 2010).
45. “Northern New Mexico College exists on the campus of the Spanish American Normal School in El Rito, which was established in the early 1900s to train teachers for the state’s Spanish-speaking population when New Mexico was still a territory. When New Mexico became a state in 1912, the school was identified as one of ten educational institutions to be supported by the state.” Quoted from “Abiquiu Land and Homes.” At <http://abiquiulandandhomes.com/category/el-rito/> (accessed September 1, 2010). My father graduated from this high school in the early 1930s, having paid his way by providing custodial work. My three older sibs (b. 1937, 1938, and 1941) were also privileged to attend this boarding school.
 46. Phil Miera Jr., electronic communication. July 12, 2010.
 47. Pseudonym, telephone communication. 2009.
 48. Phillip B. Gallegos, telephone communication. 2009.
 49. Pseudonym, telephone communication. 2009.
 50. In 1959 my father got on the wrong side of the Rio Arriba political fence and he was transferred to Gallup, New Mexico to be an assistant director of Human Services until his retirement in 1973, when my parents returned to northern New Mexico.
 51. I lived in and around the Bay Area in California from spring 1969 to winter 1973, when I moved to Brisbane, Australia for three years with then husband, Australian Jeffrey Service and our daughter Bethrah. In winter 1976 we came back pregnant with our second child (Juanita). During the years in Brisbane I studied Japanese at the University of Queensland (“the Uni”) and voice with Irish soprano Margaret Nickson at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music (as formerly named). Mr. Nickson was the chair of the Music School at the Uni. I also studied composition with their son John. Ms. Nickson thought I should study music formerly, which encouraged me to pursue music as a life-time endeavor. I take this opportunity to thank this gifted family for the significant role they played in helping me find my way to the work I love.
 52. “El Jaguar,” telephone communication. January 2010.
 53. The exhibition originated at the Experience Music Project/Science Fiction Museum, October 2007–September 2008. See “empfsm.org” at <http://www.empsfm.org/exhibitions/index.asp?articleID=910> (accessed September 6, 2009).
 54. Excerpt of abstract penned by Michelle Habell-Pallan:
As a cross-sector public scholarship project created within the context of intense anti-immigrant politics and nativist sentiment, the exhibit attempts to shift discussion about national culture. The 5,000 square foot exhibit, guest curated by University of Washington faculty and on display at the Experience Music Project/Science Fiction Museum in Seattle, does so by re-framing mainstream narratives of U.S.-produced rock and roll. By breaking down the sound of pop music, the exhibit demonstrates that U.S. based Latino communities have played crucial roles in the making of what some consider quintessentially American musics, including rock and roll, hip hop, punk, and country.
 55. See Norma E. Cantú, Norma E., Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Brenda M. Romero, ed. *Dancing across Borders: Danzas y bailes mexicanos* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 263–88.

56. The large front rooms of Pueblo homes, which indicate family prominence and status for their ability to host important large gatherings, are no doubt modeled on the large front rooms of the colonial haciendas. For instance, in the Pueblo of Jemez only those families with this kind of space can host the Infant's House, where the image of the baby Jesus resides for two weeks from December 24 to January 6. Food is constantly served to all and sundry and impromptu ceremonial dancing takes place in honor of the Christ child.
57. The term *cotilio* is from Eufelia Romero, 'Manita elder and my mother, personal communication. Lyden, New Mexico. September 7, 2009.
58. Marie "Keta" Miranda, personal communication. San Antonio, Texas. February 22, 2010.
59. From my familiarity with Native cultures in New Mexico, I would say it does not come from Native dancing, as it seems unlikely that indigenous people would ever have linked arms in such an intimate way in public.
60. See Brenda M. Romero, "La Creciente popularidad del mariachi en los Estados Unidos," in *De Occidente es el mariachi, y de México*, ed. Álvaro Ochoa Serrano (Zamora, México: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2001), 171–180.
61. See Tomás Lozano, *Cantemos al alba. Origins of Songs, Sounds, and Liturgical Drama of Hispanic New Mexico*, edited and translated by Rima Montoya (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).
62. Enrique Lamadrid, "'El sentimiento trágico de la vida.' Notes on Regional Styles in Nuevo Mexicano Ballads," *Aztlán*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1997), 1–21.
63. See Romero, "The Matachines Music and Dance."
64. Complete song lyrics for this and other songs discussed here are easily accessed online.
65. Eugene Chadbourne, All Music Guide <http://www.answers.com/topic/los-humildes> (accessed September 7, 2009).
66. Little Joe used lyrics composed by Juan Hernández Amalguer (aka Lizandro Flores), and not those composed by Ramón María Solano.
67. "89.1 FM, KANW." At <http://www.kanw.com> (accessed January 17, 2010).
68. "'El Rey de Albuquerque'—Roberto Martínez and his New Mexican Mariachi: A Transnational Legacy," *Smithsonian Folkways Magazine* (2010), 1–3. At <http://www.folkways.si.edu> (accessed September 6, 2010).
69. Peter J. García, telephone communication. 2009. See <http://www.kanw.com>.
70. Peter J. García, telephone communication with the author, spring 2009.
71. Kathy Chilton in *The Announcer*, KANW-FM online newsletter, Spring 2009. <http://www.kanw.com/> (accessed September 7, 2009).
72. "I Will Follow Him." At http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Will_Follow_Him (accessed January 17, 2010).
73. Peter J. García, telephone communication. 2009.
74. Lamadrid, "'Cielos del Norte, Alma del Río Arriba,'" 314-22.
75. MSN Music, Lorenzo Antonio Biography. At <http://music.msn.com/music/artist-biography/lorenzo-antonio> (accessed January 17, 2010).
76. Sparx Lorenzo Antonio Foundation. At <http://www.sparxlorenzoantonio-foundation.org/english/home.asp> (accessed September 3, 2010).

“*Todos me llaman El Gringo*”

*Place, Identity, and Erasure within the New Mexico
Hispano Music Scene*

LILLIAN GORMAN ■

Several years ago, during the spring of 2007, as I drove home from work in Las Vegas, New Mexico, I tuned into one of the local AM stations to hear its variety of New Mexican Spanish music. KFUN AM in Las Vegas, New Mexico, primarily caters to the Spanish musical tastes of the 83 percent Hispanic northern New Mexico town. On this particular day, in place of the normal programming, Mr. Shawn Keihne, a self-described *gringo* or Anglo, was introducing both himself and his new song, “El Corrido Del Gringo.”¹ Kiehne announced that he would be promoting his new album at the dance where he would be playing a few days later. An Anglo singing Spanish music in New Mexico did not seem unusual to me; Anglos and Hispanos in New Mexico have been interacting for nearly two hundred years in the region.² I attended El Gringo’s dance that weekend, and he sang the typical mix of *rancheras*, *cumbias*, country, and rock that I was accustomed to hearing by other local Hispano bands in Las Vegas. When El Gringo appeared on the weekly Univision show *Don Francisco Presenta* several months later on July 18, 2007, I was eager to see how New Mexico music would be spotlighted on this nationally and internationally syndicated program. Yet, with the exception of Don Francisco’s introductory remarks, “*nacido en Albuquerque, Nuevo México, en la comunidad de Los Lunas*” (born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the community of Los Lunas), any mention of New Mexico and/or New Mexico music was conspicuously absent from the entire interview. Instead, Don Francisco emphasized the uniqueness of El Gringo’s musical intervention and Kiehne spoke of his exposure to Mexicans in the border region of El Paso, his regional Mexican musical influences, and his support for undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States.

In the course of a four-minute interview, El Gringo's narrative, constructed by both Don Francisco and Kiehne, created a musical space void of any traces of the New Mexico Hispano music scene. Yet, in the summer of 2007 El Gringo was already part of the New Mexico Hispano musical landscape. His participation in multiple local dances, consistent radio airplay on New Mexico music stations, and his inclusion on CD compilations of New Mexico Spanish music testify to this presence. Therefore, it seems impossible to map El Gringo's musical trajectory without contextualizing it within New Mexico Hispano music production. It is not my intention to impose musical origins on the figure of El Gringo or to question his musical influences. However, I would like to draw attention to the competing and, sometimes, contradictory narratives that exist around El Gringo's musical production. In this article, I will engage in a critical inquiry of the construction of El Gringo's musical persona and the distinct narrative plots present within this construction. Focusing primarily on the time period between 2007–2009, I will problematize El Gringo's discourse of uniqueness and reveal a complex relationship between place, identity, and privilege that both excludes and includes the New Mexico Hispano music scene. Ultimately, I will emphasize the dynamic cultural processes occurring within and around El Gringo's musical production and their implications on New Mexico Hispano music.

The notions of musical persona and narrative are crucial when contextualizing El Gringo's musical production. Philip Auslander explains that what "musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae."³ Additionally, he proposes that both "the musical work and its execution serve the musician's performance of a persona."⁴ Auslander's analysis allows for the connection between music, identity, and performance. He also clarifies that the performance of the musical persona is a result of social interaction and "not necessarily a direct representation of the individual musician's personality, though it may be."⁵ In my analysis of the musical production of El Gringo, consistent with Auslander's theoretical framework, I will consider not only the musical and lyrical content of El Gringo's songs as part of this persona, but also his performance of an identity based in social interactions both on and off stage. These interactions include the promotion and reception of El Gringo by the Spanish and English media, by other musicians, radio stations, and New Mexico music fans, as well as his self-promotion.

When considering the notion of narrative, it is helpful to briefly explore Pablo Vila's approach to this concept in his study of Mexican ethnic identity on the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border. Vila explains:

[P]eople develop a sense of themselves as subjects *in part* by imagining themselves as protagonists in stories—hence my interest in the narrative identities of border residents. People generally act (or fail to act) at least partly according to how they understand their place in any number of social relations whose meaning—however fragmented, contradictory, or partial—is narratively constructed.⁶

Vila explores the plots that organize the narratives of his participants on the U.S.-Mexico border. He locates several consistent narrative plots among his respondents. Some of these include the idea that “all poverty and social problems are Mexican.”⁷ I propose that utilizing this same model to unpack both the (self) promotion and musical production of El Gringo as narratives is a productive way to identify the discourses, or plots, about identity constructed by and around El Gringo. Additionally, Vila emphasizes that in every effort to define the “self” one also creates “the other” as part of the construction of an identity narrative. He stresses that “the categories we use to describe the realities that surround us, as well as the interpellations we accept as valid to address ourselves and ‘others,’ are in some way overdetermined by the different stories we tell about ourselves and ‘others.’”⁸ Vila elaborates that the presence of the border and the active flows and movement across it complicates the “self/other dichotomy.” Dynamic narrative plots of self and other within the construction of the musical persona of El Gringo are always interconnected; they work as relational aspects that define identity, as Kathryn Woodward has suggested,⁹ and are key to understanding some of the consistent themes that appear in these stories. These themes include uniqueness, language, and identity. In what follows, I explore these narrative plots while simultaneously contextualizing them within the discourses of New Mexico Hispano music.

When utilizing the phrase “New Mexico Hispano music scene” I refer to the musicians, artists, fans, promoters, musical associations, and local radio stations that identify their music as “New Mexico Hispano music.” This presupposes that the music is generally produced by those of Hispanic descent in New Mexico and that the music is usually in Spanish, or both English and Spanish. Although scholarship regarding traditional New Mexico Spanish music extends back to 1915 with Aurelio M. Espinosa’s study on the *romance* in New Mexico,¹⁰ there has been almost no recent scholarship focusing on the contemporary production of Spanish popular music by Hispano artists in the state. Exceptions to this are Brenda Romero’s essay in this volume, Peter J. García’s 2003 dissertation entitled “*La Onda Nuevo Mexicana: Multi-Sited Ethnography, Ritual Contexts, and Popular Traditional Musics in New Mexico*,”¹¹ and Mary Jane Walker’s 2008 dissertation, “Family Music and Family Bands in New Mexico Music.” García’s work highlights a few of the foundational figures in contemporary New Mexico Spanish popular music, particularly the Sánchez family (Al Hurricane, Al Hurricane Jr., Jerry Dean, Baby Gaby, Tiny Morrie, Lorenzo Antonio, and Sparx). Walker’s dissertation focuses on two popular family bands in New Mexico Hispano music: The Blue Ventures de Louis Sánchez and Los Garrapatas. In this work, when exploring aspects of New Mexico Hispano music, I choose to use definitions articulated by the actual musicians, radio stations, fans, and the two music associations in New Mexico. I use these definitions as a lens through which to view the ensemble of plots communicated through the musical persona of El Gringo.

For example, style and place are two frequently mentioned elements when New Mexico music fans define the genre and they are key to understanding El Gringo’s place within the New Mexico Hispano music scene. New Mexico music fan and musician Urbano Ortega explains:

New Mexico is the fifth-largest state in the nation by area. From Vegas alone to Las Cruces is 345 miles and the culture changes between Albuquerque and Cruces... It changes between Albuquerque and Española... So I think that's the big problem with how we define New Mexico music... Is it by what you play? Or is it by where you're from?¹²

Indeed, those involved with the New Mexico Hispano music scene classify New Mexico music according to both of these criteria. Las Vegas native, and popular New Mexico recording artist, Gonzalo imagines New Mexico music as belonging to a space between Socorro (central New Mexico) and Denver, Colorado.¹³ Notably, Gonzalo locates New Mexico music within the northern half of New Mexico and southern Colorado. Yet, he also ascribes to stylistic characterizations when defining the music. He explains, “The most important thing to New Mexican music to me when I'm recording new stuff is to try and do stuff that's new and fresh but with that New Mexico *style* or *sound*.”¹⁴ Fans also use style as a standard for defining New Mexico music. Long-time New Mexico music fan Benjamin Bencomo states, “It's completely its own genre. I mean obviously it borrows from *norteño mexicano* music... and a lot of the songs were originally *corridos* from Mexico. But it's its own sound. It's different from Tejano, it's different from *norteño*. It's completely its own sound that's developed.”¹⁵ That “New Mexico sound” is often difficult to describe, as I witnessed when asking the above-mentioned individuals and a subgroup of eight additional New Mexico music fans residing in Las Vegas to define it. However, fans seem to have no problem identifying the sound when they hear it. As this article illustrates, these sometimes separate and sometimes overlapping understandings of New Mexico music create different interpretations of El Gringo's musical work in New Mexico. For instance, if one chooses to define New Mexico music by one's place of origin, as Ortega and Gonzalo suggest, El Gringo is indeed part of the New Mexico Hispano music family due to his upbringing in Los Lunas (a farming and ranching town approximately twenty miles south of Albuquerque). Yet, when issues of style are employed as discriminating factors, El Gringo's place in the New Mexico Hispano music scene becomes complicated. These notions of place and style will continue to resonate as I trace El Gringo's musical texts.

BEING A PART OF (OR APART FROM?) THE NEW MEXICO MUSIC *FAMILIA*

“Born in America, Heart in Mexico.” This is the headline for Josh Kun's July 20, 2008 feature story in the *New York Times* about El Gringo. The photograph accompanying the article showcases El Gringo standing in the middle of a desolate country road. The cloudy sky in this unnamed desert locale extends endlessly behind the solitary figure of Kiehne. Clad in jeans, an un-tucked black Western-style shirt and a black cowboy hat, El Gringo's image embodies the very notion of singularity. (See figure 15.1) The photo seems to communicate that El Gringo's



Figure 15.1 El Gringo. Photograph used by the *New York Times*. July 20, 2008. © John Burcham. Used by permission.



Figure 15.2 Official advertising poster for the 18th Annual Hispano Music Awards. © Courtesy of the New Mexico Hispano Music Association. Used by permission.

musical persona and his musical project stand alone in their originality and uniqueness. I would like to juxtapose this image with another widely circulated image of El Gringo produced just six months later.

“Generations of music growing and moving forward.” This is the slogan for the Annual Hispano Music Awards show held every year in Española, New Mexico. This slogan, along with the images of featured performers, appears on the official poster for the 18th annual awards show held on January 17, 2009. In the poster, El Gringo’s image, deep in song, appears nestled between other New Mexico artists. Second from the right in the line-up of artists, El Gringo appears in between Matthew Martínez Jr. and Ernie Montoya of the band Cuarenta y Cinco. Well-known local producer and recording artist Steve Chávez also appears on the poster to the far left. (See figure 15.2) In this image, El Gringo appears as part of a collective identity: New Mexico Hispano entertainers. The image goes even further to express this collectivity by way of the slogan. The use of the word “generation” implies a family unit. Essentially, the New Mexico Hispano Music Association, based out of Española, visually represents New Mexico Hispano entertainers as a family of multiple generations. The theme song for the association also reinforces this idea of family unity. It states, “We come with a purpose to unite *artistas musicales de nuestra tierra del encanto*, the New Mexico Hispano Music Association.”¹⁶ The use of the third person plural highlights the joining together of individuals to form a collective voice for the New Mexico music family. The code-switched lyrics underscore the linguistic hybridity characteristic of this family. The mission statement for the New Mexico Hispano Entertainers Association, based out of Albuquerque, is also consistent with this notion of family and continuity. It states, “The mission of NMHEA is to honor, promote, present and preserve the New Mexico Hispanic performer, group or entertainment entity; and to preserve and promote Hispanic cultures in New Mexico; both in the traditional sense of our elders and the contemporary sense of our youth.”¹⁷ New Mexico Hispano music artist, and self-proclaimed “King of New Mexico Music,” Tobías René, underscores this notion of family. He states, “The beauty of the land of the people... it’s like having one big huge family.”¹⁸ Maria Garduño, Las Vegas disc jockey of New Mexico Spanish music for forty-two years, defines New Mexico music in similar terms. She explains: “We grew up with it... My seven children grew up with New Mexico music... All of our *artistas* are friends, every one of them, and they make you feel so good... I have an interview with them and it’s just home. We talk about their parents... and you know it’s education. It’s like I say, *cultura, tradición y educación* (culture, tradition, and education). They all come together with our music.”¹⁹ Garduño highlights the educational process of teaching music informally within New Mexico Hispano families as part of New Mexico Hispano tradition and culture. This imagery is an important point of departure from which to view the solitary figure of El Gringo that appears in the *New York Times*. By way of his story’s uniqueness, the debut of El Gringo’s musical persona apparently excludes this notion of collectivity and solidarity with a New Mexico musical family.²⁰

“*Es algo diferente. Es algo fresco*” (It is something different. It is something fresh). The discourse of uniqueness is a consistent narrative thread in interviews and

promotional materials centered on the musical stylings of El Gringo. When the Univision news program *Aquí y Ahora* featured a story on El Gringo on July 30, 2008, this discourse was present from the first words of the report. Carmen Domenici of *Aquí y Ahora* begins, “A juzgar por las botas y el sombrero, pareciera que se tratara de un cantante mexicano del género norteño, pero al observarlo con detenimiento es claro que este artista **no es como los demás.**” (Judging from the boots and the hat, he looks like a Mexican singer of the *norteño* genre, but after carefully observing him it becomes clear that this artista **is not like the others.**)²¹ Domenici’s introduction highlights the distinctiveness of El Gringo’s persona. El Gringo reiterates this idea in his own words. In an interview with the host for the MTV3 show *Remexa* on October 30, 2009, El Gringo explains, “I’m one of the first Anglo guys to actually sing *norteño* and *banda* music...” He then describes his musical sound. He states that it is “*una fusión de banda, norteño, unos toquecitos de la música country, que a mí me encanta* (a fusion of *banda*, *norteño*, and a few little touches of country music, which I love), maybe a little bit of pop/rock influences, so it’s going to be kind of **fresh** sound.”²² Finally, in a promotional video recorded for the Internet site terra.com, El Gringo describes his vision for his music: “*siempre he tenido una visión para mi proyecto del Gringo. Es algo diferente, es algo fresco.*”²³ (I have always had a vision for my El Gringo project. It is something different, it is something fresh). The discourse of uniqueness prevalent in El Gringo’s narrative uses *difference* as a key concept in understanding El Gringo’s musical project. El Gringo is different because he is Anglo and sings in Spanish. El Gringo is different because he sings in the regional Mexican musical genre and he is different because he fuses musical styles. This notion of “difference” is consistent with Kathryn Woodward’s construction of difference when defining “self” in relation to “others.” According to El Gringo’s narrative, there are no *others* who do what he does or represent what he represents. No other artist crosses borders of musical genre and ethnic identity like he does.

However, El Gringo’s inclusion within the New Mexico Hispano music scene actually erases this notion of difference in favor of a notion of common identity. This is evident in the visual representation of the poster for the 2009 New Mexico Hispano Music Awards, the poster for the 2010 awards, and his very presence as an invited musical performer at both awards shows. (See figure 15.3) This inclusion is also clear when considering El Gringo’s consistent airplay on the major local radio stations that dedicate programming to New Mexico Spanish music. Broadcasting since 1941, Las Vegas-based radio station KFUN AM announces on its Web site that it is “the radio station with the longest running (nonstop) Spanish program in the entire State of New Mexico.”²⁴ In its visual catalog of “New Mexico Spanish Artists,” an image of El Gringo appears among sixteen other New Mexico Spanish music artists. In addition, the Albuquerque-based radio station KANW 89.1 clearly states in its pre-recorded sound bites that it plays *New Mexico* music: “89.1 KANW—proud to feature New Mexico music for the people and by the people.” El Gringo appears in four of the yearly CD compilations of music produced by KANW since 2005. The 2005 production is entitled “KANW New Mexico Music—The Gold Series 2005 ‘The Tradition Continues...’” El Gringo’s inclusion in such an anthology already implies that he is part of a musical conversation within the New



Figure 15.3 Official advertising poster for the 19th Annual Hispano Music Awards. © Courtesy of the New Mexico Hispano Music Association. Used by permission.

Mexico Hispano music scene. There is no discourse of difference present in these narratives. On the contrary, by virtue of simply being from New Mexico and singing in Spanish, El Gringo has entered into a New Mexico Hispano music family that has put no significant emphasis on his Anglo identity.

The notion of El Gringo’s musical fusions as new, innovative, and different is troubling when locating his music within the trajectory of the local New Mexico Hispano music scene. Indeed, El Gringo’s heavily promoted 2007 album *Algo Sucedió* reflects the influence of country music. In fact, the guitar sound on the title track “Algo Sucedió” in both its album version (with an acoustic guitar) and pop version (with an electric guitar) reflect this country sound. El Gringo also wrote Spanish versions of two country hits for this album. These songs include Toby Keith’s 2003 single “I Love this Bar” (“Yo Amo Este Bar”) and the Rodney Crowell song “Making Memories of Us” (“Recuerdos Bonitos”), most recently popularized by Keith Urban in 2005. Adding instrumentation consistent with banda and norteña music, El Gringo does in fact transform these country songs into norteño tunes. When addressing this sound on his album, El Gringo explains, “My voice is a country voice, and I grew up on country music, so I couldn’t really hide that.”²⁵ El Gringo’s narrative consistently roots his musical influences and tastes in country and uses these roots as a novel ingredient in the production of a Spanish music form.

Yet, El Gringo’s narrative of uniqueness conceals the commonplace nature of such articulations between country music, rock, and regional Spanish musical

forms among New Mexico Hispano music artists. Perhaps influenced by the tremendously successful fusion of Tejano and country music produced by the Texas Tornados in the 1990's, New Mexico Hispano artists often mix country music into their musical repertoires. The Web site for the New Mexico band Agua Negra states that the group "can be heard mixing in popular rock, blues, and country tunes with their lively New Mexican Music."²⁶ Cuarenta y Cinco, an extremely popular band from northern New Mexico, also describes their musical style on their Web page:

Cuarenta y Cinco is one of New Mexico's top groups and has been since its start in 1991. The traditional sound of New Mexico is what people think of when they hear Cuarenta y Cinco play its upbeat music... Cuarenta y Cinco has had much success by the blend of rancheras, cumbias, bales, boleros, Country/Western, Oldies, and Modern Rock. The ability of the band to go from hard core rancheras, to Country to Rock and back again is what makes them one of New Mexico's best known variety bands.²⁷

Cuarenta y Cinco's Web site actually recognizes the mixing of styles as a "traditional sound of New Mexico." Indeed, I have attended multiple Cuarenta y Cinco dances, and one of the group's hallmarks is not only mixing styles within their repertoire of songs, but also mixing styles within the songs themselves. At every dance that I have attended, Cuarenta y Cinco always transforms Johnny Lee's 1980 hit "Looking for Love" into a bilingual Spanish/English two-step classic. New Mexican Hispanos have consistently created a space for country music in which it actively intertwines with regional Spanish music forms.

In fact, Abenicio Sánchez's local 1997 hit "Mariachi Cowboy" not only captures this mixing of musical forms (mariachi and country), but also illuminates this fusion as an actual space for the production of a cultural identity. Sánchez sings "¿Quién soy? ¿Quién soy? Who am I? Who am I? Pues, soy el mariachi cowboy." The tendency to incorporate country music into Spanish musical forms in New Mexico conveys something much more than New Mexico artists' attraction to country music. The image of the mariachi cowboy communicates an identity that reflects a rural Hispano lifestyle. Thus, when El Gringo's narrative plot of uniqueness obscures the history of genre mixing among country music and regional Spanish music forms in New Mexico, the narrative is not only erasing this musical tradition, but also an identity, a life experience. In his study of Mascogo capeyuye singing in this volume, Alejandro L. Madrid proposes that "music as dialectical sounding could work as a medium that makes visible the invisible via a specific articulation in the present and provides a possible place for that past in a new narrative of the present towards the future." It seems that El Gringo's notion of uniqueness performs an opposite action. The discursive articulations around his musical stylings as "*algo innovador*" and "a fresh sound" actually render a local identity invisible. In a Derridian sense, the discourses of difference in El Gringo end up deferring or postponing the recognition of particular musical practices within the New Mexico Hispano music scene, as well as that scene itself, when the discourse

is aimed at the mainstream U.S. and the Spanish-language musical industries. This act of *différance* within El Gringo's discourse is worth exploring.

"PODEMOS HABLAR ESPANGLISH TAMBIÉN":
CONSTRUCTING LINGUISTIC UNIQUENESS

An ancillary component to El Gringo's narrative plot of uniqueness regards Kiehne's account of his acquisition of Spanish. Perhaps, the most talked-about facet of El Gringo's identity is his ability to speak Spanish, and Don Francisco focuses a significant amount of time of his short interview on this fact. Don Francisco begins the interview on *Don Francisco Presenta* with the following question: "*¿Y empezaste a hablar español cuándo tenías 15 años?*" (So, you started speaking Spanish when you were 15 years old?) El Gringo responds, "*Más o menos sí. Lo aprendí en la high school como dicen aquí y también trabajando en un rancho allá fuerita de El Paso, Texas, con puros vaqueros mexicanos que they did not speak English y yo tuve que aprender español.*" (More or less. I learned it in high school as they say here, and also working in a ranch outside of El Paso, Texas, with only Mexican cowboys, they did not speak English and I had to learn Spanish.) After this explanation, Don Francisco asks again, "*Y empezaste a los 15 años, ¿no?*" (And you started at 15 years old, right?) to which El Gringo responds, "*Más o menos, ahah.*" (More or less, ahah). In this short exchange Don Francisco emphasizes the novelty of learning to speak Spanish at the age of fifteen. His repetition of the question makes clear this emphasis. El Gringo then adds, "*Podemos hablar espanglish también.*" (We can speak Spanglish too.) This acknowledgement of code-switching, a common linguistic practice among U.S. Latino populations, actually receives no comment from either Don Francisco or his other guest, the popular radio personality El Piolín.²⁸ Instead, Don Francisco changes the subject to that of El Gringo's Mexican wife.

Nevertheless, he again returns to the topic of language acquisition when he asks the same question in the last minute of the interview, "*¿Así que tú antes de los 15 años no hablabas una palabra de español?, ¿nada?*" (So, before the age of 15 you did not speak a word of Spanish? Nothing?) El Gringo answers, "*Sí, hablaba poquito, pero yo siempre crecí... de hecho mi papá habla español, y yo crecí escuchando el acento, entonces yo no batallé con el acento como otros gringos batallan*" (Yes, I spoke a little bit, but I always grew up... in fact, my father speaks Spanish, and I grew up listening to the accent, so I did not struggle with the accent like other gringos do). Though neither El Gringo nor Don Francisco explicitly reference New Mexico during their conversation (with the exception of the introduction), El Gringo's mention of Spanish being *around* him growing up, his father's own proficiency in the language, and his citing of the practice of code-switching all embody a linguistic portrait that characterizes New Mexico. Additionally, El Gringo makes clear that he was exposed to Spanish pronunciation and for this reason did not have difficulty with the Spanish accent. This linguistic profile fits that of a majority of young Hispano New Mexicans of the same age/generation as

Kiehne.²⁹ As a result of language shift over more than fifty years in the region, most young New Mexicans grow up with exposure to the language and a sense of pronunciation, but without the opportunity to engage in monolingual discourse in Spanish in order to fully acquire the language.³⁰ Yet, Don Francisco also seems to overlook this comment and, again, changes the subject. Upon conclusion of the show, Don Francisco repeats, “*Comenzó cantando en inglés y recién aprendió el español a los 15 años. Demuestra de que nuestras dos culturas no son tan lejanas y nos ha permitido ver cómo un gringo hace el crossover al español.*” (He started singing in English and only learned Spanish at 15. This shows that our cultures are not that far apart and allows us to see how a gringo can do a crossover into Spanish.) Curiously, it is Don Francisco’s own framing of El Gringo’s story during the interview that seems to construct a discourse of uniqueness. Don Francisco’s emphasis on the novelty of El Gringo’s linguistic situation ignores the traces of New Mexico that Kiehne provides in his own answers. Essentially, the narrative ignores the over four hundred years of Spanish language use in New Mexico and the over two hundred years of contact with English in the land. This process renders the place of New Mexico, and the linguistic experience of its peoples, invisible from El Gringo’s narrative plot. It also essentializes Anglo identity in New Mexico as devoid of any processes of transculturation between Hispanic and Anglo culture.

It is important to recognize, however, that El Gringo’s acquisition of a formal and standardized variety of Spanish does differ from the experience of many Hispano New Mexicans. El Gringo speaks of traveling to Mexico to learn Spanish. He explains on the show *Aquí y Ahora*, “*Yo y mi hermano fuimos allá. Tomamos un descanso o un breik, como dicen, de la universidad y fuimos a México de turistas para aprender español.*” (My brother and I went there. We took a break, as they say, from the university and we went to Mexico as tourists to learn Spanish.) Taking a semester off from school alludes to a privileged socioeconomic position that would allow one to take a break; however, I am more interested in El Gringo’s privileged position regarding the perception of his Spanish by others. In his song “El Corrido Del Gringo,” he mentions that he is told that he speaks like a Mexican. The acceptance and support he feels from his Mexican audience contrast sharply with the experiences of many Chicanos in their attempts to recover and maintain their Spanish. Whereas El Gringo can say that “*la recepción ha sido muy bien y la gente me apoya*” (the reception has been very good and the people support me), New Mexico Hispanos and the larger Chicano population in the Southwest have oftentimes felt criticism regarding their Spanish. Carrasco and Riegelhaupt’s 2003 study documents the differential treatment that Anglo teachers and Chicano teachers received from Mexican families in Guanajuato. Their study states, “While the non-Chicano bilingual teachers seemed to be receiving preferential treatment, the Chicano teachers were receiving an identity crisis as the result of a language and culture clash with their Guanajuato host families.”³¹ As Carrasco and Riegelhaupt demonstrate, and as I have observed both with my Spanish heritage language students and in my own experience, Anglos and Chicanos who learn Spanish are held to different standards. El Gringo receives praise, while many

Chicano musicians are criticized. New Mexico musician David García underscores this point:

Many of those things that were criticized for local groups weren't criticized in terms of people talking about his Spanish. His Spanish was somewhat better...in terms of conversations with other musicians, that's a common thing that I would encounter...with musicians that were older, they would critique a lot of younger musicians, like saying they don't even know what they're singing...they're not pronouncing words right, they're garbling the language...A lot of people would say that he speaks much better Spanish than any of the Chicanos...the language he speaks is less stigmatized than New Mexico Spanish and so that gives him access to a bigger audience.³²

García highlights the difference in reception, dialect, and experience between El Gringo and New Mexico Hispano musicians. In essence, the fact that El Gringo actually does not speak the local New Mexico dialect of Spanish, but instead a standard or less stigmatized variety, not only allows for greater commercial appeal, but also highlights the perceived deficiencies in New Mexico Hispano musicians' Spanish.

"*AQUÍ PASÓ TODO*": PLACE-BASED IDENTITY NARRATIVES

Place identification and regional identification play significant roles in the discourse of New Mexico Hispano musicians. The ways that El Gringo's narrative plot chooses to embrace (or not embrace) place-based identities are quite distinct from the strategies that several New Mexico Hispano music artists choose to employ. In a promotional clip on his Web site, New Mexico musician Tobías René describes himself with the following words, "I'm a native New Mexican. I was born in Santa Fe, the capital city."³³ Narratives of nativity and locating specific places of origin within New Mexico are fundamental to New Mexico Hispano musicians' biographies. Again, in an effort to define "self" against "others," New Mexico Hispano artists clearly identify themselves as having roots in New Mexico. The band Agua Negra exemplifies this strategy of self-definition. The band's Web site states, "in 1894, Agua Negra, New Mexico, a town located on the Mora Land Grant, had its name changed to Holman, New Mexico, after the postmaster Joseph S. Holman. 100 years later, in 1994, the pride, honor and dignity of Agua Negra were restored with the creation of the band Agua Negra—Música Nuevo Mexicana."³⁴ The region of Mora is synonymous with Agua Negra's own name. David García comments on how this connection to place among New Mexico Hispano artists reflects itself in their performances. He explains that New Mexico Hispano artists tend to "nativize" each song and make them local by referencing distinct locales connected to their audience. He clarifies:

Their songs are tied to everything that's happening around them. It's tied to the voices that are singing them, and I think that's what makes them tied

to location, those sort of performative strategies that people use to make a connection with the audience, and the audience in many ways comes back again and again and they request the same songs and they kind of rework those relationships between the musicians and the audience.³⁵

García emphasizes plot lines of place-based identity that are at work not only in the Hispano artists' explicit descriptions of themselves, but also in the discursive and reciprocal relationship with their audiences.

Though *El Gringo* does explicitly state in various interviews, news articles, and performances that he is from either Albuquerque or Los Lunas, this place-centered identification does not play a central role in his discourse. Instead, *El Gringo* invokes the space of Rancho Cornudas, his family's ranch as a place of significance in his narrative plot. The Cornudas mountain range is located in Otero County in southeastern New Mexico and extends into Texas. *El Gringo* ambiguously identifies the ranch as near El Paso, Texas. This is, perhaps, due to its proximity to Cornudas, Texas (named after the mountain range). This strategy of identification with Texas has filtered into various texts, including an article on *El Gringo's* own Web site and a reference to him in the October 30, 2007 edition of *People en Español*, identifying *El Gringo* as Tejano.³⁶ This narrative also locates *El Gringo's* storyline on the U.S.-Mexico border and invokes notions of national identity, rather than New Mexico regional identity. Although *El Gringo* did describe in great detail on local Las Vegas radio that the photo that serves as the cover of his album was taken in Albuquerque just south of the historic Barelas neighborhood, this image is eclipsed by the visual and textual references to Rancho Cornudas that dominate the visual narrative of *El Gringo's* musical map. A promotional interview posted on *El Gringo's* Web site showcases multiple images of Rancho Cornudas. *El Gringo* explains the purpose of the video:

¿Qué tal amigos? Yo soy *El Gringo* y les doy la bienvenida a un rancho aquí afuera de El Paso, Tejas. Les quiero enseñar un día típico que yo pasé aquí trabajando como vaquero, las cosas que hacemos para que vayan conociendo y para que vayan conociéndome un poco mejor a mí, mi historia cómo aprendí español, y cómo descubrí la música norteña y cómo me enamoré de la cultura mexicana, porque aquí pasó todo.

(How are you my friends? I am *El Gringo* and I welcome you to a ranch here outside of El Paso, Texas. I want to show you a typical day that I spent when I was working here as a cowboy, the things we do so you become familiar and you get to know me a little better, my story how I learned Spanish, and how I discovered norteña music, and how I fell in love with Mexican culture, because this is where everything happened.)³⁷

El Gringo associates his entire artistic path in Mexican norteño music with the place of Rancho Cornudas and the border. This association allows for a narrative

that is geographically situated close to Mexico and to Mexicans. Indeed, El Gringo’s biography on his Web site explains that he

learned to speak Spanish while working alongside Mexican “vaqueros” on his family’s cattle ranch near El Paso, Texas. With norteño music blaring from the truck radio as they drove across the ranch, El Gringo would ask his vaquero friends to explain the lyrics to him, and he picked up the language over time. He fell in love with the Mexican culture and this style of music and began writing songs in Spanish soon thereafter.³⁸

This narrative creates a “structure of reference”³⁹ that establishes the border region as the site in which El Gringo meets Mexicans, learns from Mexicans, and falls in love with Mexican music. In a sense, by citing the border as the place of origin of El Gringo’s musical persona, he sheds any notion of regional U.S. or New Mexican identity in favor of a place-based border identity that necessarily includes Mexico.

The points of reference that surround El Gringo’s “ethnic” identity discourse also include Mexico. As the headline for the 2008 *New York Times* article states, El Gringo was born in America with a heart in Mexico. Time and again, as El Gringo identifies his ethnic identity as “100 percent Anglo” or in the words of Don Francisco, “*gringo gringo gringo*,” he pairs this identity with a Mexican cultural identity. On the news program *Aquí y Ahora* he states, “*Soy más gringo que el McDonald’s, pero mexicano en el corazón.*” (I am more gringo than McDonald’s, but Mexican at heart.) Likewise, on the MTV3 show *Remexa* he declares, “*Soy anglo, pero me siento mexicano en el corazón.*” (I am Anglo, but I feel Mexican at heart.) Both the claiming of a border place-based identity and the continuous pairing of Anglo ethnicity and Mexican cultural identity serve to promote El Gringo’s discourse of solidarity with the Mexican immigrant.

His trademark song “El Corrido Del Gringo” embraces this solidarity as its central theme and documents El Gringo’s relationship with Mexican immigrants. It explains, “*Trabajaba con vaqueros/ de Chihuahua y de Durango / y escuchando sus corridos/ fui el español pronunciando / Son mis mejores amigos/ y son indocumentados.*” (I worked with cowboys / from Chihuahua and Durango / and listening to their *corridos* / I began to pronounce Spanish / They are my best friends / and they are undocumented.) The ballad carefully constructs a didactic relationship between El Gringo and his undocumented *compañeros*. While working together on the ranch, the Mexican vaqueros teach El Gringo how to be Mexican. The *corrido* recognizes El Gringo’s Anglo ethnicity, while simultaneously embracing a deep cultural connection with Mexicans. Additionally, through the designation “el gringo,” the ballad also employs the meaning of “gringo” as “foreigner.” The song continues, “*Todos me llaman el gringo/ pues soy norteamericano / Pero una cosa les digo / siento que soy su paisano / y hasta la gente me dice / que hablo como mexicano.*” (Everyone calls me *el gringo* / because I am North American / but one thing I tell you / I feel I am your fellow countryman / and even the people tell me / that I speak like a Mexican.) The narrative of the *corrido* highlights El Gringo’s ethnicity and nationality only to obscure it with El Gringo’s ability and desire to pass

for Mexican. The song then calls Americans to be good neighbors and abandon the idea of a wall on the border. El Gringo concludes the ballad by recognizing the hard work of all undocumented immigrants. He sings, “*Yo que soy gringo les digo / sigan soñando y luchando / que este país necesita / de su esfuerzo y su trabajo*” (I, being a gringo, tell you / keep dreaming and fighting / because this country needs / your efforts and your work.) If El Gringo’s musical project communicates a narrative of uniqueness and singularity within the nature of his musical persona, “El Corrido Del Gringo” deviates from this narrative and illustrates a call for solidarity and unity when considering his relationship to the Mexican immigrant population in the United States. El Gringo’s musical intervention seems to explicitly include solidarity with a Mexican family while excluding any explicit reference to a New Mexican Hispano musical family.

El Gringo’s alignment with both a border identity and a Mexican family is significant within the context of the contested history of New Mexico and Mexico. Though annexed to the United States as part of Mexico, historian John Nieto-Phillips explains:

Mexican independence from Spain in 1821 did not significantly alter the ethnic consciousness of northern New Mexicans, nor did it instill a profound and pervasive Mexican consciousness rooted in national sentiment...the twenty-five years of Mexican rule in New Mexico did not become etched into the historical identity that “Spanish Americans” later would articulate in newspapers and academic writing.⁴⁰

This distance from a Mexican national identity also helps to explain the trajectory of disassociation with the term “Mexican” among New Mexico Hispanos after becoming a U.S. territory. Nieto-Phillips clarifies, “Both Anglo and Nuevomexicano statehood proponents made congressional approval of statehood possible by recasting New Mexico’s ‘Mexicans’ as Spanish in race, culture, and history, and American in citizenship and national loyalty.”⁴¹ Utilized as a strategy to gain political rights and articulate an ethnic identity distinct from a Mexican national identity, the employment of a “Spanish” identity in New Mexico is complex and continues to reflect itself in the discourse of New Mexico Hispano musicians. El Gringo’s distinctly Mexican narrative must necessarily navigate through this intricate New Mexico history. Yet, his project faces a challenge in striking a chord with New Mexico Hispanos who are part of this 150-year discourse of disassociation with Mexico. Moreover, the contested history between Mexico and New Mexico continues to manifest itself in a contested present. Just two years before the release of El Gringo’s *Algo Sucedió* album, the *Albuquerque Journal* headlines in November 2005 highlighted the “long-brewing tensions between ‘Hispanics’—northern New Mexico natives—and ‘Mexicans; tensions that exist in Santa Fe and other parts of New Mexico,”⁴² particularly in the public schools. In such an environment, where does El Gringo’s musical project fit? David García comments about the disconnect between El Gringo and his own Hispano band members:

The campaign that he was bringing up within his music was not shared by a lot of the people in the band. In terms of thinking about the way you see the borders and like this I think that perhaps a lot of people in the band were not for immigration reform or these other things. I think they probably kind of saw too the hypocrisy of that language of saying well, "let's erase the borders," where a lot of these people are barely eking out a living and very much in competition with a lot of *inmigrantes* that are coming to work here.⁴³

The fact that El Gringo's narrative finds itself in a potentially contested space among New Mexico Hispanos and within the cultural discourse of regional *hispanidad* present in the Hispano music scene does not eliminate the possibility of its acceptance in that very scene and/or in other cultural spaces, particularly those of Mexican immigrants in New Mexico. However, it is important not to collapse the historical (and contemporary) differences between the two groups. Kun's *New York Times* article states that "in 2003 after leading a string of local country bands in New Mexico, Mr. Kiehne began to write and sing his own songs in Spanish, performing around Albuquerque to *Mexican and Mexican-American audiences*."⁴⁴ These Mexican and Mexican-American audiences are not one in the same, and the meaning of El Gringo's narrative will change according to the distinct cultural discourses that resonate with each group.

CROSSING BORDERS OF IDENTITY: THE IMPLICATIONS OF PASSING FOR MEXICAN

El Gringo's narrative plot of "Anglo, but with a Mexican heart" attempts to seamlessly bridge the gap between ethnic, cultural, and national identities. The framework allows for El Gringo to sound like a Mexican, feel like a Mexican, and ultimately *pass* for a Mexican. What are the cultural implications for this type of identity border crossing? George Lipsitz explains how popular culture often serves as a site for such identity experimentation. He explains, "[T]o think of identities as interchangeable or infinitely open does violence to the historical and social constraints imposed on us by structures of exploitation and privilege. But to posit innate and immobile identities for ourselves or others confuses history with nature, and denies the possibility of change."⁴⁵ Does El Gringo's "identity switching" obscure Mexican exploitation and his own privilege? Or is it simply a manifestation of a true shift in his own identity? El Gringo's words in Kun's *New York Times* article underscore the idea that, perhaps, El Gringo's identity has truly undergone a shift. In explaining his corrido he states, "I wrote that song because I wanted to tell them about what I believed in. I am not some manufactured record label idea. This is music that I love. This is a culture that I love. This is me."⁴⁶ Additionally, when asked on *Aquí y Ahora* if he could truly represent the genre of Mexican regional music because he has not lived the experiences of a Mexican immigrant, El Gringo answers: "*Sí. He trabajado al lado de muchos inmigrantes en el rancho y muchos vaqueros que eran de otros países, y sí sé como vienen a este país*

a trabajar y la verdad trabajan duro y llegué a respetarlos.” (Yes, I have worked side by side with many immigrants on the ranch, and many cowboys from other countries, and I do know how they come to this country to work, and the truth is, they work hard and I came to respect them.) El Gringo’s response illustrates a sincere empathy and respect for the experiences of Mexican immigrants. Although El Gringo’s narrative may position his Mexican vaquero friends as his teachers, the power dynamics between El Gringo and these Mexican workers are still not equal. The ranch in which they are working side by side is still the family ranch of El Gringo. This contradiction in the plot line troubles the potential for El Gringo’s life experience to approximate that of undocumented Mexican immigrants.

However, this contradiction, and the unbalance in power that it reveals, coexists with El Gringo’s public intention to draw attention to the plight of the Mexican immigrant in the United States. El Gringo is clearly a privileged subject. Nevertheless, the affective impact of El Gringo’s performance is ignored when simply utilizing an analysis of power relations grounded on an argument of authenticity. Referring to Ramón Rivera-Servera’s use of the notion of sincerity in his study of reggaetón allows for a more nuanced study of El Gringo’s identity narrative. Rivera-Servera explains that “all performances of race appropriate prior performances to politically diverse ends,” thus linking the performance of race and nation to musical performance. El Gringo’s musical persona is intricately connected to an appropriation of immigration politics. Rivera-Servera then couples this connection between performance of race and music with the agency of the performer himself. He continues:

A focus on sincerity evaluates performance for its affective charge. It attends to the ways in which performers as agents activate repertoires of behavior to make public their sense of self. These enactments are approached from a critical position that looks beyond the rigid parameters of authenticity to allow particularized interpretations or approximations to occur.⁴⁷

By looking beyond the question of whether or not El Gringo is truly Mexican (or New Mexican/Hispano for that matter), the notion of sincerity allows the listener to evaluate El Gringo’s agency as a performer and the larger meaning of his alignment with the marginal subject of the Mexican undocumented immigrant. This lens of sincerity does not ignore the presence of power differentials, but instead allows for these differentials to coexist with the performative and political agency of the performer. Rivera-Servera clarifies, “Venturing into the realm of sincerity asks of the reader not to dismiss the disciplinary and hegemonic currents of commercial popular culture but to look at other gestures, ghostings if you will, that open up possibilities for consuming and participating in the public sphere in compromised but simultaneously productively strategic configurations.”⁴⁸ The consideration of sincerity within El Gringo’s ethnic identity narrative makes it possible to view the “ghostings” of political productivity within his musical project. Although it is important to heed Lipsitz’s warning regarding the danger inherent in viewing identities as interchangeable, the notion of sincerity allows for El

Gringo's narrative to reveal its complexity. Sincerity presents an opportunity to avoid essentializing his project and to, instead, look at the considerable cultural work that his musical and cultural production may be doing.

In light of this complexity, and despite the contradictions present in his narrative plot, might it still be possible for El Gringo to be the voice of a Mexican *norteño* musical crossover to an Anglo market? El Gringo explains, "Ricky Martin helped make it O.K. for white Americans of my generation to like Latin music... I want to do the same thing for *norteño*. I want it to appeal to mainstream white America while staying true to the Mexican sound."⁴⁹ El Gringo speaks of empowerment of the *norteño* genre through a potential widening of its appeal. José E. Limón draws attention to a similar type of empowerment in his analysis of the 1959 Marty Robbins country hit, "El Paso." Limón underscores the fact that the song utilizes Mexican-American musical forms and traditions within its structure, such as corridos and rancheras, and advances the notion that the presence of these Mexican-American musical structures in the song gives visibility to a marginalized Mexican population. He claims that "imbedded in its great popularity is a kind of victory for that culture and its people at a time when such recognitions were few and far between."⁵⁰ The fact that the Anglo cowboy's song may be recognizing Mexican culture by appropriating its musical traditions, does speak to a certain musical hybridity that is worth exploring. Even country music critic George H. Lewis recognizes this Mexican presence in "El Paso" in his 1993 essay "Mexican Musical Influences on Country Songs and Styles."⁵¹ However, in the end, there is a certain erasure that occurs with these types of processes. In appropriating these musical forms, "El Paso" utilizes Mexican musical structure and this structure then becomes part of "classic" American country music. The notion of empowerment through appropriation rings empty because Mexicans are ultimately erased.

El Gringo's intervention, however, is the opposite. He infuses the visible musical form of Mexican *norteño* music with his musical identity. Is his Anglo identity obscured in the same way that Mexican-American musical forms are obscured from "El Paso"? The key difference in this comparison lies in issues of power and privilege. Ultimately, El Gringo is advancing his narrative plot in the United States, and he still belongs to a dominant cultural group. Therefore, his ethnic identity will never be obscured in his performance of *norteño* music. This reality could actually be beneficial for a musical project that brings the struggles of undocumented immigrants to the attention of the mainstream. The notion of sincerity again allows for the consideration of political agency within such a project. Rivera-Servera states, "The analysis of popular culture requires a dynamic model of criticism that heeds caution to oppressive power dynamics present in commercial and subcultural practices alike. It also requires a hopeful eye to articulate the alternative strategies that also emerge from within these cultural performances."⁵² The visibility of El Gringo's ethnic identity actually serves as one of these alternative strategies. His place as part of a dominant cultural group puts El Gringo in a position to potentially empower undocumented immigrants.

Additionally, his position of privilege articulates itself in El Gringo's desire to "do the same thing" as Ricky Martin, or act as a liaison between Mexican regional

music and the Anglo-American market. In such a capacity, his narrative of Anglo ethnic identity juxtaposed with Mexican cultural identity can coexist. Yet, has El Gringo's narrative plot considered what the meaning of this process of widening the market has for Mexican players in the norteño music scene? Lipsitz's analysis of the case study of Paul Simon and the production of his album *Graceland* in South Africa asks this same question. Lipsitz explains:

Did Paul Simon colonize African music for his own benefit? Did he depoliticize and decontextualize the music of the oppressed people while celebrating his own openness? Certainly not intentionally. On the contrary, Simon wants his Western audiences to understand and appreciate the diversity of world music, to learn from the differences and the commonalities between U.S. and South African music, and to participate in the creation of a global fusion culture that transcends national, racial, and ethnic lines. But . . . he remains so preoccupied with what cross-cultural contact means for him, that he neglects addressing what it might mean to others.⁵³

This first song that El Gringo wrote in Spanish embodies the potential for the neglect that Lipsitz references.

"Cervezas, Fiestas, y Señoritas" departs from a move of solidarity with the Mexican immigrant population and promotes images common to the "U.S.-Mexico tourist fantasy" that Josh Kun references in this volume. The song begins, "*Una vez un gringo vino a vivir en México y no hablaba español pero con estas palabras no batalló: cervezas, fiestas, señoritas. Son las tres cosas que a mí me hacen feliz. Cervezas, fiestas, señoritas. Y sin estas cosas yo prefiero morir.*" (Once upon a time a gringo came to live in Mexico and could not speak Spanish but with these words he had no problems: beers, parties, and ladies. They are the three things that make me happy. Beers, parties, and ladies. And without these things I would rather die.) Unlike "El Corrido Del Gringo," this song does not encourage support for Mexican immigrants, but instead consumption of Mexican women and alcohol, in the party land of Mexico that the song constructs. These stereotypical notions of Mexico actually align quite well with the consistent tendency in country music to portray Mexico as an escape. George Strait's 2006 version of Merle Haggard's single "The Seashores of Old Mexico," and Kenny Chesney's 2005 hit "Another Beer in Mexico" are but two recent examples of this narrative. This type of stereotypical move seems to problematize El Gringo's narrative plots of solidarity and "American, with a Mexican heart" identity. It raises the question, with what Mexican culture is El Gringo identifying? Whereas, Josh Kun's analysis of the Tijuana Sound illustrates a mythologizing of Mexico on a sonic level, El Gringo engages in the same process on a lyrical level. David García played for a short time with El Gringo while he was opening for Intocable and Ramón Ayala in California in 2008. He comments on audience reaction to the performance of "Cervezas, Fiestas, y Señoritas." He explains, "I felt very uncomfortable being in that space 'cause a lot of times the audience, I got the sense that they were kind of put off by it 'cause a lot of people wouldn't dance to it and they'd just watch."⁵⁴ García

highlights the problematic nature of singing about the audience's homeland in the context of the consumption of "*cervezas, fiestas, y señoritas*."

However, according to Las Vegas DJ María Garduño, "Cervezas, Fiestas, y Señoritas" is the most popular and requested single by El Gringo at radio station 540 KNMX AM in Las Vegas.⁵⁵ This speaks to a positive reception by New Mexico Hispanos of these songs that engage in a "lyrical mythologizing" of Mexico. Notably, Tobías René also employs such stereotypical depictions of Mexican señoritas and escaping to mythical Mexican border towns in his 2005 single "Mexico." This move signals the appropriation of this practice by Hispano musical artists as well as Anglo artists. The implications of Hispano artists' representations of Mexico are another way in which to shed light on the contentious relationship between New Mexico Hispanos and Mexico. The popularity of both El Gringo's and Tobías René's tunes actually reveal a moment of alignment between El Gringo's musical project and the New Mexico Hispano music scene. However, an important difference between El Gringo's portrayal of Mexico and Tobías René's depiction lies in the audience. Again, the importance of recognizing Mexican vs. Hispano audiences is critical when considering both El Gringo's musical production and the production of New Mexico Hispano musicians.

Essentially, the narrative plots surrounding El Gringo seem to engage in simultaneous processes of "othering" in defining his musical persona. His promotion, media coverage, and performances center on a discourse of a border-place identity juxtaposed with both an Anglo ethnic and Mexican cultural identity. Thus, El Gringo embraces the "born in America, heart in Mexico" story. These plots advance a notion of solidarity in which El Gringo wishes to erase the existence of Mexicans as "the other" or as himself as "the other." The vision of this plot line unites El Gringo with Mexicans. Yet, if the notion of "other" has been removed from both El Gringo and Mexican immigrants, then who now receives this designation? The collective entity of the New Mexico Hispano musical scene, the life experiences of its members, and its placed-based New Mexico regional narratives seem to absorb this designation as they experience moments of invisibility by El Gringo's promotion of uniqueness and solidarity with Mexican audiences. What implications do these momentary erasures have? The reality exists that El Gringo does indeed interact within the New Mexico Hispano music scene. Therefore, his narrative plots during the time period of 2007–2009 seem to privilege a visible global articulation with Mexican immigrants over a more concealed localized articulation with the New Mexico Hispano music scene.

CONTRADICTIONS, COLLABORATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

As with all intersections of sound, space, and identity, (including those within the New Mexico Hispano music scene) El Gringo's plot lines exhibit contradictions. These intersections or "audiotopias" provide a lens through which to view the coexistence of these contradictions.⁵⁶ Thus, El Gringo's musical persona simultaneously conceals and reveals his place in the New Mexico Hispano music scene.

Additionally, his cultural work can both “other” this Hispano music scene through its erasures and “other” Mexicans in the mythologizing actions of his song lyrics. It is important to understand that the contradictory cultural processes at work within El Gringo’s narrative and the narratives of the Hispano musical scene do in fact coexist. The erasures are not definitive, nor exclusive. El Gringo’s collaborative work illustrates this fact.

In 2007, El Gringo recorded a duet version of his song “Algo Sucedió” with banda superstar Jennie Rivera. In spring 2010, he recorded a duet entitled “Sirvame Otra Cantinero” with New Mexico Hispano recording artist and producer Gonzalo. This recent duet demonstrates that El Gringo’s musical production continues to shift between and within distinct narrative plot lines. This collaboration suggests a move toward a more visible articulation with the New Mexico Hispano music scene. When explaining why he decided to pair up with El Gringo, Gonzalo states that he wanted a strong vocalist who would represent “something fresh.”⁵⁷ It is significant that Gonzalo returns to the discourse of “*algo fresco*” to describe El Gringo’s musical project. To Gonzalo, El Gringo’s music is something new and fresh to his New Mexico music. Additionally, he comments on his own reservations about recording with El Gringo. He explains, “I was kind of intimidated ‘cause I thought . . . El Gringo’s been on *Sábado Gigante*. He’s on Fonovisa. I mean, he’s been in *People* magazine en español, and I know he lives in Los Lunas.”⁵⁸ Gonzalo’s words recognize El Gringo’s musical promotion within the national and international Spanish language media, something that most New Mexico Hispano artists have not experienced. However, he also acknowledges that El Gringo does live in Los Lunas. These reflections illustrate an acknowledgment of El Gringo as distinct from other New Mexico Hispano music artists, but he is also grounded in a locale (Los Lunas) that suggests El Gringo’s potential accessibility. Gonzalo’s reaction seems to grapple with the audiotopias created by El Gringo’s musical project and the overlapping approaches employed to define New Mexico music.

It is worth emphasizing that the pairing of these two artists (Gonzalo and El Gringo) has deeper implications in New Mexico than El Gringo’s previous shifts in narrative plots. Gonzalo’s thoughts on the collaboration allude to these implications. He explains, “I see him as just being from New Mexico. I see him kind of being just a Mexican regional artist . . . I mean he’s accepted by New Mexico music or the New Mexico fan base for the most part, but . . . he’s not really in the loop with everything . . . for me to do that song with him was kind of neat because . . . it’s collaborating a New Mexico artist with a Mexican artist.”⁵⁹ Gonzalo concludes these reflections by explaining that El Gringo “bridges the gap” between the two genres.⁶⁰ Gonzalo advances two important ideas regarding his duet with El Gringo. First, he acknowledges that El Gringo is from New Mexico and has achieved a certain amount of acceptance from the New Mexico Hispano music fan base. Yet, he is clear in stating that El Gringo does not record New Mexico music, but instead locates El Gringo within the Mexican regional genre. Gonzalo even denotes El Gringo as a *Mexican* artist. This designation adds one more dimension to El Gringo’s “Mexican at heart” discourse. According to Gonzalo,

El Gringo is in fact passing as Mexican. Additionally, El Gringo seems to have achieved the liaison status to which he alluded when referencing Ricky Martin. Yet, he is not acting as liaison to Anglo-America, but instead has become a bridge between New Mexico Hispano music and Mexican nortño music.

An additional piece, however, in the analytical puzzle of El Gringo's narrative plots (and the implications of the El Gringo-Gonzalo collaboration) is to examine how they are received by their audiences. Auslander suggests that

the audience, not the performer, plays the most decisive role in the process of identity formation, since it is the audience that produces the final construction of an identity from the impressions created by the performer. In some cases, this audience role can go well beyond the acceptance or rejection of the performer's claim to a particular musical identity: an audience can actually impose an identity on the performer.⁶¹

This critical attempt to trace the narratives at work in El Gringo's cultural texts, and to contextualize El Gringo within and outside of the New Mexico Hispano music scene, must always be considered within the frameworks of the identities that the distinct audiences in New Mexico attribute to El Gringo. Two New Mexico music fans from the Las Vegas area concur with Gonzalo in attributing a *Mexican* identity to El Gringo's musical persona. Las Vegas mariachi leader Gary Sena explains his opinion about El Gringo's music. He states, "I didn't like the way he was doing that banda stuff. I mean I don't like it 'cause we're not used to that, but the dude is from New Mexico... I don't prefer that type of music. I wouldn't consider it New Mexico music. That's Mexico. That's Mexico right there."⁶² Sena's explanation seems to struggle with the fact that an artist from New Mexico is, indeed, recording banda music. He clearly categorizes El Gringo outside of traditional New Mexico Hispano music and locates his musical project in Mexico. Fan Benjamin Bencomo reiterates these thoughts: "I like El Gringo but I think it's because I like mexicano music too and it isn't traditional nuevomexicano... it definitely leans more towards mexicano music than it does New Mexican music... I know a lot of friends who agree with me that his sound isn't New Mexico music... It's Mexican music, but, I mean, people like him. It's just a different type of music."⁶³ Again, Bencomo's words associate El Gringo's musical stylings with a Mexican sound. He also attributes his own attraction to El Gringo's music to his inclinations toward "mexicano music." This suggests that El Gringo's sound might not appeal to a New Mexico Hispano who did not previously appreciate "mexicano music." If New Mexico Hispanos align El Gringo's musical persona with Mexico, what place, then, does this sound have in a New Mexico Hispano dance hall or town fiesta?

Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the conceptualization of El Gringo as a type of "musical bridge." In describing the release of "Sírname Otra Cantinero," Gonzalo shares, "It's the biggest song I've done so far. And I remember the first time Shawn and I played the song live in Taos for the Mother's Day concert. We got a huge response for it."⁶⁴ This positive response fed into a subsequent grouping

of New Mexico artists with El Gringo. At the annual Las Vegas Fourth of July fiestas (a three-day event in which the biggest names in New Mexico Hispano music perform), one of the nightly dances featured Gonzalo, El Gringo, and Tobías René together. (Shown in figure 15.4) Gonzalo talks about the concert: “It went over really well. As a matter of fact after the Rialto show that night, Tobías and Shawn and myself sat down and we were like ‘we should take this show everywhere else!’ It’s appealing because Tobías has his fan base, and I have my fan base, but Tobías and I kind of almost bring in the same crowd, but Shawn brings in a whole different crowd.”⁶⁵ Although the grouping was undoubtedly a crowd pleaser, El Gringo’s sound, and even his look, still seemed to confound some of the attendees. Jacqueline Gómez remarks, “There’s something about him, even his appearance . . . It’s everything. It’s the lyrics. It’s the sound. It just doesn’t fit. I mean to me, it doesn’t fit.”⁶⁶ Though he may be nestled between two New Mexico Hispano artists, Gómez noticed subtle differences. Another attendee, Martina Tapia, recounts, “He didn’t blend in with how the rest of the bands looked and how the rest of even the people there look . . . he wears his hat a little different and his clothes a little different . . . He’s not Tex-Mex and he’s not New



Figure 15.4 Advertising poster for Fourth of July fiesta dance at El Rialto. © Courtesy of The New Mexico Music Factory. Used by permission.

Mex. He's *New Mex-Mex*."⁶⁷ It is precisely within Tapia's designation of El Gringo as "New Mex-Mex" that the audience not only imposes a particular identity (Mexican), but also creates a new one. It may be that for New Mexico Hispano audiences El Gringo's musical persona occupies the place (or bridge) between New Mexican and Mexican. Although this article problematizes El Gringo's discourse of uniqueness by contextualizing it within the New Mexico Hispano music scene, New Mexico music fans and musicians are clearly attuned to the subtle differences that do set El Gringo apart from the places, sounds, and styles (musical and visual) of the genre.

Perhaps, it is within these differences, within the hyphen between New Mex-Mex, that an additional site for the study of El Gringo and the New Mexico Hispano music scene exists. It is apparent that when El Gringo performs in front of a primarily Hispano audience in a dance hall in Las Vegas, New Mexico, it is quite different from the performance he would give in Santa Fe or Albuquerque, where a more heterogeneous crowd (with both Mexican immigrants and New Mexico Hispanos) would be present. Indeed, one attendee to a fiesta dance in Santa Fe attested to this. He stated, "He adapts to the population. He played for everybody, but because he saw his crowd was a mixture, he played a mixture: about one-third New Mexico music, one-third Mexican music, and one-third oldies."⁶⁸ Perhaps, these spaces of "mixed" audiences provide a framework for studying the hyphen between New Mex and Mex as part of the continuous history of relations between New Mexico and Mexico. How Hispano and Mexican audiences in New Mexico receive El Gringo in these contexts may not only provide insight into additional narrative plots constructed around El Gringo's persona, but may also create a dynamic site for the study of intraethnic interaction on the New Mexico dance floor.

Notes

1. Throughout this article I reproduce all Spanish language song, album, and television program titles exactly as they appear from their original sources. Many of these titles adhere to English-language conventions regarding capitalization, presumably as a result of their production in the U.S. I do not wish to alter these conventions because I recognize these written titles as manifestations of Spanish/English language contact phenomena. All other translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. In this article I utilize the term *Hispano* to refer to the New Mexican Hispanic population. Recognizing that nomenclature is always contentious, I have chosen this term because of its resonance with the local population as demonstrated by its use in the names of the two musical associations that represent New Mexico Hispano musicians and its long trajectory of use among New Mexicans as a term of pride and empowerment as cited in John Nieto-Phillips' *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s–1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 81.
3. Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *The Drama Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2006), 102.

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 103.
6. Pablo Vila, "The Polysemy of the Label 'Mexican' on the Border," in *Ethnography at the Border*, ed. Pablo Vila (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 106.
7. Ibid., 111.
8. Ibid., 108.
9. Kathryn Woodward, "Concepts of Identity and Difference," in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage, 1997), 9.
10. Aurelio M. Espinosa, "Romancero NuevoMejicano," *La Revue Hispanique*, Vol. XXXIII (1915).
11. García's dissertation has been expanded to a book-length work forthcoming in 2011 by the University of New Mexico Press entitled *Decolonizing Enchantment: Lyricism, Ritual, and Echoes of Nuevo Mexicano Popular Music*.
12. Urbano Ortega, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 28, 2010.
13. Robert González (Gonzalo), personal interview. Albuquerque, New Mexico. July 23, 2010.
14. Ibid. Emphasis mine.
15. Benjamin Bencomo, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 29, 2010.
16. The New Mexico Hispano Music Association theme song can be heard in the following link, <http://www.myspace.com/nmhma> (accessed March 25, 2010).
17. The mission of the New Mexico Hispano Entertainers Association can be read on their Web site at http://www.nmhea.com/About_Us.html (accessed March 25, 2010).
18. A music video with an interview can be watched at Tobías René's Web site at <http://www.tobiasrene.com/videos/mexico.wmv> (accessed March 25, 2010).
19. María Garduño, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 29, 2010.
20. I do not wish to imply in this essay that the notion of *family* is not problematic. This concept of inclusion necessarily brings with it many exclusions. Richard T. Rodríguez productively interrogates the idea of *family* in Chicano rap and hip hop in his 2009 book *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* published by Duke University Press. Although such a critique is not the focus of this essay, it is worth further study in the context of the New Mexico Hispano music scene.
21. Emphasis mine.
22. Emphasis mine.
23. See the promotional video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNprLl2BhH4> (accessed March 25, 2010).
24. See the KFUN Web site at <http://kfunonline.com/skin/blurb.php?sectionId=179&contentId=133485> (accessed March 25, 2010).
25. Josh Kun, "Born in America, Heart in Mexico," *New York Times*, July 20, 2008.
26. For more information about Agua Negra see the band's Web site at <http://www.myspace.com/aguanegra> (accessed March 25, 2010).
27. For more information about Cuarenta y Cinco see the band's Web site at <http://www.myspace.com/micuantaycinco> (accessed March 25, 2010).
28. I will refer to this linguistic practice as simply "code-switching" because the term Spanglish references three additional linguistic phenomena associated with language contact that I will not address here.

29. For a detailed account of the circumstances that have led to the contemporary sociolinguistic situation in New Mexico see Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, “Which Language Will our Children Speak: The Spanish Language and Public Education Policy in New Mexico, 1890–1930,” in *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico*, eds. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 169–190. My own personal experiences as a Spanish heritage language learner and in directing and teaching in Spanish heritage language programs in New Mexico affirm the experience of language loss and receptive bilingualism in the state.
30. See Alan Hudson and Garland D. Bills, “Intergenerational language shift in an Albuquerque Barrio,” *A Festschrift for Jacob Ornstien: Studies in General Linguistics and Sociolinguistics*, eds. Edward L. Jr. Blansitt and Richard V. Teschner (Rowley: Newbury House, 1980), 139–158; Garland D. Bills, Eduardo Hernández-Chavez, and Alan Hudson, “The Geography of Language Shift: Distance from the Mexican Border and Spanish Language Claiming in the Southwestern U.S.,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, No. 114 (1995), 9–27; Garland D. Bills, Alan Hudson, and Eduardo Hernández-Chávez, “Spanish Home Language Use and English Proficiency as Differential Measures of Language Maintenance and Shift,” *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, No. 19 (2000), 11–27.
31. Robert Luis Carrasco and Florencia Riegelhaupt, “META: A Model for the Continued Acquisition of Spanish by Spanish/English Bilinguals in the United States,” in *Mi lengua: Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States*, eds. Ana Roca and M. Cecilia Colombi (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 170–197.
32. David García, phone interview. March 11, 2010.
33. A music video with an interview can be watched at Tobías René’s Web site at <http://www.tobiasrene.com/videos/mexico.wmv> (accessed March 25, 2010).
34. For more information about Agua Negra see <http://www.myspace.com/aguanegra> (accessed March 25, 2010).
35. García, phone interview. March 11, 2010.
36. See <http://elgringo.com.mx/noticias.htm> (accessed March 25, 2010).
37. Ibid.
38. See <http://www.myspace.com/elgringo> (accessed March 25, 2010).
39. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 52.
40. Nieto-Phillips, *The Language of Blood*, 37–38.
41. John Nieto-Phillips, “Spanish-American Ethnic Identity and New Mexico’s Statehood Struggle,” *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico*, eds. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 99.
42. Gabriela Guzmán, “Tensions among Hispanic Groups Erupt in Schools,” *Albuquerque Journal*, November 6, 2005.
43. García, phone interview. March 11, 2010.
44. Kun, “Born in America.” Emphasis mine.
45. George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso Press, 1994), 62.
46. Josh Kun, “Born in America.”

47. Ramón Rivera-Servera, "Musical Trans(actions): Intersections in Reggaetón," *Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review*, No. 13 (2009) <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans13/art11.htm> (accessed March 25, 2010).
48. Ibid.
49. Kun, "Born in America."
50. José E. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, The United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 127.
51. George H. Lewis, "Mexican Musical Influences on Country Songs and Styles," in *All That Glitters. Country Music in America*, ed. G. H. Lewis (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 94–101.
52. Rivera-Servera, "Musical Trans(actions)."
53. Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 59–60.
54. García, phone interview. March 11, 2010.
55. Garduño, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 29, 2010.
56. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 22–23.
57. González, personal interview. Albuquerque, New Mexico. July 23, 2010.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Auslander, "Musical Personae," 114.
62. Gary Sena, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 28, 2010.
63. Bencomo, personal interview. Las Vegas, New Mexico. July 29, 2010.
64. González, personal interview. Albuquerque, New Mexico. July 23, 2010.
65. Ibid.
66. Jacqueline Gómez, personal interview. Santa Fe, New Mexico. July 29, 2010.
67. Martina Tapia, phone interview. August 1, 2010. Emphasis mine.
68. Parish member and attendee at Our Lady of Guadalupe Fiestas in Santa Fe (wishes to remain anonymous), phone interview, August 11, 2010.

PART SEVEN

Performing Locality and Gender

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From Pistol-Packing *Pelado* to Border Crossing *Mojado*

El Piporro and the Making of a “Mexican” Border Space

CATHY RAGLAND ■

*Ajúa, ajúa, ya no vuelvo al otro lado,
Porque no se hablar inglés,
Y los que lo saben, pos’ no me entienden*
(Ajua, ajua, I won’t return to the other side,
Because I don’t know how to speak English,
And those who know it, well, they don’t understand me)

EULALIO GONZÁLEZ RAMÍREZ (“*El Piporro*”),
spoken introduction to the song “NATALIO REYES COLÁS”

Born in 1921 in Los Herreras, Nuevo León, México, Eulalio González Ramírez, most famously known as “El Piporro,” the comic actor, singer/songwriter and radio personality, understood very well the importance of language. For him, the meaning was not in the words themselves, but in how they were used, the cultural context in which they were applied and, most important, the humor in ones attempt to be understood...or misunderstood, depending on the circumstance. While it is true that González did not speak English all that well, as a *norteño*, a citizen of Mexico’s northernmost region which shares a border with the United States, he felt a sense of entitlement, albeit an obligation, to engage in (and become entangled with) the language of “*al otro lado*” (the other side). He did this as he developed his idiosyncratic style of parodying his own *norteño* vernacular, music,

and culture in a career that spanned from the early 1940s to his death in 2003. In distinguishing a norteño way of life and of speaking Spanish (and English) he brought to the foreground the regional diversity of the country; he was often a visible reminder that Mexico was not the “unified” nation the central government had been promoting since the Revolution. In this quote from noted Mexican essayist and cultural commentator Carlos Monsiváis explains (in a speech given in honor of the publication of González’s 1999 autobiography) that González’s unique skill as interpreter of norteño identity, culture and language is, in part, motivated by a desire to bring elements of a forgotten past into the making of a new Mexican national identity. Monsiváis marvels at how González created El Piporro from a trove of norteño cultural and performative artifacts (heroic ballads, folktales, language, etc.), thus bringing national attention to the lives and experiences of the people of the northern territories bordering the United States: “*Piporro nace y vive en el norte abandonado e ignorado por el centralismo, que protege o inventa su identidad acudiendo a un habla muy asentada todavía en los arcaísmos mexicanos, penetrada por fuerza por los anglicismos y compuesta por refranes, decenas de miles de comprimidos de la sabiduría comunitaria.*” (Piporro was born and lived in the north [that was] abandoned and ignored by the central government and that protects or invents its identity in a voice that remains deeply entrenched in Mexican archaisms, penetrated by force by Anglicisms and composed of proverbs and tens of thousands of bits of collected common wisdom).¹

NACIÓ EL PIPORRO: NORTEÑO ARCHETYPE

The country’s northernmost region had remained relatively rural, poor, and sparsely populated during the first part of the last century; in the 1930s and 1940s, the population along the border grew due to the institution of numerous government sponsored agrarian and irrigation projects.² Likewise, Monterrey, Nuevo León—a city just three hours from the Texas border by car—was thriving as the largest industrialized city in the region with increasing numbers of laborers and their families moving to the city to work in factories and in service-industry jobs during the first half of the century. González came to know the region well because his father worked as a customs agent along the border with Texas, and they moved often between Los Herreras and other border towns such as Los Guerra, Ciudad Guerrero, Reynosa, and Matamoros in the state of Tamaulipas. Eventually, the family felt the pull toward Monterrey, the largest and fastest growing city in the region, and they moved there when González was a boy. There he exhibited a natural talent for writing, eventually landing a job in 1942 as a reporter at the age of nineteen for the city’s newspaper, *El Porvenir* (*The Future*). Within a year he moved on to radio, which proved a more fascinating medium for González, who had a knack for creative conversation and the ability to speak to people in a way that made them laugh and feel comfortable. He spent about six years as a radio personality at XEMR and XEFB in Monterrey and at XEFE in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, where he served as master of ceremonies for a variety

of musical and comedy acts as well as live drama programs. In 1950 he left Monterrey for Mexico City with a plan: to find a job as master of ceremonies on the widely popular XEW radio, better known as *La voz de la América Latina desde México* or “The voice of Latin America from Mexico.” Additionally, he auditioned at the rival station XEQ, and it was there that producers heard something more in his voice than that of a master of ceremonies. His sharp wit, vibrant personality, and ability to parody an assortment of personalities from the norteno region led them to cast him in a role in a radio drama they were preparing with the then hugely popular film actor and singer Pedro Infante in the title role. The program, *Ahí viene Martín Corona* (*Here Comes Martín Corona*), was an instant success among listeners throughout the city as had been other films and radio dramas of the *comedia ranchera* genre that were typically set in rural towns and villages in regions outside of the city where many of the new migrants had come from.³ *Ahí viene Martín Corona* was so successful that the following year, González and Infante reprised their roles in a film version of the show.

At the age of twenty-eight, he played Infante’s elderly sidekick in nineteenth-century northern Mexico where his character “El Piporro” raises the young Infante after his family was murdered and trains him to become a notorious protector of the people, serious gunslinger and *mujeriego* (womanizer). It is the story of many a norteno narrative ballad, or *corrido*, and a heroic image that is still coveted today by the local population and fetishized (very much like the North America cowboy) in the collective Mexican imagination through film, popular novels, and songs. The release of this film came at the height of Infante’s career, which would end abruptly just six years later as a result of an airplane crash. For Infante, *Corona* was one of many characters that endeared him to Mexico’s working-class population. He is probably best known, however, for his role as Pepe el Toro in a trio of films released between 1948 and 1952. Pepe el Toro is a widowed carpenter who scrapes a meager living in the sprawling slums of Mexico City. Such *comedia ranchera* films reveal a delicate balance between comedy, tragedy, and popular music, all the while hoping to connect with the rapidly growing underclass population of Mexico City who had moved there from rural towns and villages across the country.

González’s film career after *Ahí viene Martín Corona*, however, would take a different turn than Infante’s. Rather than become everyman, he would become one man: El Piporro. And though at times his characters had different names (e.g., Natalio Reyes Colás, Genovevo Cruz García) González played them as El Piporro, which he based on an assemblage of real-life norteno personalities encountered while growing up in northern Mexico and those imagined characters that were brought to life in local *corridos* (narrative and heroic ballads) and humorous folk songs that he knew so well. As a master of ceremonies on the radio and at local clubs in Monterrey and other towns in the region, he often sang *corridos* and local comic songs on radio in-between the live acts he presented. In *Corona* and in many films and live comedy shows to follow, El Piporro would wear cowboy boots, a *sombrero tejano* (cowboy hat), a *cuera* (leather jacket with elaborate stitching that had become a symbolic emblem of masculine norteno identity and pride), and brandished a pistol. Most notable was his manner of speaking a



Figure 16.1 Pedro Infante and Eulalio González Ramírez as El Piporro from the film *Ahí viene Martín Corona*. Reprinted from Eulalio González Ramírez's *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1999). Used by permission of the author's estate.

colorful norteno vernacular riddled with sarcasm, frankness, and his own interpretation of (and commentary on) local *dichos* (proverbs or sayings) and songs. González explained in his 1999 autobiography *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario* that most norteno audiences typically did not react with as much energy and enthusiasm when performers sang sentimental songs, whether sung in English or in Spanish, as they did to humorous or more lively songs that told stories. This was particularly true in the cabaret-style programs he MCed in nearby border towns Nuevo Laredo in Mexico and Laredo, Texas, where American tourists were also in the audience.⁴ Very often at these events he would change the words to popular poems, proverbs, folk and popular songs and even classic norteno corridos. He became known for his musical parodies that often reflected an estrangement many nortenos felt with the rest of Mexico, particularly Mexico City and the central government, and that the region's close proximity to the United States somehow made them less Mexican. In the following excerpt, González parodies a stanza from the patriotic poem "México, creo en ti," by Ricardo López Méndez whom he described to many as one of his favorite poets. Note in this example, the reference to bathing, perhaps as a means of bringing forth or revealing a true Mexican identity. However, this may also be an allusion to early local corridos which detail how Mexicans crossing the border were viewed by Americans as "dirty" or "unclean."⁵ Both interpretations might exemplify the norteno's marginalized position with regard to both countries.

México, creo en ti, porque si no creyera, jamás me bañaría,	Mexico, I believe in you, Because if I didn't believe, I wouldn't bathe,
como lo hago ahora día a día.	like I do now day after day.
Y porque al no bañarme, a perfume de tigres olería o a esencia de león, que peor nos fuera. ⁶	Because if I don't bathe, I would smell like a tiger Or like the fragrance of a lion, which would be worse.

In the border region, where González grew up and spent his formative years as a performer, there exists a distinct and exceptionally autonomous identity within Mexican history and society. Northern Mexico's geographic isolation and turbulent historical past, one that is closely tied to the U.S.-Mexico border and migration, has led to its estranged relationship with Mexico's social and political core. The border region exists in the consciousness of both Mexicans and North Americans as a "no man's land" of sorts, where illegal crossings produce both out-laws and traitors. González describes his early years in radio and film as a time when there was a strong political push to present to the nation (and perhaps the world) a unified Mexican culture and society; however, movies and regional music were some of the ways in which the diversity of Mexican culture could be reintroduced and reinterpreted by the general population. Of those years, González writes:

Lo que pasaba era que el público de México tenía muy poca información del folklore y del humor nortños; los artistas musicales tradicionales como Los Montañeses del Álamo y Los Alegres de Terán—por mencionar algunos de los más conocidos por sus grabaciones—eran prácticamente desconocidos en la Capital y la imagen que tenían de la gente del norte era la de las interpretaciones caricaturas que los representaban como tipos patibularios con sombrero tejano y chico pistolón. Y al aparecer "El Piporro," decidior, cancionero y aventado 'zapateador,' era natural que resultaran extraños su lenguaje y su música. Pero afortunadamente, no fue por mucho tiempo.

(What happened was that the Mexican public had very little information about norteño folklore and humor; the traditional musical artists like Los Montañeses del Álamo and Los Alegres de Terán—to mention a few of the best known due to their recordings—they were practically unknown in the Capital and the image that they had of the people from the north was of cartoonish interpretations that represented them as this sinister guy with a cowboy hat and a little pistol. It seems that Piporro, as a norteño spokesperson, singer and daring 'dancer,' his language and music would naturally appear strange. But fortunately, it wasn't for long).⁷

González goes on to explain in the following quote, and in a decidedly distinct norteño vernacular, that as he came to embody his new alter ego, "El Piporro," he

began to think of this character not as an anomaly or as creature from the fringes of the northern territory, but as a postmodern representation of the *norteño* self. It is clear here that he believed that El Piporro stood as a more authentic representation of Mexican culture and society; an individual from the historically autonomous northern region who proudly asserts his regional identity, though one that is constructed from González's own imagining, alongside that of a national one.

el caso es que allí nació 'otro' Piporro, el bronco, aventao y ayudaz; y de allí pa'l real. Se empezaron a fijar en mi, a entender mi humor provinciano y a aceptar mis canciones como algo tan mexicano que disipo las primeras dudas cuando, al salir con un acordeón y una guitarra... Así ignorado estaba lo norteño.

(What happened was that another Piporro was born, the bronco, free spirited and intrepid; and from there it went on. They [Mexican audiences] began to notice me, to understand my country humor and accept my songs as something very Mexican and with the sound of the accordion and a guitar, their initial doubts fell away... They realized how forgotten the *norteño* had been).⁸



Figure 16.2 Eulalio González Ramírez as El Piporro dancing with accordion. Reprinted from Eulalio González Ramírez's *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1999). Used by permission of the author's estate.

In commenting on González's autobiography in 1999, Carlos Monsiváis weighed in on the actor's own discovery of the self and his embodiment of El Piporro over the years, bringing norteño culture, customs, and identity from the fringes of the northern territories to the hearts and minds of the Mexican public. However, he also underscored the idea that El Piporro is also a creation, or recreation, of the norteño imagination which simultaneously possesses distinctly Mexican elements.

Se necesitaba un arquetipo para uso exclusivo de los norteños de México y, en el límite del barroquismo, un actor depura al personaje y lo convierte en arquetipo de una cultura fronteriza, un modo de ser mexicano en ambientes naturales, un regocijo nómada. Y parecerse a Piporro obliga a Eulalio González a educar la voz hasta volverlo un prontuario de costumbres.

(An exclusive archetype was needed by the norteños of Mexico, and in the realm of the baroque style, an actor able to extract this character and transform him into an archetype of the border culture, a way of being Mexican in his natural surroundings, a happy nomad. And it appears that Piporro forces Eulalio González to educate his voice until it is transformed into a handbook of traditions).⁹

This "handbook of traditions" can be read as a cultural border archive of sorts, one that has been both preserved and mined by local musicians, storytellers, and folk personalities like Piporro. This is a notion that has been explored more deeply by border scholar Josh Kun in what he describes as the "aural border's archive."¹⁰ El Piporro is a personification of Kun's "aural border" where the "noise" of the region's history, folklife, border crossing, political and cultural conflict, border enforcement together become part of an eccentric, though brilliantly assembled local narrative that both responds and strives to be a part of volatile changes in Mexican social life and transnational politics.¹¹ Though El Piporro and the characters he played were often based on stereotypes drawn from the Mexican public's ideas about norteños as well as norteños's ideas about themselves, he managed to connect with the public at large who identified with other legendary lowbrow comic actors that came before him, such as Mario Moreno Reyes (Cantinflas) and Germán Valdés (Tin Tan). Both, in their own ways, popularized a kind of "peasant bravura," as described by the Mexican essayist and cultural commentator Ilan Stavans; these comedians, he claims, helped to orchestrate the rise of the masses in the 1930s and 1940s.¹² Their personalities were based on a popular stock personality, the *pelado*, which came out of the 1920s traveling *carpa* (tent show) tradition.¹³ Carpas were a type of traveling theater/circus that combined acrobatics with slapstick comedy typically based on stories involving the largely illiterate working class and the unsophisticated country bumpkin. Cantinflas, Tin Tan and later El Piporro ascribed elements of this same *pelado* personality to their characters and comic situations in distinctly novel ways.

Stavans, Monsiváis and other cultural theorists have described the *pelado* persona played by the comedian Cantinflas as a product of Mexico's massive rural to urban migration, which began in full force by the early-1930s. *Pelado*, literally translated as "peeled," referred to the poor, disenfranchised, and displaced slum-dweller who had made his way from the provincial countryside in search of a job and his place in the rapidly growing and developing city. As Cantinflas, Moreno captured the imagination of Mexico City's swelling working-class population who were caught up in this post-Revolutionary period of intense nationalistic pride and confidence in Mexico's capabilities as a country and national presence.¹⁴ Always dressed in rags, wearing his pants below his waist and a pointed cap that was too small, he had the amazing ability to turn the Spanish language inside-out; he extracted humor and satire in the most unlikely places and situations. Stavans's notes that Cantinflas personified a "preindustrial Mexico struggling to join the twenty-first century" and through him it is possible to perceive "the contradictions of the Mexican self."¹⁵ In effect, his films reflected an emerging Mexican popular culture rooted in the dialectic between highbrow and lowbrow, between the haves and have-nots. A fascinating spectacle, particularly at a time when the Mexican elite and "intelligentsia" were working toward dominating literature and mass media, under the direction of then president Miguel Alemán (1946–1952).

FROM PACHUCO TO A "RASQUACHE-NORTEÑO" ARCHETYPE

Similarly, the films of the popular comedian Tin Tan, as played by German Valdés, who hailed from Ciudad Juárez in the northern state of Chihuahua, celebrated the exploits of the urbanized *pelado* with criminal tendencies (or the expectation of such tendencies), who is also a powerful symbol of cultural diversity and autonomy. Tin Tan's marginalization, however, comes from his identification with the Chicano, an emerging Mexican-American identity that was still foreign to Mexican society in the early 1940s, when he came on the scene. Growing up in the border region just across from El Paso, Texas during the 1920s and 1930s, Valdés crafted a comic persona based on the attitudes, dress and hybrid Spanglish dialect (*caló*)¹⁶ adopted by disenfranchised young American Chicano males. His character was both con man and product of the upwardly mobile aspirations of working-class Chicanos in the Southwest, who were themselves doubly marginalized because they could not fully assimilate into the dominant Anglo-American society and their limited Spanish speaking skills meant that they were not viewed (nor did they want to be viewed) as wholly Mexican. As disenfranchised youth, they were well aware of the limitations for success in American society and, as a way of lashing back and calling attention to themselves, they formed an exclusive, hybrid subculture: *pachuco*. *Pachuco* attitude and style reflected the tension of life between cultures as well as on the border. As a young man, Tin Tan was fascinated with, and quickly adopted, the *pachuco* style of wearing the zoot suit, which included baggy trousers, gold chains, an oversized sport coat, pointed-toe shoes and slicked-back hair. Like Cantinflas, he is a *pelado*, but of a different sort. He

also offends the cultural elite through his disastrous attempts to act like one of them, but he earns sympathy and understanding from the masses who celebrate his underdog status and the defiant and obstinate way in which he tries to negotiate a better place for himself in life. Films like Tin Tan's 1949, *El rey del barrio* (*King of the Neighborhood*) and Cantinflas's 1941 *El gendarme desconocido* (*The Unknown Policeman*), which both celebrate the unassimilated urban peasant *pelado*, exist in contradiction to the modernizing campaign propagandized by then President Alemán's regime. These comedic actors stand as constant reminders of Mexico's regional and cultural diversity, its love-hate relationship with the "Americanization" of Mexican culture and society (more evident in the border region), and the strain the intensive industrialization process of a postrevolutionary nation has on the working class. Cantinflas and Tin Tan emerged during this period as "a menace for essentialist and monolithic visions of the nation," as described by border studies scholar Javier Duran in an article on the *pachuco* and Tin Tan.¹⁷ While Tin Tan represented a hybrid culture that piqued the Mexican popular imagination and curiosity, his popularity and "pachuco-pelado" character did not persist beyond the 1950s. In the end, Tin Tan represented an appropriation of a doubly marginalized identity that is neither Mexican nor American, and this is likely a big reason why his popularity waned by the decade's end while Cantinflas endured. "Mainstream Mexican culture has not effectively incorporated *fronterizo* or Chicano elements into its making," Duran concedes. "In Mexico, the *pachuco*, the Chicano, and the northern border have continued to be seen as grotesque and tacky copies of 'real' Mexicanness."¹⁸ In the end, Duran concurs with Néstor García Canclini's notion of cultural hybridity in noting that the *pachuco*'s hybrid traits "demonstrate signs of its ambivalence in its relation to both Mexico and the United States."¹⁹ The *pachuco* was not only the object of contempt, hatred, and persecution, but also the object of desire and derision in both cultures.²⁰

However, in considering the case of El Piporro, González plays him as a very different kind of *pelado*. Initially, he was a representation of Mexico's past, a folk hero who was part cowboy and part bandit hero. In later incarnations, when he played El Piporro as a *bracero* (seasonal migrant laborer)²¹ and *pocho* (a person of Mexican heritage who becomes "Americanized"), his *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) is challenged, only later to be rescued (or revived) once he returns to "his" border and *norteño* identity (I will explore this point later in this article). Unlike Tin Tan, El Piporro does not appropriate a Chicano identity nor does he articulate his *norteño* culture and identity as something other than Mexican. However, in being a *norteño* from the border region, he was also a border crosser and possessed an intimate familiarity with "*el otro lado*" and that, among other things, separated him from the *chilango* (slang term for a person from Mexico City and/or the cultural center). But, unlike Tin Tan, El Piporro did not appropriate the attitude and lifestyle of the Chicano or Mexican American. His persona was created from the *rasquache*²² (assemblage of cheap, low-class tastes and attitudes) aesthetic initially represented by *pelado* comics in the *carpa* tradition and later in films. As "El Piporro," González fashioned what I might call a "rasquache-norteño" of sorts



Figure 16.3 Mexican playbill featuring El Piporro with Tin Tan and Resortes. Reprinted from Eulalio González Ramírez’s *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1999). Used by permission of the author’s estate.

who stood as a colorful reminder of a Mexican who struggled to maintain his simple, hard-working life on the margins of society and, in the case of the *norteño*, North American economic, social, and political encroachment in the border region.

RECONTEXTUALIZING AND REINVENTING THE NORTEÑO CORRIDO

González’s references for creating his El Piporro-style “*rasquache-norteño*” archetype were not only based on his experiences growing up in the region, but also on one of the most cherished artifacts of Mexican history and culture: the *corrido*. Though the *corrido* was a popular heroic narrative song form known throughout Mexico, in northeastern Mexico—particularly the area bordering Texas and the Rio Grande Valley—it had been localized and transformed as it articulated the collective experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of border history, border life, and border culture. As the popular *música norteña* ensemble tradition, featuring the accordion and Mexican *bajo sexto* (12-string hybrid bass/rhythm guitar) at its core, became established in this region during the 1930s, the *corrido* evolved into the *canción corrido*, as its topical narrative form merged with the popular *canción ranchera* style.²³

Early border corridos were written about popular norteño revolutionary figures like Pancho Villa, who led one of the most important military campaigns of the Mexican Revolution. Villa arose as a powerful icon among the norteño people, primarily through the documentation of his exploits with his band of fighters, División del Norte, who often acted independently, even against the wishes of revolutionary leaders. The appeal of Villa and other outlaw heroes in Mexico is based on their fiercely independent personalities; they were almost always of humble origins, they consistently rebelled against the tyrannical authority of the Mexican government and were equally protectionist with regard to increasing U.S. encroachment in the region. González fashioned El Piporro from a hodgepodge of corrido heroes, drawing on both their good and bad traits. For example, he took from Pancho Villa the valiant and proud nature of a revolutionary hero, who was also known as a horse stealer and womanizer; from Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, he imagined himself the celebrated rancher and sometime politician who fought for the rights of Mexican landowners in South Texas; and, from the elusive Gregorio Cortez, he was a master marksman, never without “his pistol in his hand” and ready to defend his family and fellow Mexicans against American authority (whether it’s the Texas Rangers or the border patrol). However, as a comic actor with an eye toward the well-established *pelado* tradition, he could also tap into his ability to find humor in the multiple realities in which he (and his community) lived. He used humor as a vehicle to, as the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes, “rearticulate” or “translate” artifacts from the norteño culture and that which filtered across the border from “the other” (i.e., Chicano, American identity/culture) to create something else (or in-between) which also “contests the terms and territories of both.”²⁴

Beginning with *Ahí viene Martín Corona* and carried through in other popular films—such as *Espaldas mojadas* (*Wetbacks*) (1953), *El terror de la frontera* (*The Terror of the Border*) (1962), *El rey del tomate* (*The Tomato King*) (1962), *El bracero del año* (*The Laborer of the Year*) (1963), *El pistolero desconocido* (*The Unknown Gunman*) (1966), *El pocho* (*The Mexican American*) (1969), and many others—El Piporro personified all things Mexican and norteño: love of family; country; machismo; autonomy; pride in Mexico’s revolutionary past and the important role norteño heroes played in it; and the struggle against North American domination over the border region’s culture, economy, and lifestyle. He expertly merged these traits along with a distinct norteño-style humor that not only poked fun at Americans from the other side, but also Mexicans and in many cases with the norteño as the fall guy. To that end, El Piporro was a simple, unsophisticated rural cowboy who extracted humor from his own backwardness and his inability to fit into a modern and increasingly urban Mexican society. He is given power through his ability to thwart a dominant and often oppressive and racist American society in many of his films, which wasn’t always the case in traditional corridos. But, what made El Piporro a successful protagonist in films and among his public, was the way he stood his ground through his clever and slippery use of language, in many cases usurping the need for a pistol. Taking a cue from Cantinflas, who many scholars have said transformed the Spanish language in Mexico rather than

simply played with it, El Piporro elaborated on an already idiosyncratic norteño dialect and local tradition of self-deprecating humor.

As master of ceremonies, radio personality, comic actor, songwriter, and interpreter of local proverbs and sayings González crafted a unique norteño vernacular from the corrido's machismo bravura, brutal irony, and heartfelt melodrama as revealed in cleverly rhymed couplets, and whether spoken or sung the listener had better pay very close attention—lest they lose the punch line. Through his words, El Piporro brought a level of respectability and admiration for norteño culture and music. Carlos Monsiváis admires González's ability to transform his character through language.

Le da a Piporro la estructura secuencial de su lenguaje y sobre la marcha aquél urde refranes para enfrentar situaciones desconocidas. Yo creo que desde la Edad Media nadie había inventado tantos refranes como él. Entre otros soportes, su humor requiere de la agilidad magnífica para, por así decirlo, improvisar la tradición."

(He gave Piporro the sequential structure of his language and along the way he alters proverbs to confront unknown situations. I believe that not since the Middle Ages has anyone invented so many proverbs as he has. To this end, his humor requires a magnificent agility to, one might say, improvise the tradition. One of the ways in which González was most successful in doing this was in the way he parodied popular corridos that were already well-known to the public).²⁵

In his book, González explains that he began doing this during his early days in Monterrey as a radio announcer: he would imitate or make fun of them by slightly changing the words to the same tune, or by adding his own lyrics in between the verses of the songs. Whether these corridos were specifically from the norteño region or not, they were fair game for El Piporro, and they became part of the local argot as a result. His refashioning and reinterpreting of these songs also brought them out of the realm of "traditional" and "folkloric" since his parodies were often in the form of commentaries or "asides" interjected in between stanzas, disrupting the flow of the corrido and the traditionally distant role played by the *corridista* (corrido composer-singer). In modern *música norteña* performance, this is similar to the role of the accordion, which never plays over the words of the corrido, but is most expressive in between stanzas.

In his discussion on the form and theme, corrido scholar and folklorist John H. McDowell found that the traditional corrido, typically written by men, are preoccupied with moral situations and "often disdains to present with any completeness the workings of fate that brought the verbal exchange to pass."²⁶ The events of the corrido are delivered in a rather impersonal way and always in the past, with little to no elaboration or detail about the motivations that led to a specific action. He likens this concept to the tone of a Greek tragedy where action and the moral implication of such are more important. However, in the performance of the corrido, the

corridista as singer and interpreter is at liberty to add stanzas with more detail, whether real or imagined, and that's what gives life and energy to the corrido. However, El Piporro, as a "rasquache-norteño" corridista and comic actor, adds his own detail not by adding new stanzas, but spoken commentary filled with colloquialisms and slang, revealing a postmodern and somewhat controversial take on a number of issues such as new attitudes on gender roles, love, machismo, violence, etc. Many of these were becoming of concern to rural immigrants, whether traveling to cities like Mexico City or Monterrey or in the United States.

In this excerpt from El Piporro's version of a traditional corrido, "El Corrido de Rosita Álvarez" (also known as "Rosita Álvarez")²⁷ by an unknown author—probably dating back to the late 1800s²⁸—Rosita defies her mother's warnings and goes out alone to a dance. While there, she refuses to dance with a man named Hipólito and, because she did not do as her mother said, she ends up dead at the hands of an angry and dejected Hipólito. The corrido is typical of a time when women were expected to be virtuous and not overtly flirtatious to the point of humiliating a man in public. El Piporro's version of the corrido not only mocks this antiquated notion, but he gives Rosita a lazy, self-absorbed father which might be one reason she did not want to dance with an equally worthless Hipólito (this is indicated early in the corrido, and well before the corrido's final stanza, with the word *regando*, which I've translated as "fooling around," but can also describe someone who makes mistakes or is worthless). In his final commentary, following the last sung stanza, El Piporro interjects his own *despedida*, which is typically the last stanza where the corridista gives the moral lesson of the story (and where it is often noted that being a bad guy does not pay) and bids his listener farewell. It is a conversation between Hipólito and the police chief (or magistrate) who, after taking Hipólito's confession, the chief asks if he has a last request. At this point in the traditional corrido, Hipólito's character would express remorse or regret for having killed poor Rosita, but that is not the case here. Hipólito, as El Piporro now plays him, is transformed into a heartless criminal who demands cigarettes instead. Because the *despedida* is the point in the corrido where the moral of the story is revealed, it is one of the most important elements of the ballad form. El Piporro disrupts this notion and though his interventions are intended to be humorous, he also injects a bit of reality into the corrido by showing that some men are simply hard-headed and don't learn from their actions. He also seems to put the onus on the listener to contemplate Hipólito's actions and seems to say that in a new, more modern Mexico, it is the individual who must choose his destiny (note: Piporro's "comments" are in italics):²⁹

Rosita Álvarez

Año de mil novecientos	In the year 1900
Muy presente tengo yo	I remember it well
En un barrio del Saltillo	In a Saltillo barrio
Rosita Álvarez murió,	Rosita Álvarez died
Rosita Álvarez murió.	Rosita Álvarez died

La mamá de Rosita, mujer de antes. Se ocupaba en remendar el calcetín y el calzón del viejo, que salió muy lumbre pa' la ropa. No sabía hacer más gracia más que estar sentado. Le decían el minero, tenía plata en las cienes, oro en la boca y plomo en las patas.

(Rosita's mother was an old-fashioned woman who spent her time donning the socks and underwear of her old man, who was good at wearing out his clothes. He did not have any more grace other than sitting around. They called him "the miner," because he had silver in his temples, gold in his mouth, and lead feet.)

Su mamá se lo decía:	Her mother said:
"Rosita esta noche no sales."	"Rosita don't go out tonight."
"Mamá no tengo la culpa,	"Mama don't blame me
Que a mí me gusten los bailes,	I love the dances
Que a mí me gusten los bailes."	I love the dances."

Hipólito estaba en la labor, regando, cuando llega Marcos, amigo del alma, a sonsacarlo.

(Hipólito was in the field, fooling around, when his close friend Marcos came to pick him up [for the dance].)

Hipólito fue a la fiesta	Hipólito went to the dance
Y a Rosa se dirigió	He went straight to Rosita
Como era la más bonita	Because she was the most beautiful
Rosita lo desairó,	Rosita rejected him
Rosita lo desairó.	Rosita rejected him.

Se puso colorao colorao como un tomate de pura vergüenza. "A las muchachas les gusta que les rueguen sácala otra," dijo Marcos.

(He was red, red like a tomato of pure shame. "Women love to be begged. Ask her again," Marcos said.)

"Rosita no me desaires,	"Rosita don't let me down,
la gente lo va a notar."	people will notice."
"Pues que digan lo que digan,	"Let them say what they want to say.
Contigo no he de bailar,	I would never dance with you,
Contigo no he de bailar."	I would never dance with you."

De colorao como un tomate se puso morao, como un higo, de puro coraje. “Contente” dijo Marcos, “te conozco.” “Pos si me conoces hazte a un lado porque a ti también te agujero.”

(He went from red like a tomato to purple, like a fig, of pure rage. “Contain yourself,” Marcos said. “I know you.” “Okay, if you know me then step aside or I will put a hole in you too.”)

Echó mano a su cintura,	He put his hand to his belt,
una pistola sacó	he took out a gun.
Y a la pobre de Rosita	And at poor Rosita,
no más tres tiros le dió,	he fired just three shots,
no más tres tiros le dió.	he fired just three shots.

Cayó privada aquella mujer.—Háganse a un lado por favor, no se arremolinen.—Échenle aire.—Cállese, hombre. Por favor gentes, a un lado, ¡entiendan!—Échenle aire.—Cállese, hombre. Una súplica, atrás, por favor, atrás.—Échenle aire.—¡Cállese, hombre! ¿Pa’ que decía que le echarán aire? Vino el mecánico de la esquina y le puso 30 libras; murió muy repuesta.

(This woman [Rosita] passed out.—Step aside, please don’t make a crowd.—Give her some air.—Shut up, man. Please people, step aside, be reasonable!—Give her some air.—Shut up, man. I beg you, please stay away.—Give her some air.—Shut up, man! Why did you ask to give her some air? The mechanic from the corner came over and gave her 30 pounds; she died very restored.)

Rosita ya está en el Cielo,	Rosita is now in heaven,
dándole cuenta al Creador.	telling her story to the Creator.
Hipólito está en la cárcel,	Hipólito is in jail,
dando su declaración.	giving his confession.

¿Pus que hicites Hipólito?

La maté, la maté

Pus firmale ahí

Ya está firmado. Con la otra mano. Soy zurdo.

¿Algún encargo?

¡Me traen cigarros raza!

(So what did you do Hipólito?

I killed her, I killed her.

So sign there.

I already did. With the other hand. I’m a lefty.

Any requests?

Bring me some cigarettes people!”)

In homage to González, in 2003, after his death, the Mexican communication scholar, Antonieta Mercado, wrote that the actor once claimed that his commentaries (or “interventions” as she described them) in corridos like “Rosita Álvarez,” aspired to “*desmistificar al héroe que estos presentaban*” (demystify the heroes presented in them). Mercado added that the corridos parodied by El Piporro “*recibieron esta forma de enmarcación con sus vibrantes comentarios entre estrofas. Al final no quedaba otro remedio más que reírse a carcajada limpia, con la solemnidad de las trágicas letras del corrido y la lúdica presentación en voz de Piporro.*” (They [the corridos] received this style of framing of his vibrant comments between stanzas. In the end, the only thing to do is to scream out loud with laughter at the solemnity of the tragic words of the corrido and the playful presentation of Piporro’s voice.)³⁰

Today, popular música norteña artists like Los Tigres del Norte, Luis y Julian, Los Terribles del Norte and many others carry on this style of singing tragic or ominous corridos in a very upbeat and lively tempo and vocal style. In particular, the California-based Los Tigres del Norte have released countless songs—about the dangers of illegal border crossing and drug trafficking, about Mexican politicians and officials who are raping the government and its people of respectability and accountability, about the struggle of many Mexicans trying to eke out a living as undocumented laborers—all sung to an upbeat accordion melody and rollicking polka-inspired dance rhythm. It is that playful irony that is inherent in his “rasquache-norteño” fashioning of the local folklore and spinning of tales; when people gathered to tell stories or rib neighbors and friends about their misfortune in gambling or on a bad bet at the horse races.

By the late 1950s, through his own comic interpretations, El Piporro brought new vitality to the once tragic and solemn corrido, and he made people laugh. His films and live shows, which there were many during the 1950s and 1960s, brought the once dusty old norteño stories and local heroes back to life, and he played them with biting satire, folkloric charm, and authenticity. Thanks to El Piporro, the norteño cowboy was resubmitted into Mexican popular culture consciousness and did not aspire to be anything other than who he was. Tin Tan’s presence on the screen and in the Mexican mindset, however, had been as an interloper of sorts, trying (often to disastrous and hilarious results) to emulate the upper class and be accepted in their world and as an uncomfortable, albeit ambiguous, presence on the Mexican modern cultural landscape amid the push toward a clearly defined national identity.³¹ González’s El Piporro was impulsive, often reckless to be sure, but these characteristics made him both accessible and relatable; his tendency to drink too much on occasion, to misread (and underestimate) women, to be lacking in education and sophistication, to mangle (and brilliantly so) both Spanish and English connected him to his fellow working-class countrymen from diverse, though collectively Mexican, regional and experiential backgrounds.

RECLAIMING AND “RE-LOCALIZING” THE BORDER SPACE

As the decade wore on and nearly four million Mexicans crossed the border in 1942 to 1964 to work as laborers in the United States as part of the Bracero

Program, González recognized that this growing portion of the population was not able to fully participate in the day-to-day experience of life in Mexico. As seasonal workers, these individuals were living at home and abroad, which was disconnecting them with family and friends and, in some cases, challenging their allegiances to Mexico. Not only had many of his fellow *norteños* traveled abroad for work, but so did a large percentage of rural and working-class laborers from all across the country. Popular música *norteña* groups such as Los Alegres de Terán, Los Relampagos del Norte, Los Donneños and many others from the border region began following fellow migrant workers to towns and cities throughout the United States to perform for these migrant communities. González's interest in this traveling migrant-worker population was not new. Growing up in proximity to the Texas border and with a father who had worked as a customs agent, González saw the region transform due to the increasing numbers of *norteño* laborers crossing the border for work, and then watching many more travel to the region from rural communities in Mexican states further south to make their way across as well. During the twenty-two years of the Bracero Program's existence, more than 4.6 million labor contracts were issued to workers. Large groups of bracero applicants came via train to the northern border, and their arrival altered the social and economic environments of many border towns. While some braceros returned to their hometowns during the off-season when their contracts expired, a growing number settled in the border communities on the Mexican side, making it easier to travel back to the United States when work became available again.³² Border cities like Ciudad Juárez, Reynosa, Matamoros, Mexicali, and Tijuana became a hotbed of recruitment and a main gathering point for the agricultural labor force. From these border cities, it was much easier to make the crossing into the United States where jobs were more abundant. However, numerous restrictions and an overly complicated process for legal entry made illegal crossing a popular and increasingly viable option for many workers.³³

After making *Ahí viene Martín Corona*, he played a small, but memorable role in the 1953 film *Espaldas mojadas (Wetbacks)*,³⁴ directed by Alejandro Galindo. The film is about a disillusioned Mexican worker who illegally crosses the border and finds a job where he is exploited and experiences discrimination. González portrayed a minor character, a laborer named Alberto Cuevas, who drowns his sorrows in alcohol and song, an impassioned portrayal which earned him the Ariel (Mexican Academy of Film award) in the category of Best Actor in a Minor Role. It stood in contrast to the tradition of early films about migration to the United States such as the silent film, *El hombre sin patria (Man without a Country)* (1922) and *El hijo desobediente (The Disobedient Son)* (1945), which try to dissuade the masses from making the journey. In writing about dismantling the U.S.-Mexico border through Mexican cinema, Glenn A. Martínez observes that these early filmmakers have "systematically and, for the most part, uniformly represented Mexican-Americans as traitors to their country."³⁵ *Espaldas mojadas*, however, was one of the few films about border crossing and undocumented immigrants that doesn't portray these travelers as abandoning their loyalty to family and country, but as casualties of the government's shift away from the agriculture

industry, which many of them had worked in, to an aggressive industrial expansionist agenda.³⁶ In an interview in Mexico City in 1999, González gave me a very direct explanation of why he became interested in reaching out to the migrant population through his films. It also reflects his belief that Mexican cultural expressions such as ballads are ways in which Mexicans living on both sides can remain connected. This is a notion (clearly foreshadowed in González's work) that has become even more relevant today as many more Mexicans travel to the United States illegally, making assimilation virtually impossible and which forces stronger ties to Mexico: "*A mi no importa si viven aquí o allá, pero son mexicanos con el mismo color y la sangre igual que corre por sus venas. Mis canciones son para ellos mismos y para mí... Pa'que riamos juntos.*" (To me, it's not important if they live here or there, but they are Mexicans with the same skin color and the same blood running through their veins. My songs are for them and for me... So that we can laugh together.)³⁷

González's border presented a decidedly Mexican space. In his films, particularly those made during the 1960s such as *El terror de la frontera* (1962), *El bracero del año* (1963), and *El pocho* (1969), very often the border is depicted, not simply as a place to pass through as a means for making it to the other side for work and the hope of prosperity, but as a welcoming space, a place that you can also return to and offers experiences and memories of a Mexico past and present. While this region of northern Mexico has long distinguished itself as self-governing and self-sufficient, it is also where some of the early peasant uprisings that sparked the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) took place. Norteños are exceptionally proud of this fact, just as they are about local revolutionary heroes like Pancho Villa, Francisco Madero, and Jesús Leal, whose valiant exploits are detailed in corridos that are still sung with great fanfare today. And while the region is also defined by intercultural conflict that goes back to the U.S. invasion and subsequent annexation of what became the American Southwest at the end of Mexican-American War in 1848, norteño culture and identity held forth amid a new form of discrimination once the political borderline was redrawn between the two countries and the concept of being "Mexican" took on new meaning. The shift from songs about working-class heroes of the Revolution to those about common folk fighting for their right to work the land and to be treated as equals by the *norteamericano* (Mexican term for "white" American) were part of a regional notion of *mexicanidad* which was then extended to those who were crossing over for work, whether they were able to physically return or not.

As a border native who understood and sympathized with the border-crossing experience, González merged his own "rasquache-norteño" humor and personality with the fate of the Mexican laborer (in particular, the undocumented); another underdog figure whose exploits were beginning to be of concern to so many working-class Mexicans in rural areas as well as in the growing cities. González's portrayal offered comic relief in the midst of the inherent displacement and disenfranchised felt simultaneously by the traveling laborer, his family,

and home community. Perhaps to give the experience a lighter side or even to diffuse the stress of border crossing, González often portrayed comedic heroes who traveled north either as *braceros* (seasonal workers with legal permits) or *mojados* (undocumented workers).³⁸ Many of his protagonists drew on stereotyped *rasquache-norteño* characteristics of personalities from border corridos, like the penchant for macho boasting and love of tequila, guns, horses, and women. However, in the end, his character's willingness to make personal sacrifices for love of country, family, and an honest and "simple" way of life often prevailed, as was the case among the same scrappy characters in the popular corridos. In many of his films, he experienced numerous run-ins with the border patrol. Conflicting Anglo-American social and cultural influences positioned him—along with his fellow *norteños*—on the front lines of a newly expanding and complex Mexican social space that was rapidly developing in the border region and the Southwest during the late 1950s and 1960s. In response to the impact this migration was having on the lives of Mexicans on both sides of the border, from the early 1960s and continuing through the decade, González morphed *El Piporro* into a *bracero*, *mojado* and, later, a *pocho*.

González was one of the first film actors and songwriters to address the plight of the *bracero* and then the *mojado*, or undocumented immigrant. As a singer and songwriter, he went from commenting on corridos to writing and recording them, and they would become popular centerpieces of his films. He was also the first to write and record songs that, through sardonic humor and wit, transcended the dangers and psychological distress of border crossing to express a more modern and transnational notion of *mexicanidad*. It is a *mexicanidad* that reflects an identity that is not bound by Mexican and North American social, political, or geographic boundaries. González's songs, were written using elements of the narrative corrido style and included his spoken commentary and/or conversations with the song's characters. More often backed by his own *norteña* ensemble, featuring fellow *norteño* native Juan Silva on accordion (González's musical partner who began working with him in the early 1960s until 2003), he created a space for both the *norteño* and the migrant border crosser (whether he crossed legally or not) in the now politically volatile and increasingly hostile border region as well as in locations farther north in the expanding Mexican diaspora. This merging of the well-established and widely popularized image of the macho *norteño* as cowboy, rebel, bandit hero, and outlaw with the border-crossing *bracero* and/or *mojado*—whose undocumented status makes him an enemy of the (U.S.) state and, naturally, an outlaw—was personified by González on screen and in his songs. This image would be copied and updated by several modern *norteña* groups, in particular *Los Tigres del Norte*, *Luis y Julián*, *Los Terribles del Norte*, and more recently *Los Tucanes de Tijuana*. Similarly, the emerging transnational *norteña* music industry would continue to track the movement of Mexicans throughout the United States and systematically network with local Mexican promoters to establish Spanish-language radio stations, clubs, and an exhaustive touring circuit.

DON'T SAY "TECAILA," BECAUSE . . .

In his autobiography González says that he wrote "Chulas fronteras" ("Beautiful Borders") in 1962, and that it was one of the first songs (which also includes spoken interjections and conversations) he'd ever written. It was a way for him to launch the first shows he would perform in the United States for immigrants and migrant laborers as a new personality he called "*el bracero musical*" (the musical laborer).³⁹ His act would be part of traveling floor shows or *caravanas* (caravans), which were organized by promoters and also featured Mexican folkloric dancing, mariachis with popular ranchera singers, comedians, movie personalities, and *charros* (rodeo cowboys who performed rope tricks and other horse-back riding stunts). Caravanas were updated versions of the *carpas* of the 1930s and 1940s. The caravanas often played in large urban centers like Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and San Antonio, but by the late 1960s variety shows became too expensive to tour outside Mexico.⁴⁰ González traveled extensively throughout the American Southwest and Mexico. "Chulas fronteras" proved to be a crowd favorite in these shows and González recalled that it was a very popular request everywhere he traveled, particularly in the United States. In fact, it was so popular that it became the center attraction for his 1964 movie *El bracero del año*.⁴¹ He begins the song with El Piporro's signature shout, *¡Ajúa!* which is a *grito*, defined as a "shout" or "yell." The *grito* is emblematic of Mexican culture and identity, often heard during mariachi performances or among imbibed celebrants singing along to a traditional ranchera or corrido. González fashioned his own distinctly "norteño" *grito*, and it often opens and closes his songs.

In "Chulas fronteras" he is El Piporro playing a bracero who has just returned to Mexico and details his encounter with a border patrol officer who assumes he is crossing illegally (and calls him a "mojado"). The officer scolds the bracero for drinking tequila, who responds by showing him his "papers" and says that with the money he has made in the United States he can drink whisky *and* tequila and "in the middle of the highway" (*¡hasta en medio del highway!*) no less. The border patrol officer is put off by the notion that this Mexican laborer has adopted a "capitalist narrative" that, he thinks, allows him to participate in the American dream. The bracero jabs him even further by adding, "Because I jev money, and wit di money dancing di dog," and following up that comment with the popular Spanish-language expression "*Con dinero baila el perro*" (With money the dog dances). The border patrol officer is confused by the awkward English translation of this popular Mexican expression, which means something like "when money talks, people listen." The bracero, now flush with money made in the United States, feels empowered, and boldly offers him a drink of tequila. At this point, the bracero has, in a sense, taken back "his" border through his own creative interpretation of a Mexican expression and his manipulation of the English language, all the while enjoying his earnings from in the United States in his own country and on his side of the border.

The song's counter-hegemonic humor plays against the vulnerable state of the *mojado* and the constant fear of being caught (and deported) by the border patrol.

This threat is diffused when the *bracero* mocks the dominant American authority figure, which is like laughing in the face of the fear that dogs every undocumented worker in the United States. When El Piporro performs this same song in the film, *El bracero del año*, he visually usurps the authority and power of the officer by playing both roles himself in the same scene and through an innovative (at the time it was made) photography technique rendering the patrol officer at least three times the size of the *bracero*. With both characters dressed in similarly stereotyped “cowboy” garb, the image brings to mind the biblical story of David and Goliath, with the underdog David challenging and overcoming Goliath on his own terms and not by adorning himself with armor and weapons. (See figure 16.4) Like David, the *bracero* outwits the larger-than-life border patrol officer (who also represents North American encroachment and authority in the border region) through creative double-speak in both languages and his *rasquache-norteño* humor.

In the song, the *bracero* also makes use of other Mexican slang words and phrases such as *bochorno* (loosely, “shame”), *un poco bigotón* (with a bit of a moustache), *raza* (people or countrymen), *güero* (person with light skin or “whitey”), *chivera* (a “pack rat” or someone with a lot of stuff), as well as terms that were increasingly being used by migrant travelers, some already known to *norteños*, such as *mojado*, *la migra* (the border patrol), *las pizcas* (literally the “pickings,” referring to picking cotton or vegetables). In particular, there are two rather clever moments in the song where the *bracero* uses slang terms and phrases to diffuse (and perhaps subvert) the border patrol officer’s power in the region. One example is when the officer says “Oh, my, my *tecaila*,” mispronouncing “tequila” and the *bracero* responds, “No *digas*



Figure 16.4 Still from *El bracero del año* featuring El Piporro playing both the border patrol officer and the *bracero*.

'tecaila' porque..." ("Don't say 'tecaila,' because..."), which appears as if he is correcting his punctuation, but "tecaila" is actually a code for the slang phrase "te-cae-la migra," which can be translated as "the border patrol has got you." Finally, at the end of the last spoken phrase, the bracero says "I wait for you, or you wait for me. ¡Mejor [better] you güey!" The term *güey* sounds like "wait" in English, which is what the border patrol officer would understand. However, the Mexican listener would know that *güey* is an explicative that is derived from *buey*, which means "ox" or "bull," and in Mexican slang it can mean something like "jerk" or "idiot." Again, González uses language as a means to trick and insult the border agent, which brings him unwittingly into a hybrid Mexican-norteño border space where he becomes nothing more than a caricature of himself. In a sense, he shifts the control of the border space back to the border-crossing bracero or *mojado* and recasts it in the *norteño* imagination as the "beautiful" border "*donde si van a gozar*" "where you will have a good time." It is important to note here that the Bracero Program would end just two years after "Chulas fronteras" was written (and the same year that *El bracero del año* was released). The status of many border crossers was already changing drastically and many more laborers were crossing the border illegally to work the same jobs they did as *braceros*. González seems to be keenly aware of the heightened level of fear and uncertainty many migrants were facing by mocking the border patrol officer's authority and power and by beating him in this sardonically amusing verbal shoot-out.

"Chulas fronteras"

Lyrics

By Eulalio "El Piporro" González Ramírez (1962)⁴²

Hablado:

¡Ajúa! ¡Ajúa!
 "Chulas fronteras del norte,
 como las extraño, no las divisó
 desde hace un año." ¡Ajúa!

Spoken:

Ajú! Ajúa!
 "Beautiful northern borders,
 how I've missed you, I've not seen
 you
 for a year." Ajúa!

Cantado:

Andándome yo pasiendo [paseando]
 por las fronteras del norte
 ¡Ay qué cosa tan hermosa!
 De Tijuana a Ciudad Juárez,
 de Ciudad Juárez a Laredo,
 de Laredo a Matamoros
 sin olvidar a Reynosa.

Sung

I was traveling
 around the northern borders.
 Oh what a beautiful thing!
 From Tijuana to Ciudad Juárez,
 from Ciudad Juárez to Laredo,
 Laredo to Matamoros,
 don't forget Reynosa.

Una muchacha en el puente,
 blanca flor de primavera

A young woman at the bridge,
 a beautiful spring flower,

me miraba, me miraba.
 Le pedí me resolviera,
 si acaso yo le gustaba.
 Pero ella quería otra cosa
 ¡le ayudara en la pasada!

Hablado:

Me vio fuerte de brazo,
 amplio de espaldas, ancho de pecho.
 ¿Pos' no me cargó de bultos?

¡Ah! qué mujer tan chivera,

Y yo haciéndole tercera.
 Al llegar a la aduana me dice el

de la cachucha. “¿Qué llevas
 ahí?” “Pos pura cosa permitida,

llevo comida.”

“Mentira, llevas géneros.”

“Ah, qué sopor y qué bochorno
 empecé a pasar aceite, raza,
 sudé y sudé de pura vergüenza.

Cantado:

Antes iba al otro lado
 escondido de la gente
 pues pasaba de mojado.
 Ahora tengo mis papeles
 ya estoy dentro de la ley
 Tomo wiskey o la tequila
 ¡hasta en medio del highway!

Hablado:

“Ey tú, mecsicano. ¿Tú eres
 mojado?”

“Guara momen, güero, guara

I am working here,
 I am working en di pizcas,
 in the betabel an en di los arroces
 I gara peipers, I gara peipers,

was looking at me, looking at me.
 I asked her to tell me, please,
 if she liked me.
 But she wanted something else,
 For me to help her cross the bridge!

Spoken:

She saw my strong arm,
 broad back and wide chest.
 Can you imagine she made me
 carry all her stuff?

Ah! And that woman had a lot of
 stuff,

And I was playing her game
 When I reached the customs office,
 the

officer with the cap asked, “What do
 you have there?” “Only permitted
 things,

I bring food.”

“Liar, you have clothes.”

Oh, what a stupor and what shame,
 then came the heat, people,
 I sweated and sweated from
 embarrassment.

Sung:

I used to cross over,
 hiding from people,
 because I crossed as a wetback.
 Now I have my papers,
 and I'm within the law.
 I drink my whiskey or tequila
 even in the middle of the highway!

Spoken:

“Hey, you, Mexican. Are you a
 wetback?”

“Wait a moment, whitey, wait a
 moment, moment,

I am working here,
 I am working in the “pickings,”
 in the beets and in the rice fields,
 I got my papers, I got my papers,

dis is mai picture, un poco bigotón
 bot is mai picture.” “Bueno,
 sí, pero tú estás tomando.” “Bicos I
 jev money, and wit di money dancing

di dog.

Con dinero baila el perro,
 criatura. Échate un trago,
 no te vayas dioquis.” “Oh, no!”

“I jev whiskey and tequila!”

“Oh, my, my tecaila!”

“No digas ‘tecaila’ porque...

ándale, échate un trago.”

“Este tecaila mucho caliente,
 mucho picoso.”

“Don’t bi soflamer, don’t be soflamer,

no seas soflamero. Échate otro.”

“No, otra vez será,
 otra vez será.” “Bueno,
 I wait for you, or you wait for me.
 ¡Mejor you güey!”

Cantado:

Yo les digo a mis amigos
 cuando vayan a las pizcas
 no se dejen engañar.
 Con los güeros ganen lana

pero no la han de gastar.
 Vénganse pa’ la frontera
 ¡donde si van a gozar!

this is my picture, with a bit of a
 moustache,

but this is my picture.” “Well,
 yes, but you are drinking.” “Because I
 have money and with money

‘dancing
 the dog.’”

With money the dog dances,
 pal. Have a drink,
 don’t leave.” “Oh, no!”

“I have whiskey and tequila!”

“Oh, my, my tecaila!”

“Don’t say ‘tecaila,’ because...

go ahead, have another drink.”

“This tecaila is very hot,
 very spicy.”

“Don’t be so picky, don’t be so
 picky,

no reason to be picky. Have
 another.”

“No, another time I will,
 another time I will.” “Okay,
 I wait for you, or you wait for me
 Better you güey!”

Sung:

I tell my friends
 that when they go “picking,”
 not to be deceived.
 Make your money with the white
 men,
 but don’t spend it there.
 Come to the border instead,
 where you will have fun!

The trauma of crossing-over is diffused in this song and González invites his listeners to come together (at the border) as a nation of travelers; where Mexicanness is redefined and repositioned, where the collective experience of border crossing and living between two cultures, two languages and two borders, and where that space of hybridity binds this nation of migrants together. More important, González’s corridos set precedence for the transformation of the genre from a heroic epic ballad to a topical narrative popular song form that would now express

the ordeal of travel, displacement, cultural and racial conflict, and societal change. Due, in large part, to the massive migration of this population, years of complex and ambiguous U.S. immigration policy, a volatile and increasingly criminalized border region, and escalating undocumented migration, the audience for *música norteña*, the musical vehicle for the new *corrido* style pioneered by González in this and other songs he wrote, would grow to produce a multimillion dollar, transnational industry. As an actor and comic performer who mined border culture, border music, border language and border politics to create the multifaceted El Piporro, González foreshadows the work of the modern performance artist and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña who, himself, explores the effects of globalization on marginalized communities and politics through an imagination of the border as a politically and emotionally charged site. Similarly, today's leading proponents of the *música norteña* musical genre—Los Tigres del Norte, Luis y Julian, Los Cadetes de Linares, Ramon Ayala, Los Tucanes de Tijuana and many others—have also followed González's lead by focusing their songs on the experiences of the traveling migrant (and later the immigrant population living in the United States and their families and friends back in Mexico) and through their music, provide a means for crossing back to Mexico. Many perform songs filled with an updated interpretation of the *rasquache* slang spoken among immigrant travelers and juxtaposing humor with real-life experiences of travel, border crossing, feelings of displacement, and the search for home and place. These artists would also adopt El Piporro's *rasquache-norteño* attire, though, in many cases sporting more embellished interpretations, often looking something like a Mexican version of the "Rhinestone Cowboy."

POCHISMO AND EL PIPORRO

As in "Chulas fronteras," the notion of *pochismo* is also addressed in *El bracero del año* through González's *bracero* character. By the 1960s, and due to an increased level of travel to and from the United States, Mexico was becoming more aware of the hybrid Chicano that Tin Tan's zoot-suited *pachuco* had introduced. By this time the *pachuco* had given way to the *pocho*, a now more distant Mexican-American persona who was strongly asserting him/herself in the American social fabric. However, in Mexico the *pocho* was viewed as being disloyal to his/her Mexican identity or, as Duran describes them, "transgressors of an unquestioned 'natural' law that demands loyalty to one's cultural roots."⁴³ Duran acknowledges González's role in bringing the *pocho* to life on screen and notes that though Mexicans viewed the *pocho* with some distain, he was also embraced, to a certain degree, and was considered, primarily by young writers and intellectuals of the time, distinctly modern. "Pochismo then replaces *pachuquismo* as a trope to represent the 'Mexicanness from over there'" ("mexicanidad de allá"). Duran writes, "El Piporro's *pochismo* then becomes inscribed in the modernizing project of the Mexican nation, pushing the *pachuco* definitively outside the imagined community."⁴⁴

In *El bracero del año*, El Piporro plays a *bracero* named Natalio Reyes Colás who wins a contest and is named "Laborer of the Year." As a reward for winning

the title, he is showered with various “temptations” of North American culture: rock and roll, a big car, sight-seeing trips to iconic places like Hollywood and New York, and a young “pocha” named Maybelle (which he mispronounces “May Ball”). His transformation is expressed in a hilarious song, “Natalio Reyes Colás,” detailing his good fortune, which he sings with an affected American accent. In the spoken portion of the song, Maybelle changes Colás’s name to Nat King Cole in the song (and the film)—who was, in fact, González’s favorite American singer and inspiration for the character’s name in the first place. However, it is worth noting even though his name has been “Americanized,” he makes it a point to maintain his second surname, typically taken from the mother’s maiden name. As Nat King Cole Martínez de la Garza, he is able to hold on to some aspect of his Mexican identity (which might be an indication of his eventual move back to his Mexican self). As Maybelle changes his name, Colás’s *norteño* identity fades away (referenced by his sudden disinterest in the polka and accordion, both important symbolic and musical elements of the *música norteña* sound) and he forgets his girlfriend (spoken portion is in italics):

Nomás cruzó la línea divisoria de “yunairedsteits” y se encontró con May Ball, May Ball Ortíz. Una pochita que hasta el nombre le cambió: en vez de Natalio, le puso Nat, en vez de Reyes, King, y Cole por Colás. ¡Ahora es “Nat King Cole,” Martínez de la Garza!

(Having just crossed the dividing line for the United States, I encountered Maybelle, Maybelle Ortíz. A pochita, who immediately changed my name: in place of Natalio, she put Nat, in place of Reyes, King, and Cole for Colás. Now it’s Nat King Cole, Martínez de la Garza!)

Bracero, bracero,	Bracero, Bracero,
ya no quiere polka,	now he doesn’t want to polka
con el acordeón.	with the accordion.
Ora se disloca,	Now he’s crazy
al compás del “Rock ‘n’ Roll.”	for the beat of “Rock ‘n’ Roll.”
Olvido a Petrita,	He forgot about Petrita,
quiere a la pochita	he wants the pochita.
Y ahora hasta le canta	And now he sings to her
como “Nat King Cole.”	like Nat King Cole.

However, in the final spoken portion and stanza of the song (and in the film), Colás realizes that he doesn’t really belong in the United States after all and he longs for the food, culture, and “Mexican” way of life he left behind. He acknowledges that life back home may not be as fast-paced or modern as in the United States, but in Mexico he is valued as something more than a laborer. Mexico is personified by Colás’s girlfriend, Petrita (a name that is rather close to the word *patria* which means country or nation)—Mexican women are common metaphors

for Mexico (or one's hometown or region) in many nostalgic corridos about travel to the United States. In the end, his return is to the *frontera*, which reinforces González's inclination, in this and many of his songs as well as his stage and film portrayals, to transform or "re-localize" the border as a "Mexican" space; as a place for coming back to or crossing into home. It is in stark contrast to the increasingly negative American construction of the border space as a place for illegal crossing and contraband, which must be controlled and policed.

Pero la pochita lo dejó en la calle. No sabía más que cantar y bailar, de cocinar nada. Puro "ham and eggs," waffles and "hamburger with catsup." ¿A qué le sabe impuesto a pura tortilla con chile?

(But the pochita [Maybelle] ruined him. She only knew how to sing and dance, but nothing about cooking. Always "ham and eggs," waffles and "hamburger with catsup." How could that taste if he was used to only tortilla with chile?)

Natalio Reyes Colás
se regresó a la frontera
Se vino a pata y en "ride,"
diciendo yo no he de hallar,
otra prieta que me quiera,
como Petrita, aunque feíta,
si sabe amar. ¡Ajúa!

Natalio Reyes Colás
went back to the border.
He went by foot and by ride [hitchhiked],
saying I'll not find,
another brunette who loves me
like Petrita, though a little ugly,
knows how to love. Ajúa!

In listening to "Natalio Reyes Colás," watching *El bracero del año* and based on the film's outcome, it might be easy to infer that González is warning migrants that living and working in the United States will subject them to *apochamiento* (becoming Americanized and/or losing touch with one's Mexican heritage and identity). However, the song can also be read as encouraging the bracero or *mojado* traveler to subvert the forces of American power and authority by not only rejecting *apochamiento*, but by remaining connected to their Mexican culture and identity—such as speaking Spanish, listening to Mexican music, watching Mexican films, etc. Just as the *música norteña* groups, who had been performing first in Texas and then throughout the Southwest since the late 1930s, were now following migrants further north to Chicago and other towns and cities, González's songs, live presentations and films were also directed toward this traveling audience. However, as a comic actor of stage and film, songwriter, poet, and recording artist, González's impact on this population was significant in that the *norteño* personality he constructed as El Piporro, as well as the border-crossing *bracero*, *mojado*, and *pocho* characters he played and brought to life in his songs, helped pioneer an imagined community that is defined by national, regional, and transnational experiences and identities. It is a

notion that remains deeply embedded in modern música norteña lyrics and repeated in public commentary and interviews by popular artists. This is arguably the strongest legacy El Piporro left behind.

Between 1964 and 1966 he made eight more films and then focused exclusively on his live music and comedy shows. Increasingly, he performed in the United States, and as a result, became more fascinated with the pocho, in particular—Mexican-Americans born in the United States or those who immigrated there at an early age and knew little about their Mexican heritage or language. In 1969, González wrote, produced, directed, and secured financing for a film he called *El pocho* and for which he was awarded the Premio Cantinflas, an annual award given to an actor who best represents the Latin American community through “humor and distinction.” In his book, González writes that he tried to find a director for the film but was unsuccessful because of lack of interest by Mexicans in the experience of Mexican-Americans living in the United States. In the following quote from his book, it is clear that with this film González hoped to start a dialogue in Mexican popular discourse regarding the history of the Mexican-American experience and the making of this new Mexican diaspora:

Pues el ‘interés’ de la mía trata del desinterés que siempre ha habido hacia esos personajes... que teniendo el color nuestro y la sangre que corre por sus venas igual de nosotros, no han despertado jamás otra cosa que no sea el desprecio de llamarlo “pocho,” como equivalente expresión de renegados y, pa’ acabarla, tampoco allá se les considera ciudadanos de primera, así hayan expuesto sus vidas en aras de sus país.

(Well, my “interest” is to focus on the disinterest that we have regarding these people... who have our color and the same blood running through their veins, they have not heard much from us other than to be humiliated by being called “pocho,” which is a similar expression of a traitor, to make things worse, they are not considered citizens of the first class, even if they have given their lives for the sake of their country.)⁴⁵

One of the most memorable quotes González’s character delivers in *El pocho* is: “Tengo un pié en México, otro en Estados Unidos y los dos... en ninguna parte.” (I have one foot in Mexico, the other in the United States, and both in neither country.) González places the more Americanized, but still marginalized Chicano in this in-between (and expanded) border space alongside the bracero, the mojado, and the norteño. He explores the psychological implications of the effects of growing numbers of ethnic Mexicans living in the United States, which would lead to the unraveling of once fixed and unitary notions of community, culture, identity, and the importance of a “territorialized” nation-state. The historian David G. Gutiérrez has noted that while traveling Mexicans employed several strategies to establish themselves socially and politically in the United States (such as adopting a Chicano or Tejano identity), that many more soon embarked on a path that “reflected the growing ambiguity of their social and cultural life in the



Figure 16.5 “I have one foot in Mexico, the other in the United States, and both in neither country.” Image used by permission of the author’s estate.

‘third space.’⁴⁶ González’s work underscores the blurring of identities and nationalities that would begin to set in motion new, creative and more experiential ways of forming a sense of community and of nationality no longer based on geopolitical boundaries, but rather those evoked in *El Piporro*’s mellifluous border space. *El Piporro* was a trendsetting personality who used language, art, and performance to foreground postmodern discourses that are still being unpacked today and, looking back on his impressive body of work, as an artist he shows us how creative reconstructions of regional, national, and transnational histories, identities, and experiences can create new meanings and new methods for expressing and defining home, place, and belonging.

Notes

1. Monsiváis as quoted in Arturo G. García Hernández, “Piporro, un gran improvisador de la tradición: Monsiváis,” *La Jornada*, March 25, 1999. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Eulalio González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1999), 176.
3. A popular Mexican film genre that reached its height of popularity during the 1930s and 1940s. Comedy, music, and dancing was typical of these films, as were nostalgic themes of an idyllic pastoral life that has been corrupted by modernity and urban migration.

4. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 61–62.
5. One well-known example is the 1920s corrido, “El deportado,” written by an anonymous composer and recorded by numerous música norteña groups, most notably by Los Hermanos Bañuelos in 1929. In the song, Mexican border crossers are told that they need to be bathed before crossing into the United States, regardless of how much money they have to enter. See María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 128–129.
6. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 62.
7. *Ibid.*, 124.
8. *Ibid.*, 126.
9. García Hernández, “Piporro, un gran improvisador de la tradición: Monsiváis.”
10. Kun posits this as part of a larger discussion on the “aural border” that includes recordings of autobiographical writing of the Texas-Mexican singer-songwriter Lydia Mendoza, the 1950–1960s Latin-jazz lounge music of Juan García Esquivel, the hip hop videos of Monterrey-based band Control Machete, the socio-political performance art of Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and many others. See, Josh Kun, “The Aural Border,” *Theater Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2000), 1–7.
11. *Ibid.*, 1–3.
12. Ilan Stavans, “Riddle of Cantinflas,” *Transition*, No. 67 (1995), 29.
13. The traveling tent-show tradition, known as *carpa*, was popular in the 1920s and 1930s throughout Mexico and the American Southwest. Carpa shows were similar to the vaudeville tradition with varied performances including comedic sketches, puppet shows, acrobatics, folkloric music and dance, political satire, cowboy acts such as rope tricks and bullriding. Actors in the carpa tradition provided many stock characters (who based their success on comic improvisation) and would resurface in Mexican films of the “Golden Age.”
14. Deborah Cohn, “The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950–1968: Cosmopolitanism, National Identity, and the State,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2005), 147.
15. Stavans, “Riddle of Cantinflas,” 32.
16. Caló (also known as Pachuco) can be described as a dialect or hybrid street language, which originated among the Mexican-American, or Chicano, population in El Paso, Texas during the first half of the twentieth century. It spread throughout the southwestern United States, initially as a product of pachuco culture and identity and has evolved through the decades, in particular during the Chicano movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, and in contemporary Chicano literature and poetry. See Adolfo Ortega, *Caló Tapestry* (Berkeley: Justa Publications, 1977), for more discussion on this topic.
17. Javier Duran, “The ‘Pachuco’ in Mexican Popular Culture: German Valdez’s Tin Tan.” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2002), 47.
18. *Ibid.*, 46.
19. See Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1990).

20. Duran, "The 'Pachuco' in Mexican Popular Culture," 47.
21. This term refers to an individual who does manual labor. From 1942 to 1964, the U.S. government administered the Bracero Program, which legally brought hundreds of thousands of Mexican laborers into the country to work on building railroads and in the agriculture industry.
22. As an adjective, the term is used to describe anything that is thrown together and lower class. Comic artists exhibiting a rasquache way of dress (disheveled and in rags) and low-class manner of speaking were popular in the 1930s and 1940s shows of carpas and music halls. Cantinflas and Tin Tan took their cues from these populist actors. There is a Chicano artistic movement based on the idea of rasquachismo that is further discussed in Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Art, Resistance and Affirmation: An Interpretive Exhibition of the Chicano Art Movement, 1965–1985*, eds. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, UCLA, 1991).
23. Mexican country/folk songs with a refrain and generally played in waltz or polka dance tempos. Canción ranchera lyrics draw on rural traditional folklore or "ranch life" and are typically written in the AABAB song form. The songs are often played in waltz-time, a slow 6/8, or 2/4 polka meter (the latter more common in the border region). The canción-corrido is a modern song form of the norteña genre that merges the strophic, narrative corrido and elements of the popular canción ranchera.
24. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 28.
25. García Hernández, "Piporro, un gran improvisador de la tradición: Monsiváis."
26. John H. McDowell, "The Mexican Corrido: Formula and Theme in a Ballad Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 85, No. 337 (1972), 216.
27. For further discussion on the history of "El corrido de Rosita Álvarez" by Leslie Liedtke go to: http://www.laits.utexas.edu/jaime/cwp2/ddg/leslie_rosita_alvarez.html
28. Merle E. Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido as a Source for Interpretive Study of Modern Mexico (1870–1950)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 498.
29. Spanish lyrics are from Eulalio González's official Web site, "La página oficial del Piporro," at <http://piporro.com/> (accessed January 4, 2010).
30. Antonieta Mercado, "Adiós a Piporro," *Supermexicanos.com*, at <http://www.supermexicanos.com/piporro/piporro.htm> (accessed September 10, 2003).
31. Duran, "The 'Pachuco' in Mexican Popular Culture," 44.
32. Karen Fleshman, "Abrazando Mexicanos: The United States Should Recognize Mexican Workers' Contributions to Its Economy by Allowing Them to Work Legally," *New York Law School Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (2002), 241–242.
33. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 176.
34. "Wetback" (translated as *espalda mojada* or simply *mojado*) is a derogatory term for an undocumented (Mexican) immigrant. The term was first used in 1944 by border patrol officials when the number of illegal Mexicans traveling into the United States increased by a significantly large percentage. This

inspired a program called "Operation Wetback" instituted in 1954 which was a task force of border patrol officers assembled to rid Southern California, Texas, and western Arizona of "wetbacks." As part of the operation, officers swarmed into neighborhoods, randomly identifying people on the street. Though the government said it was targeting all "illegal aliens," the overwhelming majority of people under attack and deported were Mexican. See, Julián Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971).

35. Glenn A. Martínez, "Mojados, Malinches, and the Dismantling of the United States/Mexico Border in Contemporary Mexican Cinema," *Latin American Issues*, No. 14 (1998), 31–50.
36. Cohn, "The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950–1968," 150.
37. Eulalio González Ramírez, personal communication, Mexico City, Mexico, May 12, 1999.
38. The term is a loose translation of the phrase *espaldas mojadas*, which is itself a translation of the derogatory term wetback. Though it is associated with illegal migration and border crossing, it also indicates low economic status. For most assimilated and upwardly mobile Chicanos and Mexican-Americans, *mojado* is a highly undesirable term; however, many Mexican immigrants use it liberally to denote an individual who has sacrificed much for a better life for him/herself and family.
39. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 259.
40. Nicolás Kanellos, *Hispanic Theatre in the United States* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1984).
41. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 259.
42. From the CD *Lo Mejor de El Piporro*, a collection of songs by Lalo "El Piporro" (Musart CDN-034, 1987).
43. Martínez, "Mojados, Malinches, and the Dismantling of the United States," 31.
44. Duran, "The 'Pachuco' in Mexican Popular Culture," 46.
45. González Ramírez, *Autobiogr... ajúa y anecdo... taconario*, 245.
46. David G. Gutiérrez, "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the 'Third Space': The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (1999), 494.

Dancing Reggaetón with Cowboy Boots

RAMÓN H. RIVERA-SERVERA ■

CHOREOGRAPHIC TRANSITIONS: *LATINIDAD* ON THE MOVE

Two men in their early twenties walk onto the dance floor wearing tight jeans, Western plaid shirts, cowboy boots and hats, and large belt buckles advertising their home state in Mexico: Jalisco. They face each other in standard Latin ballroom position; one set of hands held together above shoulder. One holds the other firmly at the waist while the other places his free hand softly upon his partner's chest. A steady cumbia step with a smooth-walked turn and slight knee-bend dips to the back dominate the choreography for most of the set. They flirt with each other. One caresses the other's face as they move in synch within their tight kinesphere.

Suddenly the music shifts. The basic cumbia rhythm remains but speeds up some in the DJ's transition into a reggaetón set. The lead-in song in the mix is Calle 13's 2005 breakthrough hit "Atrévete-te-te."¹ The song—a mixture of Colombian cumbia with Puerto Rican hip hop, and Jamaican dance hall stylization—became one of the anthems of reggaetón's ascendancy as the supposed "next wave" of the Latin music explosion in the United States.² At this Phoenix, Arizona, primarily Mexican migrant dance club, just a couple of hours from the U.S.-Mexico border, this Mexican *vaquero* (cowboy) gay couple shift their orientation to each other by coming closer, very tightly together, placing their hands on each other's buttocks. They grind their hips in rhythmical circular motion to the base of the song; their legs seductively placed in-between each other's. The lyrics' invitation proceeds:

Atrévete, te, te, te
Salte del closet, te
Escápate, quítate el esmalte
Deja de taparte que nadie va a retratarte
Levántate, ponte hyper
Préndete, sácale chispas al estarter
Préndete en fuego como un lighter
Sacúdete el sudor como si fueras un wiper
*Que tu eres callejera, Street Fighter*³

The dancing couple rides the affective waves of this freedom anthem—a song whose narrative orientation is originally (as performed in the lyrics and the music video) an invitation to women to break away from the expectations of middle-class Puerto Rican propriety (and to a large extent the aspirational whiteness associated with this realm) and embrace their sexuality in explicit, freaky if you will, ways. The song addresses a *chica intelectual*, an intellectual chic, with a serious face, pop-rock Latino tastes, and modest demeanor. It asks her to let loose from her uptightness by simply indulging in the pleasures of dancing. Here the sexual “coming out” (*salte del closet*) works less as a narrative and more as an embodied performance of pleasurable movement despite reggaetón’s tendency to narrate the dancer’s liberation while objectifying her performance.⁴

The song articulates the restrictions of middle-class pop taste as a “show” (*mira deja el show*) and asks its addressee to simply let go: “*Que ahora vamo a bailar por tóa la jarda.*” Establishing the contrasts between the affluent, white Puerto Rican suburbia of Guaynabo—where rock and punk-pop like Cold Play and Green Day are preferred—with the overwhelmingly working-class city of Bayamón,—where tastes for rap and hip hop prevail—the song moves to perform a Puerto Rican unity that is grounded not in the coherent identity of the nation that the class distinctions and their identified aesthetic imports destabilize, but in pursuing a shared investment in the pleasures of dancing reggaetón. It is in their cultivation of “14 karat buttocks” and their sophisticated articulation of the abdominal area “*que va a explotar*” (as if it was to explode) that Puerto Rican women from across the class and racial divide become a collective, moving, entity.⁵

This song’s focus on class and racial differentiations in Puerto Rico and the crossings that indulging in heterosexual erotic pleasure might occasion is ripe with possibilities for the cultural critic invested in articulating the ways in which sexuality is racialized and gendered in contemporary Puerto Rican culture; scholars such as Zaire Zenit Dinzey-Flores have already begun to perform this important content analysis.⁶ But reggaetón’s travel to “other” sites such as the Mexican gay club in Phoenix, Arizona—where “coming out” into bodily pleasures as queer and as Latina/o has increasingly different, dare I say riskier in light of the anti-immigration sentiments and legislation in the state, connotations—has been remarkably absent from scholarship on the genre.⁷ While we have begun to develop knowledge about reggaetón that focuses on the narratives of identity it

puts forth, there has been little focus on reggaetón's travels beyond the specifically Puerto Rican or other ethno-national contexts.⁸

I argue that much of this oversight has to do with the framework of a Latino cultural critique that has tended to focus either on historical ethno-national units such as Mexican or Puerto Rican on one hand, or the dream of a collective *latinidad* (often attached to political utopias imagined from the top down) on the other. The models available for understanding *latinidad* thus rely on critical narratives of cohesion that assume either a historically national or a future intersectional collective. Identifying the cultural bind in either of these two models has become the primary objective of much scholarly work into Latino popular culture and performance. But the choreographic transitions performed by these queer vaqueros points us in a markedly different direction. *Latinidad* as they perform it does not conform to such neat identitarian scripts. Furthermore, their performances do not assume a stable relationship between aesthetic form and ethno-national location. What this couple performs in their articulate shift from cumbia to reggaetón is a mapping of the moving geographies of *latinidad*.

In this short dance sequence, a transition from one musical set to another within the specificity of the Latina/o (primarily Mexican) queer club in Phoenix, *latinidad* is articulated as a dynamic intersection that may at times give the impression of coherence into identitarian scripts but which more often than not challenges easy categorizations. That an anthem song that challenges Puerto Rican middle-class protocols makes its way to the Mexican queer dance club and enables the intimacy between these two dancers requires a repositioning, a critical move if you will, that manages to dance along with the on-the-ground realities of musical cultures in practice.

In accounting for how *latinidad* becomes manifest in the queer dance club, I follow this couple's strategy by dancing reggaetón with cowboy boots. That is, I trace the arrival of reggaetón to Phoenix's Latina/o queer clubs with special attention to the negotiations it occasioned, the affective and identitarian exchanges it made possible, and the transformations it endured in its performance versionings of the genre. More specifically, I center on the frictions around class that dancing to reggaetón in the queer Mexican club highlighted. I do so not through direct reference to the import of the explicitly class-conscious lyrics of a song like Calle 13's "Atrévete-te-te-te," an approach to dance music that has often resulted in too easy a textualization of much more complex cultural enactments that rely heavily on corporeality, but through an engagement with the social world and performance protocols of the dance club.⁹

CLASS MATTERS: THE UNSPOKEN FRICTIONS OF QUEER LATINIDAD

A survey of recent literature in the field of Latina/o studies shows little engagement with the role class might play in shaping social relations among queer Latinas/os in the United States. Latino queer scholars have tended to subsume all

latinidades into one abstract class category relative to the more affluent whiteness that often serves as a marker of hegemony or cultural dominance. In fact, the ethno-racial orientation of the analytical model of Latina/o queer critique has relied heavily on the dichotomous positioning of Latina/o queer aesthetics—assumed as a primarily working-class aesthetics—as a challenge to the codes and conventions of a homonormative whiteness. I have made such a move in some of my own writings on Latina/o queer performance, at times bypassing the nuances inter-Latino differentiation might bring into my analysis in a rush to champion the coalitional promises of queer latinidad. But my fieldwork into social dance clubs over the past decade, especially in the Southwest United States, showcases the increasingly significant role class plays as an element in the day-to-day interactions among queer Latinos.¹⁰ In this essay I highlight the considerable, if generally unacknowledged, frictions around class currently being played out in the Latina/o queer club scene of Phoenix, Arizona. My purpose in doing this is two-fold. First, I want to offer an example of the ways distinctions of class—both *material* (those categories we most clearly occupy based on our lived experience and our placement within broader economic relations) and *aspirational* (those codes and conventions we incorporate or perform as part of the creative and oftentimes consciously strategic labor of social performance)—shape contemporary Latina/o queer public culture. Second, I want to document Latina/o queer dance clubs as significant interclass meeting places, organizational engines that activate social networks and affective crossings not always possible or accounted for in other contexts.

Performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz's discussion of *chusmería* as a strategy of disidentification in his seminal study of performances by queers of color offers an important theoretical grounding to my discussion of intra-Latino queer class differentiation.¹¹ *Chusma*, a pejorative colloquialism, marks lower-class status within the Cuban community. As Muñoz explains, *chusmería* "is a form of behavior that refuses standards of bourgeois comportment. *Chusmería* is to a large degree, linked to stigmatized class identity. Within Cuban culture, for instance, being called *chusma* might be a technique for the middle class to distance itself from the working class; it may be a barely veiled slur suggesting that one is too black; it sometimes connotes gender nonconformity."¹² The term circulates with equal weight in Mexican culture where it was successfully cemented into the popular imaginary through the infamous expression performed by Doña Florinda in skit after skit of Chespirito's *El Chavo del Ocho* television series: "¡Vámonos, tesoro! ¡No te juntes con esta chusma!"¹³ In this instance, calling her son Kiko away from the rest of the children, a resident of a Mexican *vecindad* (residential complex) used the term to mark class differentiation within their specifically low-income geography.

This focus on the internal dynamics of class demarcation and the repertoire of behaviors and identities that challenge internal logics of "appropriate" Latino comportment nuances the generalized majority/minority dyad between latinidad and a dominant other outside of the latinidad proper. This move recognizes that latinidad as an affect or identity is always already a contested term, and one where friction might figure as prominently as does collective cohesion.¹⁴

The cultural economies of class in circulation at the Latina/o queer dance club rely on performance—from music and dance to conversation and fashion—as the constitutive elements of a public sphere that becomes recognizable through the behavioral repertoires of its participants. The presentational aesthetics of the club are thus significant indexes of the varying collective categories that constitute queer latinidad and its manifestations at particular sites. That is, the music and dance practices that make the soundscape and choreoscape of the club evidence borders and boundaries that delimit local specificity, including those of class. However, musical cultures—attached to specificities of nationality, ethnicity, race, and class as they are—present us with marked differences, cultural borderings if you will, but never with impermeable divisions. In looking at the positioning of class in the specificity of the Latina/o queer club in the Southwest, I seek to identify the local practices of inclusion and exclusion that govern cultural belonging across local, national, and transnational scales. As well, I am interested in tracing the more fluid aspects of a social geography that is intersectional in nature. The dance club scene I describe in the pages that follow articulates a community not only relative to the proximity of the U.S.-Mexico border that so shapes Latina/o, or more specifically *mexicano*, life in Phoenix, but also the pleasurable intersections and/or crossings of various inter-Latina/o ethno-racial and intra-Latina/o class categories. It is in attending to these dynamic exchanges where I think queer latinidad becomes most articulately palpable as and in performance.

I situate the queer club as central to contemporary debates over Latino class, especially in relation to the more recent narratives of Latino mainstreaming. I take my cue from the recent work of anthropologist Arlene Dávila who has noted the adjustments and expectations that shape Latina/o mainstreaming through reference to narratives of “respectability” and “class ascendancy” in the United States.¹⁵ I highlight similar dynamics within the local realm of the Latina/o queer dance club where ethno-racial collective identifications negotiate, amid their queering, what I would describe as the class hierarchies of a contemporary LGBTQ public sphere that displays similar mainstreaming tendencies. I am here referring to the centralization of the marriage equality agenda, the gays in the military debate, and consumer-based versions of LGBTQ politics that have tended to leave behind the still marginalized versions of queerness that oftentimes include queers of color, the poor, and other less marketable subjects.¹⁶ That is, only specific versions of queerness ascend to “metrosexual hipness” and mainstream agendas.

My intention is of course not to dismiss latinidad or queerness as coalitional banners but to texture the analysis of inter-Latina/o queer affiliation with the quotidian frictions that such intersections entail. And here the scholarly work of Frances Aparicio has been instrumental. Like her, I want to highlight the convergences as well as the divergences of inter-Latina/o relations.¹⁷ I do so by choreographing a dance between two Latina/o queer dance clubs in Phoenix, Arizona, that showcase two very distinct class-based imaginaries relative to queer latinidad.

Club Zarape and Club Karamba anchor the Latina/o queer nightlife in Phoenix. Both establishments cater to a primarily working-class Mexican and

Mexican-American gay community in Phoenix, and are both located in the central district of the city. In fact, they are adjacent to each other and share a parking lot.

Club Zarape and Club Karamba showcase the diversity of orientations in queer latinidad as they embrace distinct performance practices that correspond to the varying musical subcultures each of these spaces represent. While Club Zarape caters to a northern Mexico *ranchero* scene that favors *moda vaquera* (cowboy wear) and musical genres such as *banda*, *norteña*, and *cumbia*, Club Karamba favors contemporary Mexican pop and international Latin music styles that rely heavily on a techno beat. Most recently, Club Karamba has incorporated reggaetón and hip hop.

Club Zarape invests in a traditional norteño masculinity. Femininity is most publicly performed by *transsexuales* (transsexuals) and *transvestistas* (transvestites) often dressed in sequined gowns with shoulder pads, big *moño* hairdos, and bold fantasy (often plastic) jewelry that recall the fabulous *señoras ricas* (rich ladies) of the 1980s *telenovela* (soap opera) tradition. Club Karamba on the other hand often traffics on a metro-sexual image of international queer modernity that incorporates gender variance as long as it conforms to appropriate trends in contemporary urban-ware and stylistics.

Club Zarape centers on a working-class regional aesthetic while Club Karamba, although serving a primarily working-class community as well, aspires to a middle-class aesthetic that references the tourist environs of coastal queer life in Mexico. In fact, Club Karamba borrows its name from a popular gay club in Cancún frequented by national and international tourists alike.¹⁸ While both clubs cater to a primarily working-class Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American community, their design, musical repertoires, and quotidian performances mark differences that are grounded on the nuances of cultural taste and assumed distinctions based precisely on class, regional identity, time of migration, and so on. These differences are often articulated relative to musical taste and its concomitant cultural subsidiaries—from fashion to speech.

Despite the stark differences between these two musical scenes and their corresponding social practices, we cannot understand one space without the other. Their reputations throughout the city owe much to the competition created by their sheer proximity to each other and their shared iconic status as the center of a Latina/o queer public realm in Phoenix. And it is to the public narratives that circulate about these clubs in Phoenix, especially the characterization of their differences, that I want to turn to in order to show how class-based distinctions shape social exchanges in these spaces.

CULTURAL ASCENDANCY: QUEER NIGHTLIFE AND THE MEXICAN MODERN

Although Club Zarape is the oldest of the establishments in this Latina/o queer complex, it never appeared in the club listings of LGBTQ publications in Phoenix such as *Echo*, *N Touch News*, and *IONAZ* magazines.¹⁹ Club Zarape was never

covered in the colorful documentary pictorials or included in the entertainment maps that both authorize and orient the city's queer cultural scene in these magazines. During the three years I spent conducting fieldwork,²⁰ Zarape was virtually invisible in queer media—with the exception of a 2007 mention as the Best Va-Queer-O Bar in *Phoenix New Times*' "Best of Phoenix" issue, a category it occupied all on its own.²¹

A review of the club appeared in a column for *Latino Perspectives* magazine: Arizona's leading publication for professional, middle-class, and upwardly mobile Latinos. Published monthly and distributed to some 25,000 households in Phoenix and Tucson, the magazine emerged at a time when the economic wealth of the state, funded by the speculative investment in new construction real estate, fueled the optimism of many Latinos who saw in the changing landscape of Arizona's economic boom an opportunity for class ascendancy. In advocating for a new Latino Phoenix, with an imagined affluent Latino middle class at its core, *Latino Perspectives* positioned Zarape as a sign of the past; things to leave behind in a move toward economic and cultural integration with the Valley's elite. Performance artist and journalist Marcos Nájera opened his review as follows:

I totally thought I was in Nogales the first time I walked into club Zarape on West Macdowell near downtown Phoenix. From the looks of the place, I had either flitted into a John Waters makeover of a norteño bar or a wacked out produce section of my neighborhood Food City. Who knew that the supermarket's gaudy décor would years later inspire the interior of a hot night club.

Club Zarape's tragic décor aside, I was thirsty. So without a thought, I clip-clopped past the oh-so-queer vaqueros, con belt buckles the size of Frisbees, as they grabbed-assed each other on the dance floor. Another clue that I actually wasn't at Food City.²²

The author positions himself as a border crosser in this scene. Confusing the club with the border city of Nogales or the interior of a Food City does not only mark the space as quintessentially Mexican but also as particularly classed. The Food City chain of supermarkets was acquired in 1993 as a subsidiary brand of Chandler-based Bashas' Incorporated. Food City fit the parent company's lowest customer profile as it was geared toward a primarily Mexican and working class to poor demographic. This distinction was made explicit by the company's other two retail portfolios: the middle-class Bashas' and the high-end gourmet profile of AJ's. Nájera's performed disorientation serves to both support the caricature of otherness that ensues and place him as a distanced, but in the know, arbiter of good taste.

Nájera's description of Club Zarape performs a comic condescendence that transforms the space into a temporary stage to showcase his own hipness. Nájera, not Club Zarape, becomes the protagonist of this column in a descriptive exuberance that is geared toward a showcasing of his good taste and clever wit. He continues:

I ordered a drink. Breezing by a gaggle of Latina lesbians with oversized haircuts swapping *chisme* under a canopy of piñatas, I marched up to the bartender and proudly ordered, “un appletini, por favor” (that’s Spanish “for one apple martini please”). Silence. Peering over my shoulder, I imagine the Thalia music come to a screeching halt, replaced by the strains of “the good, the bad and the ugly.” “Como?” [*sic*] said the bartender. That means, “What?” My homeboys, Guillerma and Trina, they are comfortable enough with their feminine side that I don’t have to refer to them by their given names, looked stunned. Still, they managed a polite laugh to smooth over the situation. Trina suggested, “Marcos, why don’t you just get a beer? You already had an apple martini at Amsterdam tonight?” But I was all, “OOOOH, nah Trina if I feel like a beer, I would have ordered one.”

“He’ll have a beer.” Trina blurted to the bartender. Moments later, I found myself being served a Bud Light in a can, with a lime wedge, and a cute little *paquete de sal*. I would have been pissed if it wasn’t for the clever garnishes that come with every beer. Just another strange moment in my club hopping adult life.”²³

This narrative served as the inaugural column for “Nájera Nites,” a series of commentaries about Latino life in Phoenix that ran in the *Latino Perspectives* magazine until it was picked up by the more mainstream yet alternative *Phoenix New Times* (the Valley’s version to the *OC Weekly* or *The Village Voice*) under the title “Browntown.” Nájera’s description of Zarape for a mainstream Latina/o publication could be seen as a daring intervention into the scripts of respectability operative in what then was a young and aspirationally middle-class print venue unprecedented in the recent history of the Arizona capital. Intentions aside, the piece does indeed queer *Latino Perspectives* by documenting and circulating knowledge about heretofore ignored aspects of the Latina/o community in Phoenix. But his queering of *Latino Perspectives* remained curiously guarded in nature as he enacts a narrative distance to his subject matter by assuming the judgmental ironic stand of a middle-class outsider before the chusma excess, to return to Muñoz, of the Mexican working-class bar.

Nájera closes his article not just by highlighting the anomalous and temporary nature of his presence in this space: “just another strange moment in my club hopping life,” but by offering an apology, a historical caveat, and future itinerary, ALL to absolve himself of the transgression incurred by not only visiting but profiling Zarape as a Latina/o social space. He qualifies his night out as simply a moment: “A moment I hope, that you don’t mind me sharing.” But this small moment indexes monumental changes in his reader’s world. He explains: “Arizona’s changed in ways big and small since my dad’s Food City days and so have I. And nothing, in my humble opinion, has changed more than our night-life.” So Zarape is perhaps a beacon of change, an underdeveloped but hopeful harbinger of better queer things to come.²⁴ “For the record,” he says, “my central question is and always will be: Where do the Brown get down?” And thus begins “Nájera Nites,” an adventure into the waterholes, restaurants, social, and

cultural spaces that make the Latina/o nightlife in the metropolitan-Phoenix area a thriving scene. But lest not this queer inaugural taint the image of a respectable latinidad, Nájera has his eye on better and more intriguing places. As he closes his essay he reminds us that he already has his “lens fixed on the new James Hotel in Scottsdale (recently profiled in *Travel & Leisure Magazine*).”²⁵

Nájera’s short piece manages to synch with the aspirationally middle-class orientation of *Latino Perspectives* and its assumed audience or market niche. Zarape figures as both a marker of authenticity, “where the Brown get down,” and a signpost in a progressive narrative of Latina/o ascendancy from Food City to the Scottsdale hotel. The move here is not single-handedly malicious but nonetheless participates in a strategic categorization of Mexican chusma in ways that formalize and circulate specifically classed understanding of public culture in Arizona.

If Club Zarape, with its excessive chusma Mexicanness, elicits an apologetic stance before the upwardly mobile Latina/o readership and is simply nonexistent before the LGBTQ mainstream, its next door neighbor, Karamba, was embraced enthusiastically by mainstream gay communities in Phoenix and well beyond the Valley since it opened its doors in 2004. In fact, Karamba became a hot spot destination that showcased a palatable latinidad that Zarape could only fail spectacularly to possess. In an article about Karamba in L.A.’s *Adelante Magazine* (a Latina/o queer publication that has never featured Zarape), Carlos Manuel reported Karamba as “the best Phoenix had to offer.”²⁶ He clarifies that this is not just his personal opinion, but that all the people he interviewed for his article (a total of six different voices are cited in the short one-page review) indeed mentioned Karamba “wasn’t as trashy when comparing [it] to other clubs.” What Carlos Manuel seems to value the most in his assessment of this social space is its ability to offer a dignified—meaning properly middle class—version of queer latinidad that might integrate Latina/o queers into the broader LGBTQ scene in the city and beyond. And integrate into the broader queer scene in Phoenix it has; Karamba has won the Best Gay Latin Dance Club award from *Phoenix New Times* for multiple years now (2006, 2008, and 2009) and has become a central stop in the bar-hopping itineraries of Valley queer socialites. The ascendancy of the club into the gay mainstream includes being listed as one of the best gay bars in the world according to the October 2007 issue of *Out Magazine* and ongoing inclusion in the photomontages of the fabulous that comprises the pictorials of the mainstream LGBTQ press in Arizona.

But what is most poignant about Karamba’s successful appeal to a broader queer community is precisely its showcasing of a commercial pan-Latino, aspirationally middle-class aesthetic. As Carlos Manuel points out:

The owner of the club opened Karamba because he saw the need to offer a place of entertainment to that community who didn’t have a more modern and diverse locale to go. “Being Latino is not only Mexico, it’s also Latin America,” he explained. And in my personal opinion this is what separates Karamba from the rest of the Latino Clubs. Karamba’s entertainment repertoires goes from cumbia, norteño, banda, and Spanish pop on Vaquero

Thursdays with Susana's show, to rock & roll, disco punk, indie, electronica, dance rock, brit pop y new wave every Friday with its Hot Pink and Teenage Kicks After Hours program, to salsa, merengue, rock and pop en español, cumbia y reggaeton every Saturday and Sunday. With such variety, the club administrator tries to offer a unique entertainment service to the Latino gay community of Phoenix and surrounding area."²⁷

The diversity of musical material presented in Karamba constitutes the "global repertoires" that position the club as a "service" that appropriately "modernizes" *mexicanidad* by "diversifying" it beyond the local and regional and into a world where "being Latino is not only Mexico, it's also Latin America." That this pan-Latina/o gesture is advanced as an exclusively commercial one that seeks to competitively expand the geography of the dance club is not surprising considering the "touristic imaginary" through which a space like Karamba is conceptualized. That is, what seems to designate Karamba's *latinidad* as appropriate to the mainstream is precisely its citation of the dramaturgies of touristic performance that offer Latina/o entertainment as a product that more appropriately packages *mexicanidad* as modern. This model of commercial *latinidad* assumes that an investment in the trends of globally current musical cultures, namely musical fusion, favors innovation over tradition.

The tension between tradition and innovation is especially marked relative to the original iteration of Karamba as a destination of queer travel in Cancún. In the context of the tourist experience of Cancún and the greater Yucatán Peninsula, Karamba represents a marked effort to move beyond a tourist market geared toward encounters with history into one that focuses on ahistorical leisure. Cancún's Karamba developed in tandem with the tourist economy of the region and thus cultivated a particular sensitivity to those foreign visitors, mostly U.S. and European citizens, whose presence supported the development of the space through direct economic contribution in the form of consumption. These visitors also helped to authorize this Mexican queer public space by allowing its justification as a needed service to the tourist industry. But tourist development in Cancún, much like the similar reconfiguration of the industry in the Phoenix Central Valley, transitioned from a self-presentation and marketing of their respective site or destination as distinctly historical or specific (especially its staging of indigenous culture) to the more recent globalization of leisure standards (e.g., modern architecture, international cuisine) that render the hotel as a familiar nowhere readily available everywhere. The increased homogenizing expectations of tourism are also manifest in the cultural offerings of entertainment culture as it increasingly embodies an internationalist or globalized musical aesthetic. In the queer club scene this is manifest in a preference for commercial pop music and its mixing with techno or heavy bass danceable hip hop tracks.

The citational practices of Phoenix's Karamba extend the tourist rhetoric of the club space to a city where the primary clientele is in fact Mexican. The modernizing aesthetic of touristic performance signifies differently in this cross-border location. In Phoenix, the image of the iconic club in Mexico makes what is

generally a leisure space oriented toward the foreign visitor available and affordable to Mexican working-class patrons generally regarded as outside the realm of the tourist map of the Mexican tourist city. Queer tourism is made accessible here as domestic experience for both local and transmigrated mexicanos who venture into the space to experience queer mexicanidad, but also engage in practices of cultural consumption that animate conceptions and experiences of class that are attached to the aesthetics of the modern. These opportunities to be, or rather perform being, modern (to be current or in the know) allow for public enactments of class differentiation. These practices of localized class distinction are enhanced by the presence of Zarape as a counterexample across the parking lot.

Pan-Latinidad is a significant component of what characterized the Mexican modern at this particular moment in time. Pan-Latinidad is here assumed from a utilitarian perspective that positions the “appropriately” “contemporary” and “modern” as always already beyond the local and only available to participants under a model of consumption.²⁸ Commercial culture stands in as authorized standard. The different characterizations of Zarape and Karamba in Arizona queer and Latino media point to the significant investment in pan-latinidad as a potentially modernizing force in the mexicano queer scene of the Valley. In this equation, Zarape figures as an image of a “tacky” past and a very local or regional site that allows the traveling outsider a curious and temporary adventure. But most important, Zarape allows the upwardly mobile native the opportunity to recognize how far s/he has come and how much things have changed in the recent history of Latino Arizona. Entering Zarape allows access to an experience of an imagined past that can be successfully overcome by simply walking across the parking lot and into the iconic temple of the modern that is Karamba. Karamba on the other hand represents an entry point toward a future that imagines itself as a re-location from the myopically mexicano into the transnationally Latino.

The distinctions between Zarape and Karamba need to be understood as deeply invested in class hierarchies at a time when middle-class ascendancy in the growing economy of Phoenix was being challenged by increased anti-immigrant activism against recent arrivals. While middle-class Latinos rose in public visibility across the Valley as evidence of the increased metropolitan sophistication of the city, a palatable exoticism if you will, lower-class migrants became increasingly maligned in heated debates about Arizona’s emergence as the central corridor for Mexican undocumented migration into the United States. Arizonans became familiar and enamored of the new “modern” Mexico during this period. Mexican beach leisure developments boomed in places, such as Rocky Point along the coastal regions of the bordering state of Sonora, providing the Valley’s wealthy second-home opportunities across the border. High-end Mexican restaurants with minimalist décor also proliferated, often replacing the more folkloric renderings of an earlier, less “global” Arizona.

The story of Latino ascendancy into the middle class and the development of a corresponding queer nightlife that shares in this narrative remain tentative or remarkably incomplete as a totalizing narrative for Latinas/os in Arizona. Despite the distinctions outlined in the publicly circulated descriptions above, cultural

practice points in a markedly different direction. Regardless of the best efforts by club owners, media observers, and some scenesters to dichotomize the relationship between the social scenes in Zarape and Karamba, between a humble Mexican past and a middle and upper class Latina/o future, and between the aesthetics of *chusmería* and the queer modern, the cultural practices unraveling at these two clubs and the greater space they share (both physical and social) present an interconnected social and cultural scene where experiences of crossing (e.g., from one club to another, from one musical and choreographic format to another) govern both individual and collective experience.

BETWEEN *CHUSMA* AND *FRESAS*: PRACTICES OF BELONGING

The tensions between Zarape and Karamba are exemplary of larger politico-economic negotiations in Latina/o Arizona whereby historically mexicano social spaces and cultural practices became increasingly (upgraded) by globally homogeneous standards of tourism and affluent modernism while retaining a Mexican flavor.²⁹ Pan-Latino music and techno-based pop mixes served as the musical modernizing forces in Karamba's club scene. The slick metal surfaces, contemporary lamps, and large flat video screens throughout the club also contributed to the enhanced identity of the space as mexicano but with a very "modern" difference.

The distinctions outlined by the divergent portrayals of Karamba and Zarape found significant parallels in the on-the-ground distinctions expressed among participants of this cultural complex. Within the club itself, the standards for valuing cultural markers such as fashion, choreography, musical taste, and speech relied heavily on the established distinctions between the spaces. For instance, when I asked a group of Zarape patrons (four Mexican-born men in their mid to late twenties, who arrived in the United States between eight and twelve years of age) whether they ever went to Karamba, I got an immediate response from one and a raucous endorsement from the affirmative laughter of his companions: "¡No! ¡Allí son fresitas!" (No! They are *fresitas* there!)

Fresitas, or little strawberries, is a colloquial term originated in the 1960s by Mexican countercultural groups, especially *nueva ola* rock 'n' rollers and later punks. It describe conservatives, especially women, who were characterized as prudes and unable to participate of the freedoms from decorum espoused by the rising youth cultural movements. In marking this difference the term often referred to the identified group's wealth or attitudinal orientation toward upward mobility in terms of class. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the term was used to describe generally middle- to upper-class youth, male or female, in Mexico City and other urban centers. In its current usage, *fresa* can identify both an attitude and an aesthetic. Its public display generally relies on consumptive practices and performative displays of a modern Mexico, often characterized by an articulate internationalization of taste (e.g., fashion labels, national and international pop

music, incorporation of fashionable phrases into everyday speech from pop culture anglicisms to *haute couture* frenchisms). To the extent that *fresa* seeks to mark class difference from below it could be assumed to represent the putative opposite to *chusma*.

The use of this term by my Zarape interlocutors does not necessarily indicate a reference to Mexico City or an actual belonging to the upper class, but point to the perceived class aspirations of Karamba's social scene. As the young man explained:

*Esos son de Sinaloa, Chihuahua, norteros de por ahí, pero se quieren pasar de fresas. Ahí van vestiditos a todo dar. No más cuando abren la boca ya sabes que son de estas partes. ¡Pero como se chulean a lo bonito!*³⁰

(They are from Sinaloa, Chihuahua, northerners from around there, but they want to pass as *fresas*. There they go dressed up to the max. Just when they open their mouths you realize that they are from over here. Oh but how they flirt with all that is beautiful!)³¹

In his punning of the Karamba crowd this young man does not necessarily mark a difference based on the actual class status or regional precedence of his imagined others. Instead, he describes their performances of *fresa* as aspirational dramaturgies whereby men very much like themselves (working class and from the northern region of Mexico) attempt to pass into a more affluent social scene. As he comments, the efforts to perform in this scene are often frustrated by the interjection of an unavoidable working-class habitus.³² By dressing to the latest fashions the *fresitas* perform a desire to belong to Karamba's scene, but these efforts are at times betrayed by speech habits that mark them as working-class *norteros*.

The distinctions between the two spaces are also performed at sites of social exchange that precede and exceed the inside of the club. These ancillary spaces, what communication studies scholar Lucas Messer has termed "peri-club" spaces, are just as framed by assumptions around class.³³ In peri-club spaces, such as the entrance to the club and the adjacent alleyway and parking lot, the differences in experience about belonging to a particular scene were just as evident as inside the club. Messer observed in his qualitative study of Latino queers in this club complex that approaching the club's door to gain entry became an increasingly difficult transaction because Maricopa County Sheriff Joseph "Joe" Arpaio increased the harassment of all Mexicans, documented or not, as suspect citizens; and the Arizona State Legislature (aided by the reinvigorated anti-immigrant policies of a post-9/11 federal government) debated additional restrictions on services and identification requirements pointed toward the growing population of recently arrived Mexican migrants to the region.³⁴ Under such conditions, clubs like Zarape that served and depended on a recently migrated crowd for its viability suffered as patrons concerned about their well-being became increasingly wary of such public rituals as the entry point I.D. check.

At Karamba, where the aspirationally middle-class aesthetics of "Cancún tourism" had begun to attract a larger population of second and third generation

Mexican-Americans, other Latinas/os, and non-Latina/o U.S. citizens, the performative rituals of admission into the club gained a particularly classed significance. As Phoenix's economy worsened and anti-immigrant sentiment grew, Karamba's bordered geography became progressively more apparent. As a way to comply with government agents and conservative citizens invested in the persecution of undocumented immigrants, the club stepped up security measures at its door. Door staff began to require U.S.-issued identification (as opposed to Mexican passports or driver's licenses).³⁵

The appeal of a touristic dramaturgy of space and the accompanying media attention it garnered Karamba as a friendly "Mexican modern" destination worked in tandem with tactics to keep out undocumented mexicanos to seal the identity of the club as aspirationally middle class. Belonging to a space like Karamba required a repertoire of behaviors—from dress code to gestural approaches—that sought to evidence insider status as *mexicano moderno*. As a Mexican-American security staff in her mid-fifties once described it to me, "in Karamba you have to look like you belong here, anyone can get into Zarape."³⁶ But the *mexicanidad* performed at the club's entrance, invested as it was in the touristic performance aesthetics of the Mexican queer club scene and the anxieties over migratory status, delimited differences that collapsed migrant experience with class status. Legality was posited as an observable condition that relied on the performance of class (*fresa sí pero chusma no*).

To a certain extent the public rhetoric circulated about these clubs in Latino and queer media prescribed the participation of particular groups in each of the clubs. The statements by the young man at Zarape and the security guard at Karamba certainly suggest some buy-in into this portrayal. However, patrons crossed from one establishment to the other with much more frequency than official accounts let on. Just a second look at the young man's statement shows his comedic emasculation of fellow mexicanos as *fresitas* to be narratively supplemented by a recognition of their commonality. Although he describes the men in Karamba as invested in performing class difference, he acknowledges that they are "*de estas partes*" (from here). This shared geography, the North of Mexico, is established at the instance of a failed performance, "*cuando abren la boca*" (when they open their mouths). That both the differences and commonalities articulated in this Latina/o queer scene rely on performance, live acts in public spaces, to become legible supports an understanding of queer *latinidad* as contingent on cultural border crossings that exceed simple narrative categorization. In closing, I want to turn to a final example that further complicates the role class plays in *mexicano* queer Phoenix and its serendipitous or accidental crossings into *latinidad*.

RICANSTRUCTING THE BORDER OR HOW REGGAETÓN BROUGHT THE CHUSMA INTO THE CANCÚN CLUB

If the positioning of Karamba atop the hierarchy of Latina/o queer clubs in Phoenix depended on a class identification that relied on an international,

tourist-oriented dramaturgy of space as a sign of queer modernity, it was precisely this very focus on the “queer modern,” a disciplinary performance that required not only an emphasis on the latest trends, but a certain dose of Latina/o queer camp as well, that opened the doors for the arrival of reggaetón, Puerto Rico’s most recent music and dance cultural export, into the club. Radio played a protagonist role in this transition. In 2005, Phoenix’s 91.5 FM radio station changed briefly from Mexican-regional to an exclusively reggaetón/Latin hip hop format. It was the sudden and increased presence of reggaetón across the desert’s airwaves that signaled the possibility of a trend. And it was reggaetón’s potential fashioning of a commercial culture that borrowed from the present, but certainly not dominant, sounds of commercial hip hop music in the dance club that allowed for its smooth adoption.³⁷ From 2005 to 2007 reggaetón was everywhere across the Valley. Karamba’s soundscape changed in keeping with this new trend.

It was the pressure to keep current, *a la moda*, that brought this new musical genre into Karamba. With it came a new population of patrons, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and blacks from across the Valley who ventured into Karamba and quite dramatically expanded not only its demographic profile but its choreographic and linguistic registers as well. Mexicanos, very much like the couple described at the opening of this chapter, began to experiment with articulating the hip in circular and back-and-forth isolations and mimicking sexual acts in poly-rhythmic moves more common to Jamaican dance hall and African-American hip hop than the basic two-step cumbia or the even-beat-structure of the techno-inflected pop ballad. These experiments with articulating the body in “tropicalized” aesthetics of Caribbean hip hop challenged both the assumed choreographic protocols of Karamba as a club and opened up the space for valuing the performance repertoires of Caribbean Latinas/os and African-Americans in the Valley who gained local notoriety and currency for their ability to execute movements correctly.³⁸ The temporary choreographic shift from a norteño aesthetic, or even a pop aesthetic, to the movements of reggaetón represents a significant transformation of the scripts of queer mexicanidad in Phoenix. Karamba’s patrons also playfully incorporated the explicit and coded language about sexuality circulated in reggaetón’s music. Many participants of Karamba’s scene appropriated a Puerto Rican or more broadly Spanish Caribbean accent, specific words for the body, or expressions describing the sexual act and deployed them in flirtatious local exchanges where the newness of Puerto Rican Spanish added sexual charge and queer potentiality to the scene.

This argument does not work strictly along identitarian logics. That is, I do not suggest that queer Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Karamba identified with Puerto Ricanness in explicit ways. I suggest instead that the Puerto Ricanness that circulated in Karamba, and many other Latina/o public spaces throughout the Southwest that incorporated reggaetón into its soundscape, was more of an affect and an aesthetic that was “mexicanized” in translation. It offered an opportunity to be queer without leaving a latinidad that codes in this particular region as primarily Mexican. The incorporation of reggaetón both enacts the practices of class exclusivity that the modern Mexican aesthetics of the Cancún club seek to perform,

while contradicting those very same categories were Puerto Ricans who entered the club to be immediately labeled as lower class and other by participants who regarded their public performances of self as excessively chusma.

Latinidad as an analytic allows us to attend to these intersections. Puerto Ricans began to frequent Karamba during its incorporation of reggaetón. That is, the cultural material introduced within a culture that sought to secure the properly classed geography of a touristic mexicanidad represented by the globally queer dance club resulted in the temporary authorization of Puerto Rican working-class aesthetics. This awkward or accidental placement is neither definitively enabling nor limiting but rather illustrative of the complicated points of friction and interaction that characterize the homogenizing trends of Latina/o commercial culture and its localizations in subcultural practice.

In approaching queer latinidad on the move, we must pursue what bodies do as much as what identity seeks to tell of their doing. Class is central to this formulation both as an aspirational futurity (that may or may not congeal as an identity) and an aesthetic that enables both purposeful and accidental crossings. The title of this chapter documents actual transitions taking place in Latina/o Phoenix. Inter-Latina/o cultural crossings have become more frequent and consequential. But the title also seeks to model a theoretical approximation to these and other sights of encounter where both inter-Latina/o commonality and friction play equal part. Pursuant of these “contradictory movements,” as Ian Barnard has described Gloria Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of the borderlands, I too seek to break away from fixed identitarian scripts that render Latina/o queer bodies as static. As Gloria Anzaldúa has explained in the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middles and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”³⁹ Dancing reggaetón with cowboy boots seeks to document these intimacies, contradictory as they are. It looks for them in ever-shifting geographies where learning to be pleasurable in the world results from movements across categories of comfort and discomfort. Learning to articulate reggaetón’s hip while proudly displaying a Jalisco belt buckle, daring to move publicly in intimate proximity to another queer body, negotiating the pressures of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, and navigating the complicated class hierarchies within Latina/o communities are all part and parcel of living Latina/o and queer in a place like Phoenix. But daring to move seems to be the key maneuver across these various levels of engagement. To dare a step, a touch, a laugh . . . *atrévete-te-te-te*.

Notes

1. Calle 13, “Atrévete-te-te-te,” in *Calle 13*, CD, SONY US Latin, 2005.
2. As Wayne Marshall, Raquel Z. Rivera, and Deborah Pacini Hernandez observed in the introduction to their edited volume on reggaetón: “Reggaeton [*sic*] differs from earlier Latin pop or dance ‘explosions’ in its widespread grassroots popularity, especially among Spanish speakers, as the genre’s basis in digital tools of production and distribution has facilitated a floundering of aspiring

producers and performers across the United States and Latin America.”, *Reggaeton*, eds. Marshall, Rivera, and Pacini Hernandez (Duke University Press, 2009), 3. Nonetheless, the practices I document in this essay developed in close relationship to reggaetón’s commercial promotion and distribution as a new Latin boon with potential market reach in Arizona. As such, the practices I represent here offer example of grassroots rearticulations of mass-mediated cultural commodities of the “Latin Explosion” phenomenon.

3. Dare yourself, come out of the closet.

Escape, take your nail polish off.
 Stop covering yourself cause nobody’s gonna photograph you
 Rise up, get hyper
 Turn on, bring out sparkles from you starter.
 Turn on fire like a lighter
 Shake your sweat off as if you were a wiper
 Cause you are of the streets, a street fighter.
 Translation by the author.

4. For a discussion of the gender dynamics of reggaetón dancing, see Jan Fairley’s “Dancing Back to Front: *Regeton*, Sexuality, Gender and Transnationalism in Cuba,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2006), 471–488.
5. Alfredo Nieves Moreno offers an important alternative to the narrative positioning of women in this song. In his analysis of this song he proposes that the freedom women are invited to experience remains conditional to the presence of the hypermasculine male partner who must still be present in the *perreo* dance scenario to authorize her supposed freedom. See “A Man Lives Here: Reggaeton’s Hypermasculine Resident,” in *Reggaeton*, Marshall et. al., 252–279.
6. Zaire Zenit Dinzey-Flores, “*De la Disco al Caserío*: Urban Spatial Aesthetics and Policy to the Beat of Reggaetón,” *Centro Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2008), 35–69.
7. Wayne Marshall’s groundbreaking essay “From Música Negra to Reggaeton Latino: The Cultural Politics of Nation, Migration and Commercialization” is an important contribution from this debate. While his focus remains primarily on the production and marketing of reggaetón, his apt reading of the inter-Latina/o dynamics at play in these negotiations are foundational to any consideration of the genre’s traversing into *pan-latinidad*. In Marshall et. al., *Reggaeton*, 19–76.
8. In addition to Wayne Marshall’s important intervention, Bernadette Marie Calafell’s discussion of reggaetón is a notable exception. See Bernadette Marie Calafell, *Latina/o Communication Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).
9. Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia offers an important challenge to this critical tendency in his book *La máquina de la salsa: tránsitos del sabor* (San Juan, PR: Ediciones Vértigo, 2005), 37.
10. I stand by the intersectional possibilities that *latinidad* introduces to our understanding of intra-Latina/o social relations but wish to re-emphasize the critical role class plays in these exchanges. See Ramón H. Rivera-Servera,

- “Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative,” *Modern Drama*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2004), 269–289.
11. Muñoz’s exploration of *chusmería* is grounded in his analysis of Alina Troyano’s dystopian futuristic fantasy play *Chicas 2000*. This piece premiered in 1997 at Dixon Place, one of New York City’s leading spaces for experimental performance. For a published version of the script see Alina Troyano, “Chicas 2000,” in *I Carmelita Tropicana: Performing Between Cultures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 72–122.
 12. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 182.
 13. *El Chavo del 8* is a Mexican sitcom originated in 1971 as a short skit in Chespirito’s weekly show and then became a weekly half-hour serial for Televisa. The show ran successfully in Mexico and Latin America throughout the 1970s. It was later incorporated back into a skit version, to Chespirito’s own show through the 1980s and early 1990s. With reruns continually circulated on TV and other media venues, and its most recent reappearance as an animated series, “*El Chavo del 8*” continues to circulate its type characters and their phrases, including its reference to *chusma* across the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world. The show has circulated in the United States through Spanish television networks since the early 1980s.
 14. The idea that Latino identity involves investments in an identitarian collectivity while engaging notions of difference has been a central tenet and debate within Latino studies as a field. In terms of Latino performance, Diana Taylor’s early introduction to these differences continues to serve as an important starting point. See Diana Taylor, “Opening Remarks,” in *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America*, eds. Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 1–16. David Román’s 1995 survey essay on Latino performance discusses how Latino performers in the 1990s insisted “on the visibility and coherence of Latino identity even as they refuse to stabilize that identity as any one image, role, stereotype, or convention.” See David Román, “Latino Performance and Identity,” *Aztlán*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1997), 163.
 15. As Dávila demonstrates, the very possibility of Latina/o integration into a U.S. national imaginary commands very particular crossings of racial and class borders as well as the installation of disciplinary protocols that govern these crossings in order to propose a problematically assimilated Latina/o populace. See Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
 16. For an important critique of these tendencies see Lisa Duggan’s brilliant analysis in “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 175–194 and “Equality, Inc.” in *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).
 17. See Frances Aparicio, “Jennifer as Selena: Rethinking Latinidad in Media and Popular Culture,” *Latino Studies*, Vol. 1, No.1 (2003), 90–105.
 18. Located in downtown Cancún, Karamba was founded in 1986 and it advertises itself as the only survivor of the 1980s club scene in the city. Their Web

- site, exclusively in English, also evidences its outward courtship of foreign tourism over local clientele as its publicized intended audience. See <http://www.karambabar.com>.
19. To date the maps of *'N Touch* and *Echo* do not include Club Zarape. Both maps are available on the publication's respective Web site: <http://www.ntouchaz.com/-content/map.php> and http://www.echomag.com/bar_map.cfm (accessed on April 20, 2010).
 20. Prior to beginning formal research into Club Zarape as a site I was an active patron and participant in its social scene. I frequented the establishment from 2004 to 2007. My participant observation of Club Zarape formally began in September 2005–October 2007. I have paid five additional visits (one–two week periods each) from October 2007 to the present. Observations of my visits to the club are drawn from scratch notes (both written and recorded) as well as ethnographic fieldnotes.
 21. See <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/bestof/2007/award/best-va-queer-o-bar-553472> (accessed on April 20, 2010). The copy for this short article was indeed authored by Marcos Nájera who I discuss later.
 22. Marcos Nájera, "Nájera Nites," *Latino Perspectives*, September 2004, 10.
 23. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
 24. This framing of a past referent from which to evidence the modern is aptly identified by Carlos Monsiváis in his portrait of Mexico City and its representations in photography by Francis Alÿs. See Francis Alÿs and Carlos Monsiváis, *The Historic Center of Mexico City* (Madrid: Turner, 2006).
 25. Nájera, "Nájera Nites," 11.
 26. Carlos Manuel, "Review of Club Zarape," *Adelante Magazine*, October 2005. Article accessed through Karamba's Web site at: http://www.karambanight-club.com/days_of_week_html/Tuesday.htm (accessed April 20, 2010).
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. Alejandro L. Madrid identifies a similar interconnection between consumption and the desire for an aspirational modernity in his analysis of the electronic dance music phenomenon of *Nor-tec*. See Alejandro L. Madrid, *Nor-tec Rifa!: Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See especially pages 199–201.
 29. Spaces within the traditionally white and affluent Valley tourist corridors of Camelback Street and Scottsdale Road also shifted their engagement with Mexicanness from one that banked on a rustic image of México to one that increasingly invested in similar upgrades into an image a Mexican modern that retained a sense of distanced otherness while aesthetically merging with new codes and conventions of international luxury.
 30. Informal interview. Phoenix, Arizona. March 17, 2006.
 31. Translation by the author.
 32. In invoking *habitus* I am referring to Pierre Bourdieu's important theorization of the sedimentation of cultural patterns and attitudes as naturalized behaviors and orientations. See Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
 33. Lucas Messer, "Queer Migrant Culture: Undocumented Queer Latinos and Queer Clubs in Phoenix," Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University (forthcoming).

34. At the time of this writing, the Arizona legislature passed anti-immigration law. Arizona Senate bill-1070 (with amendments from House Bill 2162) signed into law by Arizona's Governor Janet Brewer on April 23, 2010. The law proposes requirements that immigrants in the state carry proof of citizenship or residency status at all times and makes the inability to produce such document a misdemeanor. It also authorizes state law enforcement officials to enforce federal immigration law and criminalizes anyone providing any form of support to undocumented immigrants in the state. Scheduled to activate on July 29, 2010, its most controversial proposals were halted in a federal court injunction pending full consideration of legal challenges against it.
35. As Lucas Messer observes, these policies were implemented inconsistently and oftentimes subverted in myriad strategies of distraction and persuasion performed by queer migrants themselves in gaining access to this scene.
36. Scratch notes. May 10, 2009.
37. Sydney Hutchison and Cathy Ragland have argued for radio's centrality to the popularization of Mexican popular music in the United States in their respective studies of *quebradita* and *norteña* music. See Sydney Hutchinson, *From Quebradita to Duranguense: Dance in Mexican American Youth Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009) and Cathy Ragland, *Música Norteña: Mexican Migrants Creating a Nation Between Nations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).
38. In their book *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Laitnidad* (Dartmouth University Press, 1997) Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman coin the term tropicalization to describe hegemonic practices of representation that position Latin American and U.S. Latinas/os as racially others from a U.S. vantage point. They also discuss the ways in which Latinas/os engage these representations in consumptive, complicitous, and oftentimes challenging ways. I invoke the term to refer to the latter dynamic here.
39. Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt Luke Press, 1987), preface.

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