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How Musical is Woman?: Performing Gender in Mariachi Music

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the  
degree Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

by

Leticia Soto Flores

2015

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

How Musical is Woman?: Performing Gender in Mariachi Music

by

Leticia Soto Flores

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Susan K. McClary, Co-Chair

Professor Timothy Rice, Co-Chair

In this dissertation, I engage in the ongoing discussion between popular music and gender scholarship through an ethnographic and archival investigation of women's performances in mariachi music, a musical expression originating in eighteenth-century Western Mexico. Historical evidence and ethnographic accounts referenced in this study reveal that women have indeed performed with mariachi ensembles since at least the turn of the twentieth century. While they were not encouraged to perform as mariachi musicians, those who did were occluded from historical representations or dismissed as trivial or novel. By presenting a critical analysis of women's socio-musical contributions, this dissertation situates the impact of gendered stereotypes in historical, social, and individual contexts. Presenting this analysis, however, calls for first understanding the mariachi tradition historically.

As with other popular musics that confronted the coming of the mass media, mariachi music evolved also alongside the globalizing culture industry. Since the early twentieth century,



select groups from Western Mexico traveled to Mexico City to secure their space in a promising performance scene. The music became such an important expression that it was featured in all emerging media technologies: the first commercial phonograph recordings in 1908, live national radio programs since 1925, the first sound film in 1931, touring caravans since the 1950s, and pioneer broadcast television programs since the late 1960s (Chapter Two). In this sense, mariachi music's dynamic presence in the media has produced three adverse effects. First, the music presented by the culture industry prompted the idea that mariachi ensembles evolved into internationally broadcasted stereotypical image, such that rural expressions appeared as a mere tradition of the past. Despite the demanding effects of globalization, there continues to be a mariachi tradition that in Mexico has succeeded in sustaining traditional characteristics. These musicians have safeguarded their tradition through aural transmission and today continue to engage in preservation efforts similar to the folk music revival expressions emerging around the world.

Second, with the rise of mariachi music's global popularity, the tradition became vulnerable to increasing disdain and rejection by scholars and public alike. Critics rebuked this evolved musical expression by characterizing it solely as commercial music created by music industry leaders, rather than by the common people from rural communities. They posited that the media homogenizes and distorts regional musical peculiarities, ultimately suggesting a loss in authenticity (Chapter Two). While the media does impact traditional music, the challenge today lies in dignifying and vindicating its artistic value. Third, it is through mass media consciousness that mariachi ensembles became associated with male practitioners, perpetuating the idea that men are the primary tradition bearers. As female singers introduced a woman-figure in Mexican popular music since the 1930s, when Lucha Reyes (1906-1944) first defined the space for

women as bold, unapologetic, and aggressive (Chapter Three), others entered the mariachi music scene, not as singers, but as musicians (Chapter Four). Despite the ideological prominence of this male-centered tradition, women have creatively established their place within this powerful medium of cultural expression so strongly associated with men.

Due to the lack of documentary evidence concerning mariachi music's disputed origins (Chapter One), the ambitious task of understanding women's place in this changing musical phenomenon presents a major challenge. My nine years of formal ethnographic research, as well as my own experience as a mariachi musician for over twenty years, has taught me not to generalize individual experiences, nor deem early-published documents as absolute authoritative truth. The findings I present in this dissertation are not the exception. They do aim, however, to contribute to a panoramic view of the mariachi tradition—with women included.

The dissertation of Leticia Soto Flores is approved.

Anthony Seeger

Roger Savage

Jesús Jáuregui

Susan K. McClary, Committee Co-Chair

Timothy Rice, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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## Vita

### EDUCATION

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### SELECTED AWARDS

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- July 2012          Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA Graduate Division
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- October 2007 Dr. Hyman Oxman and Frieda Dreyer Oxman Fellowship

## PUBLICATIONS

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- In print. "Mariachi Music: Pathway to Expressing Mexican Musical Identity," by Patricia Shehan Campbell and Leticia Isabel Soto Flores. In *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: An Ecological Perspective*, edited by Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant. New York: Oxford University Press.
- August 2014 "La Enseñanza de la Música de Mariachi en Diversos Contextos Educativos." In *Memorias del Coloquio: Aprendizajes y relaciones*, pp. 311-324, Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultural del Gobierno de Jalisco.
- June 2014 "Mariachi Music Education in Diverse Teaching and Learning Contexts." In *Proceedings for the American Musicological Society*, Southern Plains, Texas.
- August 2013 "La Enseñanza de la Música de Mariachi: Una Agenda Pendiente Para la Educación Musical Formal." In *Memorias del Coloquio: Patrimonio Cultural de la Humanidad*, Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultural del Gobierno de Jalisco.
- April 2012 "Performative Metaphors: The "Doing" of Image by Women in Mariachi Music." In *Thinking Gender Papers, UCLA Center for the Study of Women*, UCLA, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8p7123fr>
- August 2011 "Hacia una Revisión de lo Tradicional y lo Moderno en el Mariachi" In *Memorias del Coloquio: El Mariachi, Patrimonio Cultural de los Mexicanos*, pp. 307-315, Jalisco: Secretaría de Cultural del Gobierno de Jalisco.
- January 2011 "La Participación de la Mujer en el Mariachi: el Caso del Son 'El Cascabel'" In *Antropología: Boletín Oficial del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, enero-febrero de 2011, pp. 128-133, México D.F.

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## Chapter One: Introducing women's place in the mariachi tradition

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*Music does not just passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated.*

Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (1991)

When the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi was founded by the Secretariat of Culture of Mexico's Federal District in fall of 2012, applicants with diverse backgrounds and musical experiences approached the admissions office, showing their interest in entering this revolutionary three-year mariachi performance program.<sup>1</sup> During the application process, a young woman with her mother entered the office to inquire about whether she could apply for this new mariachi school, despite her gender. Arlette Jacqueline Gudiño explained that her father, a mariachi musician, did not want to teach her how to play because she is a woman —yet he would teach her younger brother. I will never forget the tears in her eyes when she reasoned, "but it is not my fault that I have mariachi music in my blood, too!" I comforted her and her mother by assuring them that there were no gender restrictions, and that all she had to do was satisfactorily practice the audition guide and review basic music theory in preparation for the entrance exam. The next day, Jacky brought her sister Mexibel and younger brother Luis Eduardo so that all three could complete the application process, and a few weeks later, all three siblings passed the entrance exam. While no official prohibition against women performing

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<sup>1</sup> I was appointed this school's director in July of that same year, given the responsibility to select the best professors and create and implement a formal mariachi music curriculum. Classes officially started on October 15, 2012.

mariachi music exists, social norms throughout the evolution of this tradition have impacted ideas concerning whether women can or cannot play an instrument in a mariachi ensemble.

That women from many parts of the world have historically been incapable of performing music is today refuted by the reinterpretation or discovery of historical documents that prove otherwise. These documents provide ample evidence that women have been musicians since Medieval times, as early as twelfth century (Doss-Quinby 2001:14). Yet, if history did not all together erase the idea of women musicians, it did isolate or diminish their accomplishments, reducing them to anomalies or, worse yet, to prostitutes (Cohen 2002). In Western music, women were not typically encouraged to train as instrumental musicians, much less as musical arrangers or composers. Women introduced to music performance or composition tended to receive training and performance opportunities as a result of familial connections: as wives, daughters, or sisters. Woman composers such as Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) and Clara Schumann (1819-1896) received training and opportunities because of their fathers, and only recently have women who aspire to become composers begun to study music in academies.

In the case of mariachi music, while women were generally not encouraged to participate in the aural transmission process, some did learn musical instruments, generally from their fathers, or father figures. So, what is it about this musical tradition that has made it so problematic for women to learn and perform? To approach this question, we need to first understand, and then challenge, the definition of the mariachi tradition, its history, and its cultural significance today. In this vein, this study engages in a transdisciplinary focus that draws upon gender, performance studies, historiography, various themes in music research, and ethnographic investigation, with the aim of contributing to the knowledge of mariachi music on three levels: (1) to re-conceptualize the mariachi tradition by acknowledging that it is both a

traditional and popular performing art, an approach which enriches the understanding of the tradition as a whole; (2) to encourage respect and dignity for the mariachi tradition by vindicating its artistic value, and that women can contribute to this; and (3) to unfold narratives that bring forth women's historical, social, and musical contributions. Examining the socio-historical context of the mariachi tradition as a whole permits a better understanding of women's place in this history, and more importantly, their place in the future of this tradition.

### **1. Oral history and ideology**

A history of mariachi music has not been written. Any attempt at approaching a mariachi history poses two general problems: first, that historiography of oral traditions is not value-free, and, second, that two types of mariachi musical expressions with different performative characteristics alive in Mexico today, traditional and popular, share a similar history, which is described further below. With regard to the first problematic, like many aurally transmitted musical traditions across the world that have relied on oral traditions surviving selective transmission, mariachi music also faces the historiographic challenge of scarce published sources and audio recordings prior to the invention of the phonograph in 1877. Furthermore, historical accounts of mariachi music prior to the 1920s are occasional, fragmented, and widely scattered. These include traveler's testimonies, ecclesiastical records, chronicles of festivities, newspaper articles, festival programs, compilations of *aires nacionales y regionales* (national and regional melodies), dictionaries, census documents, complaints about inconveniences brought upon by mariachi musicians, and finally, laws established with the intention of prohibiting mariachi music's own existence (Jáuregui 2012a:210).

It was not until the media promoted a popular urban mariachi expression since the mid 1920s that the tradition was given attention in specialized works in Mexico (Linares 1925,

Ramírez de Aguilar 1930 [1925], Vázquez Santa Ana 1925a, Campos 1928, Toor 1931). Once information about mariachi music became available via published material, it began its transition from an oral tradition to a written one. Since published material tends to receive status as authoritative proof and that which described mariachi music lacked historical and ethnographic research, instead of supplying historical evidence, these publications thus paved the road for ideological disputes concerning this tradition's origins. Renowned Mexican historian (of French origin) Jean Meyer acknowledged this when he took on the task of reviewing historical documents attempting to locate mariachi music's history, summing them up as battle for local patriotisms:

Local patriotisms have turned this into a passionate discussion: is mariachi [music] from Tecalitlán, Cocula, or Santiago Ixcuintla? The word is fought over, but, of course, not the musical ensemble so successfully promoted by Jalisco.

Los patriotismos locales han vuelto apasionada la discusión ¿será de Tecalitlán, de Cocula o de Santiago Ixcuintla el mariachi? Se pelea el vocablo, desde luego, no el conjunto musical promovido tan exitosamente por Jalisco.

(J. Meyer 1981:117-121)

While local patriotisms certainly have historical validity, the problem emerges when writers attempt to provide a history without having historical training, or when they offer etymological answers without having studied linguistics or philology. Furthermore, claims to mariachi music's origins have also been influenced by political decisions, such as attracting tourism to a particular region, or by family intents to promote one particular group over another. Researchers had not delved into an in-depth mariachi study, at least not until the late 1980s, with the proclaimed works by anthropologist Jesús Jáuregui (Ph.D., 1995, CIESAS) and historian Álvaro Ochoa Serrano (Ph.D., 1998, UCLA), who are frequently cited throughout this study.

The second problem in writing a mariachi history is that, since at least the late 1930s, two kinds of mariachi musical expressions in Mexico have coexisted: the popularized urban mariachi

ensemble known throughout the world, and the rural ensemble that remained in the countryside and succeeded in preserving traditional characteristics against the demanding effects of globalization. Mariachi music today is not merely that iconic ensemble found in urban centers such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Los Angeles, New York, Bogotá, and Tokyo. There are also groups in Mexico that, when compared to the more popularized, standardized, and widely identifiable version, share only the name "mariachi" and a few other characteristics. In general, these rural groups tend to preserve an aural transmission that has, until recently, been independent of the entertainment stage associated with urban popular mariachi music. The popular groups, on the other hand, are an evolution of the traditional mariachi expression in Mexico, and have adopted standard instrumentation generally consisting of three to five violins, two trumpets, a guitar, a harp, a vihuela (small five-stringed guitar-like instrument with a convex back), and a guitarrón (large six-stringed deep-bodied acoustic bass instrument with a convex back).<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, recent investigations have shed historical light on the traditional mariachi expression through the discovery of historical documents, ethnographic field recordings, and the discovery of musicians' and family biographies. These documents reveal that the word "mariachi" has a variety of meanings: as a *fandango*, where singing, music, and dance come together (Ochoa Serrano 1994, 2001), as a *tarima*, a stratus or a moving floor used to dance upon (Barrios de los Ríos 1908:43-44), as the name of a group of musicians, as the music played by these musicians, and as place names (Jáuregui 1999b). Furthermore, the word *mariache* turns out to be a variant that has also been used interchangeably to describe the above referents (Ochoa

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<sup>2</sup> The guitarrón originated as a five-stringed plucked instrument, and only later included a sixth string so that it could be played in octaves like the harp.

Serrano 1994). To add to the polysemy of the word, the aforementioned historical documents have also illustrated that both the word "mariachi" and the actual ensemble each have their own histories. The ensemble was not always called "mariachi" and the word did not always refer to the ensemble. At some point in the nineteenth century, the word "mariachi" and the ensemble converged and ensembles already called "mariachis" traveled to Mexico City in the early twentieth century for performance opportunities.

Since Spanish colonization of Mexico (1519), the cultural *mestizaje* (miscegenation) brought upon by Europeans (particularly from Spain) also led to a musical *mestizaje*, such as the *fandango*, a popular rural celebration in which music, dance, and singing *sones* were an inseparable part of local and communal entertainment (Ochoa Serrano 1994:102). As a result, the history of mariachi music has been extended to include historical knowledge of the *fandango*, which encompasses far more regions than those where mariachi music originated.<sup>3</sup> This historiographic extension to the *fandango* has validated the categorical line that divides the traditional musical expression from the popular. Traditional mariachi music is thus currently understood as an etic macro-regional category that is inclusive of vast micro- and trans- regional musical manifestations, which suggest multiple types of traditional mariachi expressions.<sup>4</sup> The struggle to establish a national identity in Mexico, during the second and third decade of the twentieth century, occurred at the same time as the prevailing globalized media industry, which resulted in the rise of new practices and cultural significations. Hence, the popular mariachi

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<sup>3</sup> There are *fandangos jarochos* and *fandangos huastecos*, which encompass different musical styles and instrumentation.

<sup>4</sup> This understanding of traditional mariachi music has been discussed in several occasions, particularly during the *Encuentro Nacional de Mariachi Tradicional* (National Festival of the Traditional Mariachi), hosted by the *Secretaría Cultural del Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco* (Department of Culture of the State of Jalisco) since 2002. Its objective is to create awareness in the Mexican community that traditional mariachi music is not merely a precursor to the modern mariachi expression, nor a thing of the past, but that it is a musical expression that is still alive and should be preserved.



ensemble emerged, evolving from the rural expression that was first popular regionally, then nationally. Despite the differences between the rural-traditional and the urban-popular musical expressions, both share the same history.

Noting the variants of the word "mariachi," as well as extension of the tradition to the *fandango*, journalists, historians, and literary critics began publishing documents that focused on an evolution of the mariachi tradition as a linear historical process. They maintained that mariachi music began as an oral rural tradition that originated in Western Mexico, arrived in the nation's capital in the early twentieth century ([Méndez Rodríguez] 1983a), gained popularity as an urban popular music through the mass media since the 1930s, and achieved a status as a musical emblem of Mexican nationalism (Henriquez 2006). While this sequence of events is correct, the socio-historical processes affected the mariachi tradition at different moments in history and in different geographic locations (Chapter Two).

*a. Regional origins and urban signification*

Jáuregui refers to a nuclear and an extended region as the geographical origins of the mariachi tradition. The nuclear region includes the states of Colima, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Michoacán, whereas the extended region spreads throughout Aguascalientes, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Zacatecas (Jáuregui 2007a:212-215). Early mariachi music, as a *fandango* expression, has been traced to regions that extend north along the Southern California coast, up to San Diego and San Francisco (ibid.). However, since the early twentieth century, a series of visits by mariachi ensembles from Cocula, Jalisco, about 35 miles from Guadalajara, to Mexico City, led many commentators to attribute the roots of such celebrated music to this town. Despite knowledge of the extensive regions in which mariachi music originated, certain scholars were adamant about claiming that mariachi music originated in

Cocula ([Méndez Rodríguez] 1983b, Anda Pedroza 1995, Cruz 1996, Villacis and Francillard 1995, Estrada Barrera 2000, and Reynoso Solorzano 1999).

Early mariachi groups from Cocula, still in the rural-traditional format, captivated audiences as they were featured in concert on live radio programs with CYX (owned by *Excelsior* newspaper) and CYL (owned by *El Universal* newspaper) (Jáuregui 1999a). Since then, many featured groups and musicians that traveled to the nation's capital also happened to be from this town, or pretended to be. Two noted groups from Cocula made the headlines: Mariachi de Concepción "Concho" Andrade and Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez de Cirilo Marmolejo. Concho Andrade (1880-1943) decided to stay in Mexico City permanently when Cocula entrepreneur Juan Hernández Ibarra invited his group to work permanently at the historically famous Salón Tenampa restaurant on Plaza Garibaldi, where they performed since 1923 (Méndez Rodríguez 1983a) (figure 1.2).<sup>5</sup>

In 1926, Concho Andrade invited his *compadre* Cirilo Marmolejo (1890-1960), noted guitarrón player who, at the time, directed his own mariachi group in Tecolotlán, Jalisco. Since mariachi ensembles from Cocula were building a name for themselves, and medical doctor Luis Rodríguez Sánchez was willing to sponsor them, they changed their name to Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez—even if neither Cirilo, nor his musicians, were originally from Cocula (figure 1.3). While Mariachi de Concho Andrade performed inside Salón Tenampa, Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez satisfied customers outside the restaurant, and thus was born the famous mariachi tradition at Plaza Garibaldi.

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<sup>5</sup> An early audio recording by Mariachi de Concho Andrade was made in 1903, when they traveled to Chicago on tour. While I have not been able to secure a copy of this recording, it predates that by José García in Los Angeles in 1904. See De la Cruz, Efrain, *El Origen del Mariachi Coculense* (Guadalajara: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1966).



Figure 1.2: Mariachi de Concho Andrade (1925)<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1.3: Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez, studio photograph for RCA Victor in 1926.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Source: *El Universal*, (México D.F. August 9, 1925, pg. 1).

<sup>7</sup> Photograph available in Jesús Jáuregui, *El Mariachi: Símbolo Musical de México* (Mexico City: Taurus, 2007). Original source may be found in the newspaper *Jueves de Excelsior*, November 26, 1936, page 3. Cirilo Marmolejo is second from the left, holding the guitarrón. In the center is Dr. Luis Rodríguez Sánchez.

Seeking to earn their space in the growing mariachi industry in Mexico City, a growing number of musicians traveled to the nation's capital. Cirilo Marmolejo's group is one example ([Méndez Rodríguez] 1983a). Another example is the now world-renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, originally founded in Tecalitlán, Jalisco in 1898, by guitarra de golpe player Gaspar Vargas (1880-1969)<sup>8</sup> (Clark 1992, Jáuregui 2007b). Mariachi Vargas challenged the defenders of the mariachi groups from Cocula due to their original way of performing the traditional *sones*. Both the proclamation that mariachi music originated in Cocula, and that the *sones* by Mariachi Vargas were the most commended, were later captured in Mexican songwriter Manuel Esperón's the song, *Cocula*, originally written for the film "Ay Jalisco, No Te Rajes" (*Ay Jalisco, Do Not Back Down*) (1941), which featured the famous phrase: "De Cocula es el mariachi, de Tecalitlán los sonos" (From Cocula is the mariachi, from Tecalitlán its *sones*). Cocula authorities have since relied on and trusted this song's 1941 text as a kind of historical document, which, to them, validates that the mariachi tradition originated in Cocula. In fact, upon entering the town, one cannot miss a large arch that reads "Cuna Mundial del Mariachi" (Global Birthplace of Mariachi).

Historical documents that refer to mariachi music origins, however, suggest that its birthplace cannot be attributed solely to Cocula, but to various regions in Western Mexico. Not only were many of the renowned artists who made this music famous from other states, but mariachi musicians themselves were from diverse areas of the nation, some far beyond the extended regions of Western Mexico. Ironically, however, mariachi music continues to be promoted and sold as if it originated in Jalisco. What was once a rural musical tradition from

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<sup>8</sup> A guitarra de golpe is a five-stringed guitar-like instrument with varied tuning methods. As opposed to the vihuela, the guitarra de golpe has a flat back and its size is in between a vihuela and a classical guitar.

these extended regions evolved into Mexico's most popular urban music in Mexico City, and later became an important means of cultural identification for many Mexicans abroad.

*b. Mariachi music transmission*

The complexities concerning the mariachi tradition's geographic origins help locate its historical importance as a local musical expression along parts of Mexico's Pacific coast. But locating its history in geographic spaces alone cannot reveal the tradition's transformation through time. Traditions throughout the world have long struggled with the pressures of maintaining established social structures and practices in the face of modernity. As Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire asserts, even "a social structure, in order to *be*, must *become*; in other words, *becoming* is the way a social structure expresses 'duration'" (Freire 2005:179). For mariachi music to *be* what it has *become*, knowledge and experiences need to have been transmitted through a community effort, and in accessible learning spaces. To further understand the diverse transmission of knowledge of mariachi music, I propose to analyze its transmission in three different, yet related, teaching-learning contexts: informal, non-formal, and formal.<sup>9</sup> In the following, I provide a brief review of these three systems in order to present a few ideas regarding how these have impacted the mariachi education experience.

Historically, the mariachi tradition has been learned and taught in an informal context, in a corporal language that suggests imitation, with or without a teacher. Its knowledge is passed on to following generations, in unsystematic practices, and generally within a community or family context. This informal learning experience is the most difficult to analyze and reproduce, even if

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<sup>9</sup> I borrow these terms from Patricia Campbell, *Lessons From the World: A Cross-Cultural Guide to Music Teaching and Learning* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991),

it is the one that adds the most richness and significance to the mariachi tradition. As with other orally and informally transmitted traditions, mariachi music has been commonly transmitted from father to son. The first musicians to enter the popular music scene in Mexico City had inherited the art from generations past. For example, Cirilo Marmolejo (1890-1960), director of Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez, passed on his knowledge to his nephew José Marmolejo (1908-1958), director of Mariachi Tapatló, and to his son, José Santos Marmolejo (19??-2012), director of Mariachi Marmolejo. Moreover, Gaspar Vargas (1880-1969), already a descendent of various generations of mariachi musicians, left the Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán legacy to his son Silvestre.<sup>10</sup> Women, too, have been mariachi tradition bearers, and while I have the honor of being able to share some narratives in the chapters that follow, there are surely more examples of women who have learned to play a musical instrument in mariachi ensembles than those mentioned in this dissertation.

The oral transmission of cultural and musical knowledge, such as song lyrics, musical melodies, and rhythmic figurations, needed to be complemented with a kinesthetic-embodiment component that involves what ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice refers to as the transmission of gestures through observation, trial-and-error, and practice (1995:268). A vihuela learner, for example, can learn strumming patterns by imitation and trial-and-error before learning to read sheet music. Mnemonic devices for learning are also common. For example, I–V–IV harmonic progressions are colloquially referred to as "primera, segunda y tercera" (first, second, and third).

With the emerging media technologies in the mid 1930s, musicians such as trumpeter

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<sup>10</sup> Although Mariachi Vargas is no longer a family legacy, for after Silvestre Vargas passed away, the group's ownership was transferred over to Ruben Fuentes, and today we celebrate the sixth generation of this acclaimed ensemble that is now an important referent for much of the mariachi tradition.

Miguel Martínez (1921-2014) did not informally learn mariachi music from his family, but from local musicians and the radio, before trumpets were officially standardized in mariachi instrumentation (figure 1.4). A local saxophone player was his first teacher, who showed him basic fingerings and major scales. When Miguel Martínez learned his first three songs from the radio, he began playing with a local mariachi group and realized that some of the pieces were in a different key. This learning-by-doing context taught him that he also needed to know how to transpose music, continuously and spontaneously. Through time, he complemented his knowledge of the growing mariachi repertory by taking music theory classes and learning from a professional trumpet instructor. Figure 1.4 is a photograph of Miguel Martínez performing with Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán in Tokyo, Japan. In 1941, he was invited to form part of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán as its first trumpet player, at which point he set the mariachi trumpet style.<sup>11</sup>

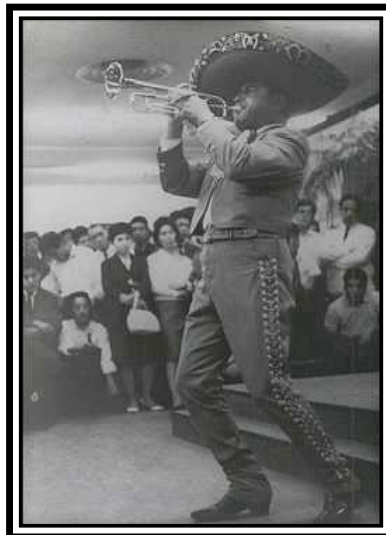


Figure 1.4: Miguel Martínez, first trumpeter for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.

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<sup>11</sup> At the age of 91, Miguel Martínez published his autobiography, which offers an important testimony of his desire to learn mariachi music and how he became the most renowned trumpet player in the history of this tradition. See Miguel Martínez, *Mi Vida, Mis Viajes, Mis Vivencias: Siete Décadas en la Música del Mariachi* (México D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Culturas Populares de México, 2012).

Social changes, such the invention of the radio, inevitably impact *how* and *what* knowledge is transmitted. Despite the changing needs of modernizing societies, traditions are best kept alive when the intangible cultural heritage is relevant to its community. As noted in UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), intangible cultural heritage "is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history."<sup>12</sup> Thus, cultures continuously adapt to changing needs in modern societies. In effect, not only do traditions change; so do the educational systems in which knowledge and meaning are transmitted.

Towards the end of the 1960s, scholars began to question whether formal education systems respond, or not, to society's changing teaching and learning needs. In *World Crisis in Education*, Philip Coombs, the first director of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, analyzes the education problem at a global level, concluding that teaching systems do not maintain the same pace alongside social and technological revolutions. The "crisis" for Coombs was that such systems tended to lose the ability to adapt to social changes, such as globalization, gender equality, increased migration, and socio-cultural identification (Coombs 1969 and 1985). These changes inevitably impacted how musical traditions were to be passed on to next generations by reshaping the relations between distinct educational systems, such as formal, non-formal, and informal teaching and learning contexts.

Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire offers an alternative interpretation of the consequences of social change on education. For Freire, education may be interpreted as a reflection of society

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<sup>12</sup> See "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" on UNESCO's website <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=EN&pg=00022>.



that has the potential to offer reflexive social transformations. Using bank operations as a metaphor for teaching and learning, Freire shows how a contradiction between the responsibility to teach and the idea of educating results in a situation in which the educator simply "deposits" information in the "bank account" of the learner. In effect, he asserts that only with "dialogicity," which is the essence of education, can transmission of knowledge truly become a kind of social liberty (Freire 2005[1968] and 1970). In sum, educational systems must not ignore social realities; instead, they should reflexively reformulate the relationship between various educational systems to maintain their relevance to their community.

With mariachi music, a series of social changes influenced the development and continuity of this tradition. Of the most influential is the role of the mass media since the mid 1920s, which not only impacted mariachi music, but also, and less obviously, the learning process of this musical tradition. As mariachi music gained national presence on live radio programs, mariachi groups such as Mariachi Tapatío (figure 1.5) and Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán (figure 1.6) were invited to accompany a growing number of Mexican iconic singers in Mexico City. Figure 1.6 is a publicity photograph for RCA Victor México.



Figure 1.5: Mariachi Tapatío, directed by José Marmolejo.



Figure 1.6: Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, directed by Silvestre Vargas.

Before the use of written music for mariachi orchestration, musical producers or directors played each instrument's part on the piano, or on a mariachi instrument, one by one, until each musician memorized their part in the songs they were to perform. By the mid 1940s, the increasing demand for a rapidly growing repertoire and new musical arrangements proved that

the aural learning-by-doing process consumed too much preparation time. Aural transmission in this sense was not only inefficient; it was impossible. With time, directors needed to learn to write music in modern notation and musicians needed to learn to read it.

Many musicians thus quickly complimented the learning-by-doing transmission with non-formal music education. Non-formal music learning encompasses educational activities that are organized and sustained within or outside educational institutions. Like formal education — but unlike informal, incidental, or random learning— non-formal education is intended and planned by an instructor for an apprentice (UNESCO 1997:11). It is generally offered as a compliment or an alternative to formal education in the form of workshops, short courses, seminars, and private instruction.<sup>13</sup>

In a personal conversation with violinist and musical arranger Jesús Rodríguez de Hajar (b. 1920), he described that when he first arrived in Mexico City, from Tequila, Jalisco, in the 1940s, Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo was the most acclaimed group given that they shared the same violinists with the renowned *Orquesta Típica*, directed by Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (personal interview with Jesús Rodríguez de Hajar, 2013). For Rodríguez de Hajar, it was not enough to know how to play mariachi music with the proper style; he also believed that one had to study music in order to reach higher standards of performance and meet the growing demands of the culture industry.

The need for multiply skilled mariachi musicians in professional ensembles consequently led to a demand for non-formal and formal mariachi music education. In the United States, the

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<sup>13</sup> Mariachi violinists in Mexico City, for example, studied with concert violinists Elías Breeskin, father of the famous Olga Breeskin, and Agustín Fuentes, father of the renowned Rubén Fuentes. In addition to learning instrumental and vocal technique with private instructors, many also enrolled in music schools to learn music theory and harmony.

decision to include non-Western orally transmitted musical expressions in music education curriculum since the late 1960s sought to deal with the new realities of "social, economic, and cultural developments . . . and emanate from an emerging ideology and maturing of the nation as a whole" (Choate 1968:iii). Formal music education follows an approved curriculum and takes place in an established institution such as a school or university.<sup>14</sup>

In the United States, early attempts to institutionalize mariachi music into a formal educational experience extend back to 1961, at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), when ethnomusicology doctoral student Donald Borchardt sought the implementation of the mariachi courses in an educational setting, and which later led to the formation of university mariachi ensembles. Since then, educational mariachi programs are found in diverse academic spaces, including grade schools, specialized music schools, community colleges, and universities. Including mariachi education in these institutions, however, should not be confused with formal mariachi music education. These efforts remain in what I am calling the non-formal sphere.

Formal education, on the other hand, is designed as a continuous educational pathway that is recognized by education authorities (UNESCO 1997:11). Students generally receive training via a formal curriculum offering theoretical and practical tools. While there are a growing number of educational mariachi programs offered in American universities, only a few offer a degree certifying a formal education specializing in mariachi music. One example of a formal curriculum is the Associate Degree program in Arts at Southwestern College, Chula

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<sup>14</sup> In the late nineteenth century, educator Fletcher Durell became concerned with the growing increase of formal education in general, and acknowledged that "not only has the amount of professional teaching thus increased, the amount of lay or incidental teaching has wonderfully increased also" (1894:16). Outside the formal environments, people are educated informally by all whom they meet and by all of their surroundings.

Vista, designed by Jeff Nevin, which offers formal music education in a two-year program, with a Specialization in Mariachi Music. Texas State University also offers an M.A. in Latin Music, also with a Specialization in Mariachi Music. Both seek to offer mariachi music students a more comprehensive mariachi music education.

In Mexico, the first school to aim to offer a formal mariachi music curriculum is the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, which consists of a three-year program that intends on offering a Professional Technical Degree in Mariachi Music Performance. The objective is to acquire what can be gained from a formal teaching and learning context without losing sight of the importance of orality in the mariachi tradition. The danger is that, in a formal context, musicians tend to lose the "dialogicity" of teaching and learning within a community, and the music runs the risk of becoming a bank account of mere musical information.

With the recent institutionalization of mariachi music, the teaching-learning process has entered new domains of education, which includes non-formal and formal methods of transmission, which cannot be separated from the vital informal learning processes. While it is becoming more common for mariachi musicians in Mexico and abroad to be taught in formal settings, the educational program supplements rather than replaces the learning that occurs in informal environments. The wide array of learning experiences of contemporary mariachi musicians is echoed in the varied systems for learning mariachi music that has its roots in informal processes or learning.

### *c. Understanding the past for a sustainable future*

Safeguarding mariachi music has traditionally depended on informal aural transmission, in a close community context, independent of formal education. Today, with the growing powers of globalization, the traditional mariachi expression is threatened and may be on the road

towards becoming an endangered musical practice. For these traditional mariachi groups, the sustainability of tradition may not always be possible without a cultural policy at the state or international level. The modern tradition, too, is facing a loss of traditional performance practices and repertory. This is, in part, due to changing popular demands and the recent institutionalization of mariachi music education.

There are strengths and weakness in the current forces that work for and against the sustainability of mariachi music. The key strengths include a legitimation of a popular and negatively stereotyped musical expression in a formal music education context, the increase in the number of skilled musicians, performances in well-established contexts as opposed to bars and plazas, and the opportunity to offer continuity in a variety of educational contexts. The weaknesses might include inconsistent support in funding and infrastructure, lack of knowledge and respect by some scholars and politicians, and having unclear notions of *what* and *how* the tradition is to be transmitted to following generations.

Sustainability, in this context, covers three main areas: repertoires and style, continuity of collective memory, and the ecology of the culture industry. First, the repertoires are intertwined with the performance practices and the styles unique to the various regional musical genres performed by mariachi ensembles. More on the repertory and styles will be discussed in Chapter Two. Second, oral traditions rely on the transmission of collective memory. Prior to musical recordings, if this memory was not successfully taught and learned, the tradition naturally changed. As older musicians pass on, if their knowledge was not successfully learned, such knowledge would pass on with them. This can be avoided through careful field recordings, proper documentation of musicians' biographies, combining these as historical backdrops when teaching younger musicians.

Third, the culture industry and cultural policy affect ways in which the mariachi tradition is respected within the nation and promoted to the rest of the world. The music survives and is sustained in these ways, and while fine musicians emerge over a century of practice, absent is a strong civic infrastructure or government support for means of furthering the music through education and schooling. Without financial support for schools that teach the instrumental techniques and style, singing, and song repertoire, the future of mariachi music in Mexico becomes uncertain and unpredictable. Over 500 school mariachi programs in the United States, on the other hand, are successfully preserving and passing on a canonized set of mariachi selections within classes that are supported by public funds.

Local mariachi music-making continues to thrive in a variety of socio-cultural contexts, such as in religious ceremonies, at public outdoor events, and in private family celebrations. With the inevitable effects of globalization, traditional musics across the globe tend to undergo patterns of change. Musicians' and communities' responses to these changes are not uniform; they are contrasting. In mariachi music, there are musicians who continue to perform traditional versions of the music in their rural communities in Mexico, who have separate means of income, and do not making a living as professional musicians. Then there are those urban musicians who have dedicated their lives to learning to perform mariachi music and earn enough income to refer to mariachi music performance as their full-time profession.

The Mexican government is beginning to take responsibility in the preservation of mariachi culture by subsidizing formal, informal, and non-formal learning opportunities —inside and outside educational institutions. On Sunday, November 27, 2011, UNESCO inscribed *El mariachi: música de cuerdas, canto y trompeta* (Mariachi: string music, song, and trumpet) to the *Representative List of the Intangible Culture of Humanity*. While the procedures and cultural

legislation that led to this international recognition initially only considered the traditional form of mariachi practice as worthy of preserving, the final recognition declared in 2011 also took into consideration the popular tradition. Since UNESCO's recognition, confrontations have grown sharp between the urban-popular and the rural-traditional mariachi performance practices, leading to the disclosure of inevitable differences between these two traditions. As traditional mariachi musicians define their identity and space within a revival movement, many unfortunately do so at the cost of disdaining the popular tradition. This has resulted in the evolution of two socio-cultural contexts that have received little ethnomusicological attention in Mexico.

A vexing question concerning sustainability thus arises: which mariachi tradition shall be continued? The popular mariachi groups of Mexico that have become known internationally have recently been called into question by scholars and musicians of the traditional mariachi groups, who claim that these non-commercial groups have been able to better preserve the original ways of living and performing the mariachi tradition (Chamorro 1994 and 2000, Ochoa Serrano 2001). While many of the traditional groups seem to be participating in a traditional mariachi revival movement, there are still some traditional musical expressions in the *sierras* (mountains) of Western Mexico that are not officially recognized (Jáuregui 1992). Still, these mariachi groups continue to play the music as they have come to live it, and as it has been passed on to them from their ancestors for the past two centuries. These mariachi groups need to be documented, as they are passing away.

UNESCO's recognition of the mariachi tradition has undeniably bestowed upon the music the importance it rightly deserves in academic initiatives and cultural politics. Indeed, it has opened up mariachi music followers to a new consciousness regarding sustainability and music



education. Instead of perpetuating the conflict between traditional and popular mariachi groups, scholars are needed to step in and conduct an analysis of the musical styles and musical realities performed by these diverse ensembles. Understanding mariachi culture as a whole, including its several dimensions and forms, can help to determine options for sustainability. In sum, the focus must be recognized as two-pronged in discovery of *what* is being preserved and *how* the music is going to be transmitted to the next generations.

## **2. Women mariachi tradition bearers**

During a visit to Croatia in 2009, I had the opportunity to meet some of the members of Mariachi Los Caballeros (The Gentlemen), directed by Ivan Androić.<sup>15</sup> I had previously heard this group perform during an *Encuentro Internacional de Mariachi y Charrería* (International Encounter of Mariachi and Horsemanship), hosted by the Guadalajara Chamber of Commerce. While in Zagreb, I asked Mr. Androić if he would allow me to perform a few songs with his group, to which he kiddingly replied: "Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán doesn't have any women, why should we?" Although he presented it facetiously, as the saying goes, "there's a grain of truth to every joke," which suggests that one disguises thoughts, either subconsciously or deliberately.

An unspoken rule exists claiming that high-profile mariachi groups can only be composed of all men, and that including a woman in these groups would corrupt the tradition, with social and musical implications for both. In addition to directing his own all-male mariachi ensemble in Mexico City, Alex C. (pseudonym) rehearses a group of young women because, for him, it is

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<sup>15</sup> I would like to kindly thank Irena Miholic, whom I met at the 2009 International Council for Traditional Music Conference in Vienna, Austria. She convinced me to visit Zagreb, where I had the opportunity to speak with Ivan Androić.

important for them to have access to the music. During a rehearsal he invited me to during the summer of 2010, he commented that only two or three of these young women had satisfactory preparation, and the rest did not have the proper musical training required to perform this music. I suggested that if he selected the more advanced women to perform in his regular all-male group, there they could acquire the practice-by-doing experience necessary to complement any music training that most of them never had the opportunity to attain. He was shocked. His gestures made me assume he would never invite any woman to perform with his group, which by 2015, he hasn't.

Many men like Alex C. claim to support women's participation in mariachi music by seemingly opening spaces for them to learn and by supporting their efforts. Yet they will not open the space for them in their own musically recognized groups, composed of all men. Women with the capacity and musical training should have equal opportunity to join these groups and perform with men successfully. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as will be explored in later chapters of this dissertation. So, if women have the same musical capacity as men, what excludes them from joining high profile mariachi ensembles, if women too are mariachi tradition bearers?

Gender difference is physiological, psychological, and ideological. In order to better understand women's social role as a member of a mariachi ensemble, I suggest a typology of group types based on gender, described below. This gender-based typology contrasts with those that focus in performance venues. For example, in their dissertations, anthropologists Steve Pearlman (1988) and Russell Rodríguez (2006), and ethnomusicologist Lauryn Salazar (2010) have referred to "group types" as a categorical system to better understand the social function of mariachi performances. Pearlman presents three group types to illustrate how mariachi ensembles receive income from their performance: *al talon*, *planta*, and show groups (Pearlman

1988:107-109).<sup>16</sup> Rodriguez elaborates a list of group types to address the variances in the structural composition (number of members) and the introduction of new performance spaces: working groups, show groups, and student groups (Rodríguez 2006:11).<sup>17</sup> As a result of the institutionalization of mariachi music in the United States, Rodriguez introduces the idea of a student group, which he suggests changes the "gender, race, and class composition of performers, as well as instrumentation" (ibid.: 17-18). Salazar expands this large list of mariachi group types to illustrate the growing number of performance situations: recording/media, community/church, and student/academic groups (L. Salazar 2011:42-49). These group types mark important moments in documented mariachi history for they indicate an American point of view of the socio-cultural performance contexts. It is important to point out that, while these scholars offer these group categories, there are situations in which the same group can be a "show" group when performing on a concert stage, then spend time in a recording studio or appear on television show, and then later in the evening perform *al talón*, or as it is called in Mexico City, *a la laica* —all in the same day. These group types simply describe the distinct scenarios in which the music is performed, not specifically different types of groups.

While I am cognizant of problems that arise with the characterization of groups distinguished solely by their gender make-up, and understand that these can lead to subjective generalizations, I find it nonetheless important to propose a new typology based on the participation of women in mariachi music. I am hopeful that this will aid in furthering

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<sup>16</sup> *Al talon* literally means "at the heels" and refers to mariachi ensembles who walk around asking for a particular price per song, as opposed to an hourly contract. In Mexico, these kinds of groups have been referred to as *mariachis ambulantes*, which roughly translates to "strolling mariachi." A *planta* literally means "plant" and refers to mariachi ensembles who have steady performances at a restaurant, theater, hotel, etc. Show groups are hired to perform for high-profile concert performances.

<sup>17</sup> Rodriguez's idea of working groups can be compared to Pearlman's *al talón* and *planta* groups; show groups have the same meaning for both authors.

discussions concerning the importance of gender dynamics and performance in mariachi music, presented in case-by-case situations. Three mariachi group-types I propose are: (1) mixed gender groups, (2) groups with one woman, (3) all-female groups, and (4) all-male groups. Considering the criteria for suggesting this typology, I refrain from setting aside a section to describe the all-male groups because they are generally described in comparison to this group type.<sup>18</sup>

Understanding that problems may arise by presenting types of groups based on gender participation, I emphasize this importance because it reveals realities concerning unsuitable performance spaces for women, gendered social implications within the tradition, and the implications of gender in a changing musical tradition.<sup>19</sup>

#### *a. Mixed gender groups*

Mixed gender groups are comprised of both woman and men musicians of diverse ages. They tend to be associated with family or local groups or educational institutions and have at least two or more women, although in rare cases a group may consist of all women and one man (which are sometimes still classified as all-female groups). Because an increasing number of women participate in these kinds of groups, they alter the dynamic of such ensembles, both socially and musically, through their nonverbal and verbal modes of behavior. The majority of these group types have regular performances at restaurants or other steady performance venues. All of these spaces are suitable for women and youth and, in many cases, keep them out of the kinds of social troubles that might occur in, say, a bar or tavern. On the opposite end of the

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<sup>18</sup> These are the types of groups that have dominated the omnipresent image of mariachi music. These groups have the liberty to perform all days of the week, if there is work, but they also have the freedom to perform in social spaces that are not always welcoming to women, such as bars, nightclubs, and in places that charge a fee per song. It does not mean that women do not work in these spaces, but that the dynamic is different when they do.

<sup>19</sup> These three situations will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

spectrum are the less suitable and less common venues for these group types, which include late night performances at private parties with audiences and sometimes musicians involved in alcohol and drugs. The women in these groups generally wear the standardized A-line mariachi outfit to match the rest of the male performers.

*b. Groups with one woman*

In groups with one woman, the woman has traditionally been the daughter or wife of one of the members; however, more recently, a woman who is not necessarily related to any of the musicians may also perform as the only woman in a mariachi group. She tends to stand out among all the men, as opposed to the two or more women in the previous category, who more easily mix in with the ensemble. The director of such a group is generally a man, although there have been groups where the sole woman is the director. The major difference between this type of ensemble and the mixed gender groups is that the dynamic between the one woman and the male performers can vary when she is not a family member. A woman in this situation chooses one of two options: she either finds the need to blend in as "one of the guys" or she emphasizes her place as the only woman. The woman in these groups generally wears the standardized A-line mariachi outfit that matches with the rest of the male performers.

In *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture*, Lewis Erenberg suggests girl singers, also known as canaries, are "needed singers of romantic songs and iconic models of femininity to appeal to a heterosexual youth culture" (Erenberg 1999:85). This description implies that the one female in these groups tends to serve as a kind of marketing tactic, which indicates that she is only there for the attraction. Most American swing bands of the 1930s and 1940s had their "lone participant." Erenberg explains that, "[w]hile male musicians represented public values, women singers articulated private emotions" (ibid.:85). A similar

interpretation has been suggested regarding women performers in mariachi music. In many cases, female members of ensembles are expected to sing a specific repertoire associated with popular women *ranchera* singers, as those described in Chapter Three. I argue however, that women do not limit their participation to the articulation of "private emotions" on stage. Unlike the canaries in swing bands, the lone woman performer in mariachi ensembles is not merely a singer, nor is she the only singer (all members of the group are asked to sing); rather, she is a musician standing in the ranks with the rest of the men. This makes her instantly equal in the musical sense. The inequalities that emerge are not principally musical but, more frequently, social.

*c. All-female groups*

In the United States, ensembles whose members are all women are generally referred to as all-female mariachi groups. In Mexico, the Spanish term for these ensembles is *mariachi femenil*, which literally refers to the "feminine," not explicitly stating that there are all women, although they are. While there are cases in which established all-female groups invite a man to substitute for a woman who could not make it to a particular performance, this generally does not remove the "all-female" character of the group. Where most directors of all-female mariachi groups have tended to be men, women have more recently taken on the challenge of directing their own group. All-female groups in Mexico that currently stand out in this regard are Mariachi Xóchitl from Mexico City, Mariachi Femenil de América from Tlaxcala, and Mariachi Femenil Continental from Zacatecas. In the United States, women run Mariachi Mujer 2000, Mariachi Divas, and Mariachi Las Colibrí. Many all-female groups wear the *traje de charro*, although there are those who find alternatives to this masculine-associated attire. Some groups combine the traditional *charro* skirt with a colorful (and sexy) regional Mexican top. Others change their

outfit completely, challenging the male-dominating appearance by finding more feminine ways of presenting themselves, such as fitted clothing (Chapter Seven). While many all-female groups unify their look with the same hairdo, hairpieces, earrings, make-up, and other accessories, other all-female groups limit their visual synchronicity to a few items. Others yet wear a modified version of a man's mariachi pants, fitted to a woman's body. Although the majority of these types of groups play in safe performance spaces such as public cultural events, concerts, and church ceremonies, their all-female character does not inhibit them from performing at the *laica* or other similar spaces (Chapter Eight).

Having their own performance sphere as all-female ensembles can have two effects. On the one hand, this sphere may offer women a space in which to perform independently and, with their socio-musical autonomy, achieve the opportunity to prove they can perform mariachi music just as well as their male counterparts. Yet on the other hand, an all-female performance sphere might also be masked as a tool of male dominance in order to exclude women from spaces of power and prestige.

#### *d. The problem of gender in mariachi music*

The growing popularity of all-female mariachi groups has provoked both aesthetic and ideological judgments concerning their musical capacity to perform mariachi music. Much of this is grounded on the ideological basis that exceptional mariachi music is authentically made only by men. In general, there are two overall drawbacks women have faced as mariachi musicians —just for being women.

Firstly, women may face the hardships of experiencing an adverse performance environment, in which they may be subject to their client's behavior. Solo singers themselves have treated mariachi musicians who accompany them with little respect by belittling them on a

performance stage with comments such as "follow me, you are playing off beat" or "damn musicians, you don't know anything". Off the stage, clients who hire a mariachi feel they have a right to handle some musicians with disrespect. If mariachi men were treated with disdain, and have their own issues with tolerating situations, what would this situation be like for women?

Secondly, the type of relationship a woman has with her spouse may determine whether she begins, or continues, to perform mariachi music. I have come across women of all ages who have performed mariachi at some point in their lives and later discontinued because her spouse asked (or forced) her to stop. In some cases, few women have chosen to separate from their spouse in order to pursue their performing career in mariachi music.

### **3. Methodology as procedure**

Upon embarking on this doctoral journey, from my decision to change my career (from economist to ethnomusicologist) to the actual writing of this dissertation, I discovered as much about myself as I did about the methods I used. During this research path, I was introduced to two research methods: one that deals with use of the procedures, tools, and techniques of research and another that deals critically with the vital epistemological foundations that ground understanding and knowledge. This section focuses on methodology as the procedures, tools, and techniques of research used. I focused on three principal methodological procedures: historiography, ethnography, and reflexivity.

#### *a. Historiography*

My historiographic methodology consists of archival research on primary sources as well as surveys of historical and commercial audiovisual materials found both at institutions and in personal collections. I consulted various institutional archives in Mexico City: the Arts Library



of the National Center for the Arts (Biblioteca de las Artes del CENART), the UNAM's National School of Music (Escuela Nacional de Música) library, the National Sound Archive (Fonoteca Nacional) and UNAM's Newspaper Archive. In Guadalajara, I also consulted various university libraries and newspapers. In general, despite mariachi music's national presence, many of these official archives lacked mariachi music sources. While some held commercial recordings, most had nothing to offer regarding women's participation in mariachi music.

Individual archives have been by far the most helpful in terms of documented records. Most mariachi sources are sold out and unavailable in libraries or bookstores. Nonetheless, I was privileged to have had access to perhaps the only archive that specializes on the mariachi tradition: the Jesús Jáuregui Personal Collection. His collection, which has taken form over the past 30-plus years of his own research, consists of the following:

1. Library: antique books, articles, journals, magazines, pamphlets, songs, scores, and newspapers.
2. Photo and film archive: photographic images and films.
3. Sound archive: open reels, cassettes, albums, and compact discs.
4. Iconography archive: prints, posters, paintings, trays, sculptures, and business cards.

The bibliographical references that relate to mariachi music go as far back as colonial documents that chronicled *fandangos*, and extend into the myriad of relatively recent books that claim mariachi music's origins.

In addition to this specialized collection, I was also privileged to have visited the homes of many women who performed mariachi music throughout their teenage years, and who have saved newspaper clippings, photographs, concert posters, letters, and certificates of recognition. Here I must mention the personal collection of Hilda López Soto, Lupe Villa, Concha González, Chuy and Juanita Lara, Magdalena Berrones, Ramona Madera, and the family of the late Isabel

López Soto. The materials these women have generously given me access to will appear, with their permission, throughout the chapters in this dissertation.

*b. Ethnography*

I first engaged in formal field research in Guadalajara during the summers of 2000, 2005, 2007, and 2008. The fieldwork in Guadalajara led me to the annual International Mariachi Festival organized by the Guadalajara Chamber of Commerce, where, as a participant-observer, I enrolled in the mariachi workshops. In addition, I was occasionally invited by local mariachi groups to perform with them during their own presentations independent of the mariachi festival. I came to discover there that, in Jalisco alone, there were over fifteen all-female mariachi groups performing by 2008. Thus, I deemed it important to engage in field research in Guadalajara because of its significance to mariachi music as a symbol of Mexico.

Yet my research took me to Mexico City instead, where, thanks to mariachi historian Jonathan Clark, in 2007 I was put in contact with elderly women who performed with all-female groups that were formed in the late 1940s, and who participated in the most prominent nationwide touring caravans (Chapter Six): Hilda López Soto, Lupe Villa, Concha González, Chuy and Juanita Lara, Magdalena Berrones, and the family of the late Isabel López Soto. I conducted fieldwork in Mexico City during the summers and winters of 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. In 2010, I permanently moved to Mexico City, funded in part by the UC Mexus Dissertation Research Grant. This experience helped me realize that formal interviews offer limited opportunities when seeking "ethnographic truth." In addition to interviewing these women in a group, more than once, I found myself needing to speak with them individually, away from the interview format, many times, during rehearsals, at performances, and by inviting them to visit the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi.

My move to Mexico City distanced me from the mariachi scene in Jalisco, yet it expanded the horizon of mariachi performance to other parts of Mexico. From Mexico City, I was also able to interview all-female mariachi groups in Querétaro, Tlaxcala, Mexico State, and Zacatecas. The importance of women's performance in Mexico City is also tied to the opportunities offered at various mariachi plazas: Plaza Garibaldi, Iztapalapa, and Cabeza de Juárez, to name a few.<sup>20</sup> Like men, women gather in these plazas to wait for potential customers; yet women face challenges in these types of spaces men do not encounter.

I interacted with people mentioned throughout this dissertation in informal (and personal) conversations as well as in formal interviews. The formal interviews were all videotaped. I kept a database of all the people I spoke with, their contact information, and a list of the groups they performed with. The women I spoke with sometimes asked me to play some music with them. It was their way to not only share their narratives and musical achievements, but to involve me as a musician as well. While all the women I contacted were willing and eager to take part in a formal recorded interview, a great part of the information for this dissertation comes from informal conversations that women did *not* want to share in front of any recording equipment. Some of these commentaries had to do with abusive relationships that caused some women to stop playing mariachi music, while other information is private or gossip-related, which will remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

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<sup>20</sup> Mariachi plazas are public spaces in which musicians will gather and wait for future clients. The most popular plaza is located in Mexico City, called Plaza Garibaldi. Other major cities also have plazas where mariachi musicians gather: Guadalajara, Los Angeles, Madrid.

### *c. Reflexivity*

In addition to the historiographic and ethnographic research, I would also like to mention the importance of reflexivity, as a research method. Reflexivity, as a concept, seeks to reveal a level of transparency in the relationship between fieldwork and ethnographic product. As a method, reflexivity allows the ethnographer the opportunity to research one's own practice in order to situate oneself in the research.

The crisis of reflexivity in the 1960s and 1970s has influenced the development of the human sciences and, as a result, affected the way ethnomusicologists relate with their research subjects. Bruno Nettl, in his forward to *Shadows in the Field*, provides an excellent outline of these changes and progressions in ethnomusicology. He reflects upon the early ethnographer-informant relationship. The "data" produced through this kind of relationship was later used in structuralist conceptions regarding the function of music. Subsequently, this ethnographer-informant relationship slowly began to transform into one in which the "informants" were viewed as consultants and teachers, and with the bi-musicality approach, the ethnographer was able to engage in the musical experience differently by becoming a student of the "master" of their musical traditions (Nettl 2008: v-vii). The evolution in reflexive research led to the understanding of a different level of meaning, or truth, revealed during fieldwork and the musical experience. While reflexivity calls for a widening of the ethnographic lens, which includes a look at the ethnographers themselves, this amplification poses new challenges on the use of the concepts of objectivity and truth.

The insider-outsider dichotomy has been a starting point for ethnomusicologists to understand their own position in their research because it suggests the level of objectivity and subjectivity in the ethnographic product. Regarding this insider/outsider paradox, Nettl initially

wrote, that "Many would surely deny that investigation of one's own culture is ethnomusicology at all, since the idea of comparing other cultures and styles with one's own, and the principle that one can be more objective about other cultures than about one's own, are important fundamentals of our field" (Nettl 1964: 70).<sup>21</sup>

Ideological boundaries exist in every relationship, be it academic or not, such that in situations when one is an "insider," one is always also an "outsider." By associating the insider-outsider dichotomy with notions of inclusion and exclusion related to ethnography, the lines of mediation become ambiguous. Timothy Rice's *May It Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (1994) is based on fieldwork in Bulgaria beginning in 1969. That Rice is present in his ethnography allows him to reflect and understand the meanings of his own musical experience (Rice 1994). This suggests that, while a level of outsider objectivity exists, reflexivity allows for researchers to obtain an insider's view on the musical experience, which entails a reflexive subjective process of encountering and experiencing music for everyone. Similarly, in *Why Suya Sing* (2004[1987]), Anthony Seeger describes his ethnographic experience by stating "Fieldwork is a delicate exchange of information and a subtle interaction of personalities, set within a larger socio-economic and political context" (20). This information exchange in ethnography is vital because it puts into perspective who is being studied, and why. Seeger's humble reflexive position allows for a mutual recognition and understanding of cultural difference, which, like with Rice, provides an element of truth that goes beyond facts.

Gender, as a category of analysis in ethnography, was put under the spotlight of

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<sup>21</sup> Yet philosopher Paul Ricoeur has pointed to Karl Mannheim's famous paradox to show the contrary; Mannheim's paradox suggests that everyone has an ideological perspective by which they view the world. Ricoeur writes "if everything that we say is bias, if everything we say represents interests that we do not know, how can we have a theory of ideology which is not ideological? The reflexivity of the concept of ideology on itself provides the paradox" (Ricoeur 1986: 8). This suggests, then, that there is no real objective position from which to view the world.

reflexivity in anthropological studies dealing with women. Of the early considerations of gender in ethnography, anthropologist Edwin Ardener wrote that both female and male ethnographers tended to talk primarily with men, taking on men's worldviews as the equivalent of society's worldview, and as a result, ignored women's narratives and perspectives. He drew on the then-popular structuralist techniques to argue that society could not be taken as singular, and that ethnography was a fertile ground for lending a voice to what he called "muted groups" (Ardener 1972).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's field diaries, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Word* (1989) problematized the lack of transparency between field research and the production of ethnographic texts with "muted groups" (Malinowski 1989) As a result, new writing strategies challenged the traditional distinction between subjective and objective writing styles.

In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), Clifford and Marcus called attention to the task of feminist anthropologists, claiming that they had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographic studies, and that the women who did significantly contribute to ethnographic textual innovations did not identify as feminist anthropologists. Feminist anthropologists, such as Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, responded by accusing them of insufficient reflexivity in their positionality. In her article "Women Writing Culture: Another Telling of the Story of American Anthropology," Behar responds to their stance on feminism:

*Writing Culture* had an immense and unexpected impact on feminist anthropologists. Women readers in the profession were knocked off their feet with the power of something like a tidal wave. Those of us who had been asleep woke up. Those of us who

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<sup>22</sup> This same idea of "muted groups" has since been used by other theorists: Gayatri Spivak's "subaltern," James Scott's "hidden transcripts," etc.

had kept our mouths shut opened them to clear out the sand. Those of us who had gone into anthropology with the dream of writing, and gotten our wings clipped by male teachers in graduate school that chastized us for not being analytical enough, took hold of the pen with a new fervor that would never again permit us to stash our flashes of insight under our beds like Emily Dickinson did with her poetry. When feminist anthropologists stood up again, they came back with a series of critical readings and creative works that are unraveling the original project of writing culture and setting up an entirely new agenda for women's writing of, for, and against culture. And yet, will the project of Women Writing Culture attract anywhere near as much attention as did the original project based in the illusion of gender neutrality? Of course not. For it is, after all, identified with women.

(Behar and Gordon 1995:308)

Although I was personally surprised to find such ideologically saturated tendencies regarding feminism in *Writing Culture*, I was not surprised that Clifford felt this way about feminists; such judgments are unfortunately common in this and other fields. What was particularly moving for me was Behar's response, where I was able to witness, through her writing, that women at that historical point in time gained the academic consciousness and freedom to respond to a gendered oppression that existed in the fields of representation.

For Henrietta Moore, the task of feminist anthropologists was to deconstruct this kind of bias (Moore 1988). She suggested that ethnographers focus on describing what women really do, as opposed to documenting when men say they do. This includes a collection of reflexive perceptions and attitudes of women themselves. It was not until feminist scholars who called for a study of women that men begin to question what it means to be a gendered ethnographer as well. In "Muted Masculinities: Introduction to the Special Issue on Contemporary Indian Ethnographies," Indian sociologist Radhika Chopra reviews the studies regarding men and masculinity in recent ethnographies, calling for an expansion "toward the men and muted masculinity to readdress the way that muting provides a conceptual frame for understanding gender and masculinity in ways that have so far remained hidden in the ethnographic record" (Chopra 2006:129). In U.S. popular music culture, R.W. Connell surveys a history of

masculinity (Connell 1995) and Robert Walser provides a critical interpretation of masculinity in heavy metal music (Walser 1993).

In reflexive ethnomusicology, scholars are becoming more aware of the importance of experience in terms of musical performance, fieldwork research, and in the writing of ethnography (Barz and Cooley 2008). In an ethnography that deal with music and gender, British anthropologist Judith Okely drew upon her own gendered fieldwork experience among traveler-gypsies in her own country: Britain. She argued that the removal of oneself from ethnographic narratives was based on a "false notion of scientific objectivity" (Okely 1996[1975]:27).

In her article "What's the Difference? Reflections on Gender and Research in Village India," (1997) ethnomusicologist Carol Babiracki examines the implications that her gender has on her actual ethnographic experience in the field, and how this has affected her quotidian interactions with the female and male participants in her research. She raised very important questions regarding different experiences by female and male ethnographers, such as they way they might be perceived in the field and the privileges that either of these may or may not have. Babiracki suggests that there are moments where women may become an "ungendered" ethnographer, for the sake of neutrality, which would decode her from gendered nuances in the field (ibid.:169-171, 178).

In the growing concern to add studies of women into the general knowledge of music, several collections were published. Beverley Diamond and Pirkko Moisala, in their edited volume *Music and Gender* (2000), have collected various essays on this topic. In their collection, they deal with performance and performativity, individual and collective narratives, gendered musical cites, and technologies in gendered motion. Furthermore, Tulia Magrini edited the volume *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean* (2003), which deals



specifically with cultures influenced by Mediterranean region, some of which are written by men as well.

While a growing number of texts in music studies began to question the role of women in music, few, if none, had addressed their ideological conditions in society. Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (1991), a founding text of feminist musicology invokes invaluable critiques regarding ideas of gender, sexuality, the body, and musical constructions, revealing centuries-old ideological saturations (McClary 1991, 1993, 2007a). To begin to understand the conditions in which these ideological saturations were formed, McClary lays out five sets of issues: 1) musical constructions in a semiotics of gender and sexuality, 2) gendered aspects of traditional Western music theory that have inscribed feminine and masculine codes into the theory, 3) implications of gender and sexuality in musical narratives, 4) gendered discourses in music dealing with gendered codes influencing female participation altogether, and 5) discursive strategies of female musicians that include concerns about “how to participate” without reproducing the ideologies of those discourses (McClary 1991). Although McClary's work follows a methodology different from ethnographic studies guided by anthropological paradigms, her insight has influenced researchers (especially me) to think differently about gender. Stepping into a "field" to write about women who are musical requires much more than observing and interacting with them; it involves stepping out of oneself in order to understand gender ideologies and their effects on culture.

My own exposure to the mariachi tradition has blurred the boundary between my performance experience and my research. During the twenty-four years I have performed as a violinist and vocalist of mariachi music, since January of 1991, I have formed part of several mixed gender groups, all-female groups, and a few groups in which I was the only woman.

Caught between reflection and evaluation, I have gained unique insights into the musical practices as well as the formation and assimilation of socio-cultural stereotypes within mariachi expression. As a mariachi musician, I underwent my own trials and tribulations, never questioning (until recently) what I have internalized as a musician, and much less, what I have internalized as a woman. I identified with mariachi music so strongly that gender relations were not always clear to me. Spreading out my dissertation research while writing this dissertation and directing the first formal mariachi school in Mexico City ultimately brought me closer than ever to the mariachi experience.

In retrospect, my research experience can be traced to the summer of 1999, eight years after I first picked up a violin and played my first mariachi song. Due to my own interest in knowing more about the history of women mariachi musicians in Los Angeles, I engaged in my first formal interview with the late María Elena Muñoz, founder of the all-female Mariachi Las Generalas (1976-1983), may she rest in peace.<sup>23</sup> Since I did not have the best interview equipment, nor the reflexive knowledge necessary to frame the right questions for the interview, this really became a vital conversation between María Elena and I, one in which she shared her personal memories, positive and adverse, as a woman mariachi performer in the 1970s (Chapter Five).

As I drove away from her home that hot summer day, I thought about the challenges she and the other women in Mariachi Las Generalas had faced, asking myself whether that interview would ever become more than information in a mere UCLA undergraduate humanities term

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<sup>23</sup> While most of my ethnographic research focuses on women mariachi musicians in Mexico, we are very fortunate to have Cindy Reifler's M.A. thesis, which presents an important biography of the all-female Mariachi Las Generalas, as well as women pioneers from California (Reifler Flores 2013).

paper. I received my B.A. in Economics from UCLA two years later, in 2001, and moved on to work with a non-profit small business development corporation, and then for agencies associated with the United States Air Force in El Segundo, California—all the while performing mariachi music in Los Angeles-based ensembles. But something motivated me quit everything I had achieved in the corporate sector and write about women in mariachi music instead. I had no background in research methodology, except for that warm interview with Maria Elena Muñoz, and knowledge of Laura Sobrino's research on the history of women in mariachi, and I am forever grateful to both, especially Laura, for her knowledge and support.<sup>24</sup>

When I formally began my graduate studies in Ethnomusicology at UCLA, during fall 2006, I had the opportunity to interview and engage in dialogues with many of the mariachi musicians I had at one time worked with, individuals I had known for many years prior to becoming an "ethnographer." For personal and intellectual reasons, I prefer not to refer to the people who appear in this dissertation as "informants" or research subjects; they are knowledgeable musicians and educators who have shared their wisdom and personal experiences worthy of ethnographic and historical documentation. Nor do I claim to present an ethnographic truth in an ethnographic present. In this dissertation, I present my experience of truth that combines the aforementioned methods with my own capacity to interpret a reality using the framework presented below, always intending to be conscious of my own subjectivity in the reflection and revision of the experience.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Laura Sobrino's research can be found on the websites that Nancy Muñoz currently manages: [www.sobrino.net/mpc/womenmariachi/](http://www.sobrino.net/mpc/womenmariachi/) and [www.mujeesenelmariachi.com](http://www.mujeesenelmariachi.com).

<sup>25</sup> For Heidegger, to tell the truth means to unconceal entities and let them be seen as something unhidden or to "be discovered," which he refers to as the Greek word *aletheia* – a truth that is looked upon as unconcealed, which gets discovered or uncovered (Heidegger 1962:56-57). *Aletheia* as truth is thus the discovery or the revelation of a being, of something that is, or that is revealed.

#### 4. Methodology as epistemology

While methodology as a procedure is crucial for placing the ethnographic subject and product into a social and academic context, methodology as epistemology looks beyond a procedural quest by reflecting upon the conceptual and theoretical framework for my overall theoretical purpose: *understanding mariachi music, with women included*. In finding the focus of my academic lens, inevitable general questions arise: How is the mariachi tradition understood, and by whom? Why study gender in mariachi music? Is the mariachi performance experience different for musicians in Mexico than for those abroad? Finding new and useful ways of referring to mariachi music necessitates both explaining and understanding the idea of tradition, which leads to further fundamental inquiries: what is *tradition*? How do one's prejudices and judgments affect—and reflect—tradition? For these inquiries, I rely on hermeneutics, not so much as a *method* of interpretation, but as a way to clarify the context (attitudes, roles, conventions) in which understanding takes place. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer raises the following questions concerning the methodology of understanding tradition in the hermeneutics of the human sciences:

Does understanding in the human sciences understand itself correctly when it relegates the whole of its own historicity to the position of prejudices from which we must free ourselves? Or does 'unprejudiced scholarship' share more than it realizes with that naïve openness and reflection in which traditions live and the past is present?

(Gadamer 2004:283)

I have found that with the interplay between this framework and my own reflexivity as a researcher, I inevitably project a meaning on my research as a whole based on what I have encountered in its parts.<sup>26</sup> Gadamer would refer to this as a foreunderstanding or prejudice,

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<sup>26</sup> This is what Schleiermacher, followed by Heidegger and Gadamer, referred to as the hermeneutic circle.

which is the ground of all meaningful encounters including the encounter with the past—the way the past speaks to us— and that brings about a fusion of horizons.

*a. Tradition and the fusion of horizons*

Despite attempts to define or characterize it, tradition has an ambiguous nature. In its most elementary sense, tradition is defined as the inheritance of knowledge transmitted from the past to the present (Shils 2006:12). For folklorist Henry Glassie, "tradition would be construed as a vehicle for authenticity, a means for achieving at once individual and social success (Glassie 1995:400). In oral histories, folklorist Simon J. Bronner lists seven ways in which tradition has been understood: a performative and imitative process that draws on collective oral wisdom; knowledge associated with non-institutionalized oral transmission linked to the past; a modern context associated with non-mainstream or marginalized groups and communities; behavior inclined to repeat actions and speech (in ritual, or even invented) to form identity, narrate memory, and establish a sense of socio-cultural stability; norms and ideals generally prescribed in texts that form the authoritative basis of an institution; sets of ideas presumed to be conservative, collective, naturalistic, religious, or ethical; the negation of modernity, innovation, and progress (Bronner 2011:40-50). In this characterization of tradition, Bronner suggests that folklore is the study (and science) of tradition. In short, he locates *what* tradition is (knowledge, oral wisdom, ideals), *how* it happens (through repetitive behavior, as a performative process, by reading texts, etc.), and *what* purposes it serves (to form identity, inherit knowledge, enforce authority or negate hegemony).

What I find Bronner does not consider is the researcher's role and influence on the written product that becomes referred to as tradition, or history. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggests that the aporia of the truth in history "becomes apparent through the fact that historians frequently

construct different and opposed narratives about the same events" (2009:242). In this sense, written products are situated within traditions that are thus affected by the writer's prejudices, making the representation of culture, or the past, part of the hermeneutical circle. For Ricoeur, "If the event is a fragment of a narrative, it depends on the outcome of the narrative, and there is no underlying, basic event that escapes narrativization" (ibid.:242).

Furthermore, the writing of tradition, and by extension, history, is dependent on the writer's prefigured understanding, that is, the effective history of which he or she is always a part. This understanding is similar to a situation that stands in tension with its own horizon, which Gadamer describes as "something into which we move, and moves with us" (Gadamer 2004:303). Drawing on Reinhart Kosellek, Paul Ricoeur relates the "space of experience" to the "horizon of expectation": the former refers to the past projected and understood in the present, where the latter anticipates the future (Ricoeur 1991:218-222). The horizon of the present is constituted by one's own knowledge and prejudices, which includes everything seen from a particular vantage point. The horizon of the past exists in the form of tradition and is surpassed by our own present horizon of understanding. This means that tradition (the horizon of the past) affects our understanding of the present, while our own horizon of the present (our understanding and thus interpretation of it) simultaneously supersedes the past such that the present is the surpassed past (ibid.: 2004:304-305).

A fusion of horizons would thus allow us to enlarge our understanding in such a way that would permit the circular movement Gadamer identifies. With regard to mariachi music, past and present are constantly fused, as the past continues to weigh on contemporary understandings and practices. Mariachi music is a centuries-long oral tradition. The scant historical documents that link the mariachi tradition's existence to the mid-nineteenth century, as a group in a festive

space called a "mariachi," and to the eighteenth century as an early expression of a *fandango*, provides the basis of our historical understanding of it. Moreover, efforts to preserve and sustain the tradition make us consciously aware of its historical depth. The use of stereotypes, for example, limits one's horizon, which provides a narrow understanding of the mariachi tradition.<sup>27</sup> Dialoguing about this tradition and its history, with women included, extends the fusion of horizons, such that the understanding of the tradition as a whole comes to mean something more to the performers of this music.

*b. Understanding taste and judgment*

Judgments have no methodology. Just as our prejudices are themselves brought into question in the process of understanding, so too are they brought into question in the encounter with others, and the horizon of our own understanding becomes susceptible to change. Although judgment of art is believed by some to be free from moral or political aims, the capacity to judge is also a political ability. Concerning the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Musicologist Roger Savage suggests:

Aesthetic experience's transposition onto the domains of ethics and politics highlights how the work's expression of the 'rule' it exemplifies voices its claim to truth. Like works of art, moral and political acts attest to their appropriateness by resolving in a practical way a problem or crisis.

(Savage 2015, forthcoming)

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<sup>27</sup> Some of these unfairly identify mariachi musicians as overweight, illiterate and undisciplined drunks, womanizers, and *machistas* (chauvinists) who are uninterested in applying themselves to formally study music.

In this sense, the relationship between aesthetics and politics encourages a concept of freedom that opens new possibilities in creativity and innovation, concepts that are judged and valued (Savage 2015, forthcoming).

Philosopher Hannah Arendt connects judgment to thought in order to see thinking as a way of clearing the space for judging, as opposed to allowing thought to encourage an escape from the world. Arendt reveals how the faculty to judge particular situations or conditions is not the same as the faculty to think. Thinking occurs in the mind with "representations of things that are absent," while "judging always concerns particulars and things close at hand" (Arendt 1981:193). She presents two notions of judgment: first, the actor who judges in order to act, and second, the spectator who judges in order to select meanings from the past. Judging actors and spectators require different forms of imagination because acting requires *being* in the world and the recognition of new creations and transformations. The actor not only judges, but also thinks and wills. Arendt, following Kant, emphasizes the position of the spectator; from this position one is able to see the whole without the mediation of a concept based on the presence of an interest. Spectators do not produce judgments that ought to serve as *principles* for other judgments or for action; rather, they create the public *space* in which the objects of political judgment, the actors and actions themselves, can appear, and in this sense, alter our sense of what belongs in the common world.

### *c. Towards a critique of an ideology of gender*

For over a century, women have performed as mariachi musicians, prepared musical arrangements, and composed their own pieces within this tradition. More recently, some have also challenged and changed the idea of tradition, which has produced value judgments that have delegitimized women's role within this practice, causing their serious involvement to be



dismissed as trivial or novel. Narratives and judgments grounded in longstanding social and cultural ideologies have thus cemented the idea that only men have the capacity and right to perform mariachi music well. When we begin to ask "why" these ideologies have come to overpower individuals' and societies' thoughts and actions, we find astonishing reasons.

Why have both the natural and human sciences associated social qualities with sex? Why have women historically been marginalized, and some more than others? Why have some women not been permitted to learn mariachi music? Why do all the high-profile male groups exclude women from their ranks? Susan McClary's response in the context of Western art music applies to mariachi as well: "IT'S JUST A CONVENTION! Which translates —Don't ask" (McClary 1991:3). Yet only by asking such questions can we develop the consciousness necessary to understand how changing conventions can promote positive social change.

Let us revisit, briefly, the course of ideology in the human sciences. A concept coined by philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy, ideology was intended to be a "science of ideas" that would better comprehend (and reconstruct) social conditions (Eagleton 1991:66-67). It was Karl Marx who later analyzed its socio-economic impact over materialist conditions prescribed by the German government. For Marx, people produce their conceptions and ideas, which are ideologically conditioned. As such,

consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. . . . Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life

(Marx 1986:27).

This inverted image of reality becomes internalized by lived experience into conscious existence. Subsequently, sociologist Karl Mannheim proposed that, since all discourse is already ideological, no point of view exists that is not already the same: the "ideological element in

human thought. . . is always bound up with the existing life-situation of the thinker" (Mannheim 1954:71). Ideology happens *in* us and *to* us (Althusser, cited in Eagleton 1991:142); it works with metaphors that carry social meaning in lived experiences (Geertz 1973); and it has a credibility gap, wherein the claim to authority, or legitimacy, is greater than the beliefs actually held by those being dominated (Ricoeur 1986:13-14).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Ricoeur relates three elements of ideology's legitimating function with their utopian counterparts:

Ideology	Utopia
Its integration of a system of symbolic mediations	Its eccentric role with respect to explorations of the possible ways of thinking, feeling and conducting our lives in opposition to congealed outlooks, habits and practices
Its legitimation of a system of authority and of the claim to the right to rule	Its experimentations with alternative ways of sharing power that challenges the legitimacy of existing systems of rule
Its dissimulation of instances of domination.	Its flights from reality, which are a form of pathological escape

(Ricoeur, cited in Savage 2015)

The problem of legitimacy and authority thus becomes an inverted image of reality in terms of understanding the mariachi tradition as a whole, with women included. In this sense, a critique of an ideology of gender would aim at identifying the male-centered ideas and actions in mariachi music that justify excluding women. Such a critical awareness would offer women the opportunity to reflect upon adverse situations, such as contexts inducing powerlessness or oppressive conditions, so that they can choose how to interpret, subvert, and transcend dominant

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur moves towards a theory of cultural imagination by describing three functions of ideology and utopia: pathological, legitimizing, and integrative.

ideologies. By seeking real social change, the credibility gap concerning women's oppression — for *being* women— can be diminished. It is this gap that opens the space to reflect upon the legitimacy of the dominant viewpoint.

Critiques of and responses to gender ideologies have empowered women to seek justice and change over the past century. Although women are seemingly more liberated in the twenty-first century, gender discrimination is still rampant. Music is not the exception. Susan McClary affirms that

the power of music —both for dominant cultures and for those who would promote alternatives— resides in its ability to shape the ways we experience our bodies, emotions, subjectivities, desires, and social relations. And to study such affects demands that we recognize the ideological basis of music's operations —its cultural constructedness (McClary 2001:6-7).

The ideological basis of music's cultural constructedness weighs heavily on tradition, in large part because cultural values continue to be perpetuated by the characteristics and behaviors set by society. This basis also frames the construction of Mexican identity through mariachi music. Gender ideologies not only shape gender roles as a kind of social structure, they also, as McClary suggests, *shape experience*. Despite actions that defend dominant ideologies concerning mariachi music, women have become empowered to appropriate this musical heritage by both preserving and shaping it so that their experiences fit their musical and cultural needs.

## **5. What is at stake?**

The stakes in this research enterprise are vast: mariachi music not only has a strong cultural stronghold within Mexico and for Mexicans abroad; it is also entangled in the symbolic intersections between gender, music, musicality, and ideology. The dominant mariachi ideology claims that men have the authority to legitimately perform the music while establishing a normative standard of dress, musical style, and conduct. For women to participate in this musical

tradition, two things are at stake: first, her participation challenges claims to authenticity and legitimacy in the musical tradition; and second, this participation changes ideologies associated with gender, mariachi, culture, and society. As a result, women's participation in mariachi music is an example of a struggle for legitimacy and recognition.

Women have not been excluded from the tradition, for the stories told in this dissertation tell otherwise. Yet the stories presented as official mariachi history have indeed excluded them. Why has that story been told that way? How can we redress that? To offset this officially-presented history, women like Laura Sobrino, Nancy Muñoz, with Leonor Xóchitl Pérez have taken on the task of documenting the experiences of women mariachi musicians. During September of 2013, Laura Sobrino and Nancy Muñoz, with Leonor Xóchitl Pérez, inaugurated the exhibit "*¡Viva el Mariachi Femenil! 1903–2013*", with the Women's Museum of California at San Diego. It featured photographs, documents, artifacts, music, films and displays of women's mariachi dresses and suits collected by Laura Sobrino and Nancy Muñoz, an independent research project they had been working on for over 25 years. Aside from the first three all-female mariachi groups that formed in Mexico City since the late 1940s (Chapter Four), the exhibit predominantly focused on women and all-female groups from the United States. This effort is an example of women who seek to unveil the gender gaps in history by through independent research. The exhibit, curated by Leonor Xóchitl Pérez, former mariachi musician from Los Angeles, formalized the materials Laura Sobrino had gathered through her research over the years.

Aside from this visual presentation that highlights certain women mariachi musicians, there are very few references to women mariachi musicians in the stories written about the mariachi tradition, making them ideologically operated. One of the things I aim to present in the

remainder of this dissertation is to fill the gap between reality and ideology concerning women in mariachi music. This gap, whether observed in official histories, vernacular histories, or counter narratives, delegitimizes the official history by providing an alternative. At the reflexive level, I deal with issues concerning authority, ideology, ideology critique, science and ideology, and a discussion of metaphor in order to advance a discourse that legitimates the role of women in mariachi based on a historical precedent that has been occluded or overlooked.

Nino Tsitsishvili (2006, 2009) in her analysis of male and female polyphonic singing in Georgia notes that, like the "rooster women" of this tradition, some women musicians may perform like men in order to be valued. Since male polyphonic singing in Georgia is so closely tied to nationalism, Tsitsishvili argues against the idea that women's performance of this national music may change this male-dominated tradition. In Jane Sugarman's (1997) book about singing at weddings among Prespa Albanians, women's participation in a once male-dominated musical tradition is now transforming into one in which new ideas about gender are practiced and performed musically.

With mariachi music having achieved its status as a musical symbol of Mexico, this dissertation on women's participation in this tradition aims to show that there are socio-musical contributions that have changed the tradition, without necessarily excising the male-centered element. Through an extensive examination of personal experiences, this dissertation documents women's contribution to the development of mariachi music. For some, the impact of gendered stereotypes, grounded in longstanding social and cultural ideologies on cultural expression, has been an issue of the past; for others, it continues to be an ongoing challenge.

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## Chapter Two: Mariachi, Revisited

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*The mariachi [tradition] is a relevant cultural expression in a complex, multi-class, and multi-ethnic society, which is bifurcated into a centuries-old tradition of an oral-gestural culture and, more recently, organically associated with the mass media. This institution, on the one hand, is fragmented and dispersed throughout a vast region –Western Mexico– and, on the other, manifests a national and international expansion.*

*El mariachi remite a una expresión cultural vigente en una sociedad compleja, pluriclasista y multiétnica, que se encuentra bifurcada en una tradición centenaria de cultura oral-gestual y en otra, más reciente, vinculada orgánicamente a los medios de comunicación masiva. Se trata, por un lado, de una institución fragmentada y dispersa a lo largo y ancho de una vasta región –el occidente mexicano– y, por otro, manifiesta una expansión nacional e internacional.*

Jesús Jáuregui, "El Mariachi, Símbolo Musical de México" (2012)

One of the most difficult tasks for mariachi researchers is to elaborate categories that best define the mariachi tradition. Since categorization is often automatic and unconscious, however, we generally become aware of it only in problematic cases (Lakoff 1987:6). Argentinian musicologist Carlos Vega notes the challenges in the classification of music in groups, suggesting that there are "many kinds of music and few words of sufficient general validity to distinguish among them. . . ." (C. Vega 1966:1). The difficult nature of definitions concerning music categories has led to controversial debates when dealing with traditions that are often referred to as traditional, folkloric, popular, of the masses, commercial, rural/urban, and so forth. As Vega suggests, this kind of music "coexists in the minds of urban groups along with fine-art music, and participates in the life of rural groups along with folk music," referring to these expressions as "mesomusic" (ibid.:3).

Mariachi music is an example of mesomusic because it is a musical expression that is neither autochthonous nor classical, but straddles both worlds. As a result, many attempts to define its origins have led to a myriad of categorizations, followed by academic disputes

concerning its regional origins (as described in the previous chapter), etymology, and musical influences. The mariachi ensemble that will generally appear on television and on popular musical recordings has become so renowned all over the world that, for many people, a definition of this kind of "mariachi" is not problematic. These groups have taken on names such as "contemporary Mexico City mariachi" (Borcherdt 1966:408), "*mariachi actual*" (current mariachi) (Castillo Romero 1973:183), "commercial type of mariachi" (Geijerstam 1976), and "*mariachi moderno*" (modern mariachi) (Jáuregui 1987a). In addition to traditional and folk music, these groups also perform popular musical genres (further described below) and art music adapted to mariachi instrumentation. They generally have a standard set of instruments that consist of three to five violins, two trumpets, a guitarrón, a vihuela, a guitar, and a harp. When they perform, the performers generally wear a *traje de charro*, and sometimes wide-brimmed and high crowned sombreros.

While this may be the case for most mariachi groups, this general definition ostracizes those who also form part of the mariachi tradition, yet do not fit this characterization. In effect, mariachi music today is not only this popularized ensemble found in urban centers in Mexico, the United States, and many other parts of the world. There are also mariachi ensembles that, when compared to this more popularized version, share the name "mariachi" and one or two socio-musical elements (discussed below). These kinds of groups have also been given a variety of names, such as "proto-mariachi" (Stanford 1972), "original mariachi" (Geijerstam 1976), "*mariachi tradicional*" (traditional mariachi) (Jáuregui 1987a), and "*mariachi antiguo*" (old mariachi) (Chamorro 2000). They do not wear the widely identified *traje de charro* but rather common clothing, such as the cotton rural attire also referred to as the *traje de manta* (white cotton rural clothing), or other quotidian casual attire. While their instrumentation is variable,

they generally have a plucked bass instrument, a few strummed rhythm instruments, and one or two melody instruments (Stanford 1972). Some of these traditional rural groups have included percussion instruments (Chamorro 2000). In contrast to the popular mariachi groups, these traditional groups do not typically include a trumpet, and do not perform the latest popular music tunes (Jáuregui 1987a).

One of the most influential discussions concerning the distinction between the rural/original/traditional/folk and urban/contemporary/modern/popular mariachi groups is Jáuregui's article "El Mariachi Como Elemento de un Sistema Folklórico," in which he explains:

Before defining our object of study, a precision is urgent: at present two types of mariachi [groups] exist, the traditional mariachi, on the one hand, which responds to and reproduces [music] neither mechanically nor statically, but rather from its peculiar dynamics —a popular tradition that remained traditional in our country's West until approximately 1930; *it does not use a trumpet*. The modern mariachi, on the other hand, was conceived in Mexico City in the 1930s; its music is a result of the repositioning of the mariachi tradition from commercial and political interests (by radio broadcasting and record companies, first, and then film and television; simultaneously, of the Mexican State): one of its distinguishing features is that *the trumpet is essential*.

Antes de delimitar nuestro objeto de estudio, es impostergable una precisión: en la actualidad existen dos tipos de mariachis, el mariachi tradicional, por un lado, responde a y reproduce no de manera mecánica ni estática, sino a partir de su dinámica peculiar — una tradición popular que se mantuvo como típica en el occidente de nuestro país aproximadamente hasta 1930; *no utiliza trompeta*. El mariachi moderno, por su parte se gestó en la ciudad de México en la década de 1930; su música es resultado de la reubicación de la tradición del mariachi a partir de intereses comerciales y políticos (de la radiodifusión y las compañías disqueras, primero, y luego del cine y la televisión; paralelamente, del Estado mexicano): uno de sus rasgos distintivos es que *le es imprescindible la trompeta*.

(Jáuregui 1987a:95)

For Jáuregui, the distinction between the traditional and modern mariachi groups lies not only in their instrumentation, but also in a series of sixteen additional items, which he bases on decades of ethnographic anthropological research in communities where rural mariachi groups continue to express their musical identity. These can be grouped into seven categories, which refer to



instrumentation, teaching methods, performative ambits (sacred and festive), performance practice, musical repertory, rural/urban identity, and the cultural context. He later reorganized these as "elements" that define the mariachi tradition (described below).

Creating a distinction between the traditional and the popular mariachi groups has contributed to the comprehension of the mariachi tradition by focusing on their differences, rather than their similarities. However, to better understand the transformational character and panoramic view of the mariachi tradition as a whole, I thus suggest focusing on both the similarities and the differences between these traditions, which I aim to do in a brief review of eight musico-social elements that, I believe, define the mariachi tradition. By reviewing these elements, we find that the mariachi tradition does not have a linear history. Each of these elements originating at distinctive moments in time, each with their own individual historical process, and during the nineteenth century converged to become what today we can affirm as mariachi music.

### **1. Eight elements of the mariachi tradition**

The word "mariachi" has multiple referents. It is, at once, the individual musician, the ensemble, the music, the *fandango*, and the tradition in general. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the word has also been used refer to place names and a tarima (foot drum) (Jáuregui 1999b). Since one may use the same word to refer to any of these, the context is vital in knowing its referent. For this dissertation, I will not leave it to the context, but will always describe whether I refer to mariachi music, a mariachi musician, the mariachi ensemble or group, the mariachi space, or the mariachi tradition. These referents, however, do not *define* the mariachi tradition, they exemplify the use of the word. In order to approach a more complete view of

mariachi music, I proposed a definition based on eight elements that define the mariachi tradition.

Presented below are eight working socio-musical elements that define mariachi music.<sup>29</sup> Some are taken from Jáuregui's systematization, others are proposed by me, and all refer comprehensively to the mariachi tradition as a whole: (1) mariachi instrumentation, (2) performance methods or styles, (3) literary sung forms, (4) musical genres, (5) dance styles, (6) performative spaces, (7) performance clothing, and (8) the etymology of word "mariachi." Each element has its own history, originated at varying moments in time and in different regions of the Western Mexican countryside, and some, not all, had to have converged in order for, returning to Freire, "mariachi" to *be* what it has *become* (Freire 2005[1968]:179). Furthermore, it is important to note that while there are extra-musical factors (globalization, gender, migration) that have influenced the tradition, I consider these to affect the sustainability and transformation of the tradition, not define it.

*a. Mariachi instrumentation and texture*

Despite the long history of instrumental experimentation within this musical tradition, there have been polemic discussions concerning whether certain instruments should be used in groups that call themselves mariachi ensembles. In 1995, Mariachi Campanas de America (founded in 1978 in San Antonio, Texas) performed using a full drum set, calling themselves a mariachi group, and wearing a *traje de charro*, complete with a sombrero (Jáquez 2000:63).

During this time, many mariachi musicians argued that Mariachi Campanas de America should

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<sup>29</sup> By "working," I am referring to the fact that, as I delve into the history of each element, I discover new or updated information. Although a scrutinized review of each of these elements is very necessary, I recognize that I am very far from achieving that goal.

not be considered a "mariachi" because real mariachi groups do not use a drum set. Some argued that this group must either eliminate the drum set, and other foreign instruments to the mariachi tradition, or stop utilizing the word "mariachi" in their name. At times, the group removed the word "mariachi" when they experimented with other instruments, such as the accordion and a keyboard, but used it when they performed with the standardized mariachi instrumentation.

Later that decade, Cindy Shea created the all-female Mariachi Divas (founded in 1999 in Los Angeles, California), which also experimented with a variety of instruments she considers an extension of the standardized mariachi instrumentation. These included *timbales*, a flute, the *tres*, a drum set, the *güiro*, a saxophone, and a trombone. While some mariachi musicians speculated that Mariachi Divas simply created mariachi fusion music with the new instruments, others strongly suggested that they too change their name for the sake of preserving the mariachi tradition.<sup>30</sup> Cindy Shea did not change the group's name, nor did they altogether eliminate extended instrumentation. Instead, she decided to prove to the mariachi community and its audience that new things could be done with mariachi instrumentation, while continuing to preserve part of the tradition. I have been a witness to both the polemic discussions regarding Mariachi Divas's use of instrumentation, as well as to how they have negotiated between tradition and innovation in their performance as the years have passed.

In Western music history, the idea of fixed instrumentation in specific kinds of musical ensembles can be considered a rather recent concern. In previous centuries, art music was not entirely characterized by a fixed instrumentation. For example, blind Spanish composer Antonio de Cabezón (1510-1566), in the posthumous publication of his compositions *Obras de música*

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<sup>30</sup> One particular mariachi musician who supported the standardized mariachi instrumentation suggested that Mariachi Divas change their name to a Salsa-riachi band, instead of a mariachi group.

*para tecla, arpa y vihuela* (1570), elaborated by his son, never mentioned a fixed instrumentation for his music. In fact, most keyboard music of the Baroque period could be played interchangeably on the harpsichord, pianoforte, organ, lute or harp.

The classical orchestra too has had changes in instrumentation throughout history. Despite a history that goes back to the seventeenth century, the orchestra became standardized in the nineteenth century. Music historians John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw analyze the history of instruments used in orchestras since the seventeenth century, concluding that, over the years, the orchestra in general came to include "more instruments and more different kinds of instruments" (2005:6-7). For example, what began as an improvised bass line played by four backstage instruments in 1600 evolved into a large ensemble of winds and strings that played an orchestral score. In one of the earliest staged operas, *Orfeo* (1607), for example, Italian composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) did not designate the particular instruments during its live performance. It was not until the nineteenth century that particular instrumentations became standardized in specific kinds of musical ensembles. The music during this time circulated in the form of transcriptions and paraphrases that allowed individual instrumental parts to be substituted for the instruments the music was originally written for.

If this holds true for written musical traditions and Western concert music, what are the implications for orally transmitted traditional and popular music? Considering that, in the case of mariachi music, for example, the music was not written or documented in any way prior to the twentieth century, how can it be known whether a specific instrumentation is proper for making a particular kind of music? The music performed was based on its social and musical functions for festive events and religious ceremonies—not instrumentation. Moreover, the variability in the instrumentation of traditional music was a quotidian issue and necessarily affected the meaning

and significance of the music that was made. As such, many mariachi groups have long performed ungoverned by rules and labels, which resulted in many groups having variations in their use of instrumentation.<sup>31</sup>

The earliest known document about the instruments used in a mariachi ensemble can be found in Father Ignacio Aguilar's diary, in which he recalled that on May 3, 1859, in Tlalchapa, Guerrero, on the festivity of the Sacred Cross,

The music, or as it is called over there, *Mariache*, is composed of *arpas grandes*, violins, and a *tambora* drum, were played without rest.<sup>32</sup>

Las músicas, ó cómo allá se dice el Mariache, compuesta ne arpas grandes, biolines [sic] y tambora tocaban sin descansar.

(Aguilar 1909, cited in Jáuregui 2007a: 38)

Father Aguilar refers to specific instruments that make music in the *tierra caliente* region of the state of Guerrero, which include an arpa grande, violins, and a *tambora* drum. In addition, he sheds light on a variation of the word "mariachi" (described below).

A few years later, writer Enrique Barrios de los Ríos (1868 – c.1925) also published memoirs of his travels in Nayarit. In his published journal, he describes a *mariache* as a wooden platform the community used to dance upon to music made by

. . . a harp, or by a violin and a vihuela, or by a violin, a snare drum, cymbals, and a *tambora* drum, in a stunning quartet.

. . . arpa, o de violín y vihuela, o de violín, redoblante, platillos y tambora, en cuarteto aturdidor.

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<sup>31</sup> Most of the instruments used in mariachi groups have European origins, or European influence, and were brought to the Americas with Spanish colonization. The vihuela, for example, shares the same name with the Spanish vihuela, yet they are distinguished in terms of their physical structure, their musical function (described below), and the way they are played. The *guitarrón* and the *vihuela* were invented expressly for mariachi ensembles, whether the groups used these instruments or not. Each instrument has its own organological and stylistic history, and is adapted to the mariachi performances style (described below).

<sup>32</sup> "Mariache" is another form of referring to the mariachi tradition, which will be further detailed in section f below.

(Barrios de los Ríos 1908:43-44)

While a specific combination of instruments that comprised the "stunning quartet" is not definitive based on this description, it is evident that towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the same region, mariachi groups performed with different instruments in similar kinds of performance ambits.

Well into the twentieth century, the phenomenon associated with mariachi instrumentation changed very little. In his article "El Mariachi Multinaciente" (The Multi-Nascent Mariachi), music scholar Mata Torres writes:

Mariachi [music] was born simultaneously in different places. . . . The music of one region need not be the same as the other. . . . The mariachi [groups] from the area between Durango, Nayarit, Zacatecas and Jalisco, are generally integrated as follows: violin, guitar, vihuela and *tololoche* (stand-up bass). The mariachi [group] from Jiquilpan, municipality of San Gabriel, was composed of three violins, three guitars, a harp, and a vihuela; the one from Copala, Toluca, had a guitar, a violin, a harp, and a vihuela; the one from San Antonio de los Vásquez was formed by a violin, a guitar, a *tambora* drum, and a snare drum. The mariachi [group], as a popular conception, varies in its instrumentation.

El mariachi nació simultáneamente en distintas partes. . . . La música de cada región no tiene por qué ser igual a la de otra. . . . Los mariachis propios de la zona comprendida entre Durango, Nayarit, Zacatecas y Jalisco, se integran, por lo general, de la siguiente manera: violín, guitarra, vihuela y tololoche. El mariachi de Jiquilpan, municipio de San Gabriel, estaba integrado por tres violines, tres guitarras, arpa y vihuela, el de Copala, Toluca, tenía guitarra, violín, arpa y vihuela, y el de San Antonio de los Vásquez estaba formado por violín, guitarra, tambora y redoblante. El mariachi, como concepción popular, varía en su instrumentación.

(Mata Torres 1992:25)

Mata Torres provides evidence of the diversity of mariachi instrumentation found in different regions, still found along the Western Mexican coast, well into the twentieth century.

In general, any mariachi ensemble, whether traditional or popular, generally have at least four musicians to perform three basic musical functions: melody, rhythm, and bass.<sup>33</sup> These groups, most of them called "mariachi," will have melody instruments, a bass instrument, and a few strummed rhythm instruments (Stanford 1972). At least two musicians are required on the melody instruments, which include violins, a harp, and more recently, trumpets, which play melodic lines in thirds or sixths. If there are three or more violins, for example, they tend to complete the chord, dividing their melody into three parts, as opposed to two, and they are generally played in the first or second inversion, rarely in root position.

In addition, at least one musician must play a plucked bass instrument, which includes a harp, a guitarrón, or a *contrabajo* (stand-up bass). Some mariachi groups may have both a guitarrón and a harp because, although the harp can play melodic lines, it is also commonly used to play the bass part. Finally, one or more musicians play rhythm instruments, which are strummed percussively as they follow through with the harmonic progressions. These include guitars, vihuelas, *guitarras de golpe*, and *tamboritas* (small skin drum), the latter for the percussive element. While there are a great variety of ensembles that need only three musicians to fulfill the three musical functions, they are not generally considered to be a mariachi ensemble.<sup>34</sup> These are instead referred to as a *trío*, which can theoretically perform mariachi musical pieces, but they would be missing the instrumental melodies in thirds.

Noting the flexibility in the instruments used in early and contemporary mariachi ensembles, it becomes clear that these groups depended more on what was available, so long as

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<sup>33</sup> There are groups, however, who have performed with a violin and a guitar, depending on the social necessity, and have called themselves a "mariachi."

<sup>34</sup> Yet, in many touristic contexts, there are groups of three musicians that dress with a mariachi *traje de charro* and please some customers by calling themselves a mariachi ensemble.

the social and musical functions were fulfilled. Moreover, while mariachi groups have been generally considered stringed ensembles, some groups have also experimented with a variety of non-stringed instruments, such as trombones and flutes (Jáuregui 1990:43), clarinets (Sheehy 2006:20), accordion (Jáuregui 2007a:254), percussion (Chamorro 2000:63-66), and triangle (Jáuregui 1999a:41).

Therefore, a collective agreement concerning the correct set of instrumentation for mariachi ensembles came into question when the social function, or performative ambit (described below), of the music was altered, not whether specific instruments were used. Since the 1930s, the media was influential in creating a new performative environment and social function: to accompany singers, record music on albums, and later in the 1940s, appear in films and on television shows. While the local community practice was still important, and still in use, this new performative ambit standardized the instruments that the extended audience would come to expect of mariachi groups, which included the use of the trumpet.

Including the trumpet in mariachi ensembles entailed a long musical and social process. The first trumpeter to form part of a mariachi group that entered this new performance space, circa 1933, was Gil Díaz, with Mariachi Marmolejo (Flores and Dueñas 1994). Years later, trumpeter Jesús Salazar would be called "el padre de la trompeta del mariachi" (the father of the mariachi trumpet) during his stint with Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo (Clark 1994:5). According to mariachi historian Jonathan Clark, Mariachi Tapatío was the first mariachi ensemble to include a trumpet that became popular nationwide. The group's live radio performances and appearances in important Mexican films were fundamental in popularizing and standardizing the instrumentation, as well as much of the music (ibid.:6). Then in 1940, Miguel Martínez joined the already renowned Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, which solidified the sound



of the trumpet in the mariachi groups that followed (Martínez 2012:72-74). In 1952, Martínez was invited to join Mariachi Mexico de Pepe Villa, who already had another trumpet player, where he stayed for one year —long enough to become influential in standardizing the trumpet duo in mariachi ensembles.

When the trumpet formally became a part of the standard instrumentation, some mariachi musicians, scholars, and audiences did not accept it, and questioned its validity (Chamorro 2000; Martínez 2012). Naturally, this newly standardized instrumentation caused friction for those groups that preferred not to use the trumpet, yet were pressured by the growing demand for the mariachi with the trumpet sound. For Stanford, these instruments had a "devastating effect on the traditional ensemble" (Stanford 1972: 73). Mariachi musicians that lived the transition from experimentation to standardization of the trumpet recalled the adversities this caused their tradition. In his autobiography, Miguel Martínez recalls how, when he began performing with mariachi groups at Plaza Garibaldi in the 1930s, the general public did not like hearing a mariachi group with a trumpet. During one of his first performances at a birthday party, with a mariachi group from Plaza Garibaldi, Martínez shared how the birthday lady did not want the group to continue playing because, according to her, a mariachi group does not have trumpets. After her family convinced her to allow them to stay, she said:

Well, they can stay, but the young trumpeter will not play. The trumpet is for an orchestra, for a band, what do I know, but a mariachi! You —she tells me— will get paid, do not worry about that. But don't play!

Bueno, que se queden, pero que el joven de la trompeta no toque. El pistón es para orquesta, para banda, que sé yo, ¡pero pa'l mariachi! A usted —me dice a mí— se le va a pagar, por eso no se apure. ¡Pero no toque!"

(Martínez 2012:49)

The trumpet, like many other instruments, was initially included with mariachi as an experiment, but unlike most others, it ended up becoming an emblematic part of a mariachi ensemble. Years

after this instrument became inseparable from mariachi music in general, Jáuregui conducted field research with traditional mariachi groups in Nayarit, from 1982-1983, and came in contact with a variety of mariachi groups that continue to perform without the trumpet. One musician evoked how this change impacted the tradition, stating that:

People no longer hire mariachi groups without a trumpet. Today, even if they have no violins, the mariachi group still plays, but if they do not have a trumpet, the mariachi group will not play, the people do not want it.

La gente ya no contrata a un mariachi sin trompeta. Ahora si no hay violines, el mariachi de todos modos toca, pero si no hay trompeta, el mariachi no toca, la gente no lo quiere.

(Euquerio García, cited in Jáuregui 1987:98)

The addition of the trumpet to popular mariachi ensembles became a catalyst for other effects that further separated the popular mariachi groups from the "original" mariachi tradition. Stanford argues that mariachi groups including trumpets became what he called "mariachi orchestras" (1972:73). As a result of the sonority given by trumpets to mariachi music, groups that included one or more trumpets began to increase the number of violins in order to balance the volume level of the melodies. For mariachi scholars today, the definitive difference between the standardized instrumentation and the mariachi groups that are today considered to be "traditional" is the use of the trumpet. In fact, this distinction also became vital for the organizers of the *XI Encuentro Nacional de Mariachi Tradicional* (National Encounter for Traditional Mariachi), in Guadalajara, Jalisco, such that their call-for-musicians stated:<sup>35</sup>

Traditional mariachi ensembles that play early music of traditional roots may participate. In this *Encuentro*, the participation of mariachi ensembles with a trumpet will not be considered.

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<sup>35</sup> The electronic version of this invitation is available at: <http://noticiasdelgobiernodejalisco.blogspot.mx/2012/06/convocan-la-comunidad-mariachera.html>, accessed on December 12, 2012.

Podrán participar Mariachis Tradicionales que interpreten música antigua y de arraigo tradicional. Dentro de este Encuentro no se contempla la participación de mariachis con trompeta.<sup>36</sup>

While the trumpet is considered to be what marks the vast difference between the original traditional and the popular modern mariachi groups, there are documents that refer to this instrument being experimented with prior to this contested evolution.

In sum, if we think of mariachi instrumentation as a system of transformations, existing on a kind of spectrum, as opposed to being an absolute category, then value can be placed on the regional variances in the instruments used by mariachi groups. On one end of the spectrum, we have a set of instruments generally accepted in traditional mariachi ensembles, which include various combinations of the following (so long as there is a melody, a bass, and rhythm): violin, *guitarrón*, *vihuela*, harp, guitar, *guitarra de golpe*, *contrabajo*, *tamboritas* and other kinds of percussion instruments (Jáuregui 2014a:43-44). On the opposite end of the spectrum, concerning the popular mariachi ensembles, we see groups that call themselves "mariachi", yet include instruments such as trumpets, guiros, drum sets, electronic instruments, clarinets, saxophones, accordions, and so on. Surely such diversity enhances Mexico's contributions to world culture.

Beyond the notion of tradition and authenticity concerning the kinds of instruments used in mariachi ensembles, there are also perceived gender stereotypes associated with these instruments, which influences the instruments women choose to play. For example, it has been more common for women to play the guitar, *vihuela* or violin, as opposed to the trumpet or *guitarrón*. Perhaps Western gender instrument stereotypes have impacted these associations in

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<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, it was this event that awarded a medal to Miguel Martínez and featured lectures in his honor at the academic Colloquium, which later facilitated the publication of his autobiography *Mi Vida, Mis Viajes, Mis Vivencias: Siete Décadas en la Música del Mariachi* (México D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Culturas Populares de México, 2012).

mariachi music.<sup>37</sup> In many cultures, the physical stamina required to play certain instruments has also associated them with men over women. The trumpet, for example, is one of those instruments associated with men. According to ethnomusicologist Curt Sachs (1940), in many musical cultures around the world, trumpets were often representative of male virility and were played only by males. In mariachi music, when women have played the trumpet, they have been criticized for having a weaker sound because they do not have enough stamina.

This argument is without merit as I have also observed a myriad of examples where men who play the mariachi trumpet have neither a strong sound nor stamina, therefore one's gender does not define the potential one has to play this instrument. The musical director of Mariachi Xóchitl, Ramona Madera (b. 1959), for example, is a trumpeter who has gained the respect of many, such that she was selected among those who auditioned to play the bugle call for the horse races in Mexico City's *Hipódromo de las Américas* (Race Track of the Americas). Her story is shared in detail in Chapter Four.

Another male-associated instrument is the guitarrón because it requires burly hands that must pluck its thick nylon strings, played in octaves. During the summer of 2008, shortly after having purchased my own guitarrón, I took advantage of the weeklong intense mariachi instructions offered in the UCLA World Music Summer Institute so that I could learn how to play this instrument. To my surprise, no other guitarrón students enrolled, which meant I had to hold the lead on the bass part for the ensemble (student ensembles generally have a lot more instruments than the standardized amounts). In one week, I had to learn the technique required for this large instrument, practices scales and arpeggios, and play in various tempos. Within a

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<sup>37</sup> I specify Western because in countries like Korea, transverse and vertical flutes are considered men's instruments; women commonly play stringed instruments as opposed to wind or percussion instruments.

few days, I developed unladylike calluses on various fingers that, just before the concert, burst, bled, and hurt. Nonetheless, I had to play the series of pieces we learned, for the ensemble depended on it. It is not merely that the guitarrón is associated with men or women, but that it takes tough hands and determination to succeed in performing it. Today, both women and men have overcome the initial callus phase and are successful guitarronists.

More and more women are beginning to play the violin, guitar, and vihuela in mariachi ensembles. Of these, I would like to pause for a moment on the last of these. The vihuela performance technique requires four strong right hand nails in order to get the crisp sound particular to this instrument. One can either purchase a *púa* (false index finger nail) or, if their natural nails are not strong enough, get manicures on one, two, or all of the right hand nails. Most vihuela players will opt to get manicures on most or all of their right nails, men included. While this is aesthetically characteristic of femininity, and men may get teased for having long nails, it is also characteristic of the finest vihuela players in mariachi music. In sum, mariachi instrumentation has become standardized since the early 1950s. Women mariachi musicians have had to overcome gendered instrumentation stereotypes and prove that these ideological tendencies would not hold them back.

#### *b. Musical genres and subgenres*

Mariachi music is a genre characterized by its instrumentation and the social functions it performs in Mexico and other parts of the world. Musicologist Jim Samson contends that, in a broad sense, a genre is a class, type, category that is sanctioned by convention and codifies past repetitions while inviting future ones. For Samson (2001), a narrower definition of musical genre would identify it as a means of ordering, stabilizing and validating musical materials themselves. This understanding of musical genre would categorize music with related characteristics from

particular communities into particular genres, and at the same time, distinguish some musical characteristics from other genres that are not in the same category.

The ensemble can be grouped under a genre category called "mariachi" in a record store or on iTunes. These ensembles perform a wide gamut of musical genres from the oral, popular, concert classical, and religious traditions, which are defined by a combination of many musical elements. It is important to distinguish between the oral, popular, classical, and religious musical genres because each have their own history, social function, and transmission processes. This section will include a brief description of the mentioned genres, and their importance to the mariachi tradition.

According to ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman, the music from oral traditions relies on memory and aural transmission, and generally maintains a continuity of genres (Bohlman 1988:30). Yet, although much of this music is passed on to the next generation aurally, through listening and imitation, a kinesthetic-embodiment component to oral transmission is also vital. Ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice takes the notion of oral tradition to another level, referring to this form of learning as a visual-aural-kinesthetic tradition that involves, not only oral information, but also observation, trial-and-error, and practice (Rice 1995:268).

The musical subgenres from the oral tradition most representative in the mariachi repertory include *corridos*, *valonas*, and traditional *sones* that have remained in the collective memory of many musicians. *Corridos* are narrative ballads that chronicle historic events, such as the Mexican Revolution, and significant individuals, such as Pancho Villa (Mendoza 1954). While most *corridos* form part of a larger literary category of narrative songs, they can also be

understood as dramatic.<sup>38</sup> *Corridos* have diverse musical melodies and rhythms, such as 3/4 or 4/4, at various tempos. The *valona* is also a narrative song, but it is usually lyrically improvised in the moment (R. González 2001). Unlike the *corrido*, *valonas* have similar melodies and are stimulated by whimsical and clever narrative themes.

The word "son" comes from Latin *sonus*, which indicates a song (Rubio 1983:160). Traditional *sones* (songs) involve music, sung literature and dance, and emerge from various regions in Mexico, which result in local variants that form the core of the diverse mariachi repertory. They can be broadly grouped into a category called the *son mexicano*, and include, but are not limited to, the *son jalisciense* (also called *sones de mariachi*), *son huasteco/huapango*, *son jarocho*, *son planeco*, and *son calentano* (Stanford 1972 and Sánchez 2005a). The Mexican regional *son* is rhythmically characterized by the *sesquiáltera*.<sup>39</sup> In these *sones*, the proportion alternates in rhythm between 6/8 and 3/4, and may occur within the meter itself (horizontally on a score), or simultaneously, where some instruments may play in 3/4 meter and others in 6/8 (vertically on a score).

Some of the pieces are entirely in 6/8 meter, such as *El Tren* (The Train) and certain fragments in a *jarabe* medley (traditional Mexican dance), which generally consists of five pieces that vary in rhythm and speed (Cordero 1897:196-197). The majority of the *son* repertory consists of pieces that alternate between 3/4 and 6/8. Some are less complex in rhythm and melody, such as *La Culebra* (The Snake), in which the *sesquiáltera* is not as present, and the

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<sup>38</sup> An excellent example is the *corrido* "Contrabando y Traición" (Smuggling and Betrayal) by Ángel González, was released by the norteño group Los Tigres del Norte in 1974. This *corrido* narrates the story of Camelia *La tejana* (the Texan), a woman who kills her lover for money and drugs.

<sup>39</sup> The Latin prefix "sesqui-" refers a proportion of one unit with one and a half of it, for example, 1:1½. In chemistry, it refers to a particular element or group present in a 3:2 ratio.

principle rhythm and melody are conformed by constant eighth notes. In other *sones*, such as *El Carretero* (The Carriage Man) and *El Toro Viejo* (The Old Bull), the sesquiáltera is more present rhythmically, within the guitarrón and the vihuela/guitar, as well as melodically, in the violin and trumpet parts (horizontally). In some cases, the melody could be phrasing in ternary accents simultaneously with the rhythm section, in binary accents (vertically).

Then there are *sones* that are far more complex. Professor Erick Mora, who teaches Guitar, Mariachi Ensemble, and Harmony at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, argues that there is a social factor that contributes to the complexity in some *sones*. For Professor Mora, the encounter between the Jalisco and Michoacán playing style created a new style referred to as from Tecalitlán, where Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán gets its fame. In Michoacán, the triplets dominated the rhythmic patterns, whereas in Jalisco the eighth notes dominated. The complexity thus lies in the combination of the sesquiáltera, the technical capability, and the complex rhythmic patterns that combine the eight notes and triplets in diverse ways. Some examples of these more complex *sones* include *Las Olas* (The Waves) and *El Pasajero* (The Intemperate).<sup>40</sup>

Many traditional *sones* are in the lyric literary form, which describe the rural landscape, the beauty of nature, and working the land with animals. The composers for these pieces are anonymous, although a myth prevails that tells the story of a man in Jalisco who learned the

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<sup>40</sup> For a concise analysis of some traditional mariachi *sones*, describing their form, harmonic progressions, and vocal style see Mark S. Fogelquist's M.A. thesis "Rhythm and Form in the Contemporary Son Jalisciense," (University of California, Los Angeles, 1975). For a review on the African influence on Mexican mestizo music, see musicologist Rolando Pérez Fernández's *La Música Afromestiza Mexicana*, in which he suggests that certain rhythms in mariachi *sones* are similar to specific African rhythms (1986).



*sones* from a bird that sang them to him in his sleep.<sup>41</sup> Many *sones* were originally folk songs with no author, although more recently some people have adjudicated these in order to receive royalties.

In addition to these three traditional subgenres, *corridos*, *valonas*, and traditional *sones*, mariachi ensembles also play musical subgenres originating from the popular music tradition. These have a distinct history, social function, and transmission processes. In Spanish, the term "popular music" refers to rural and folkloric "music of the people" (Simmonett 2001:17). However, the popular music of the 1940s and on, did not originate particularly originate in the rural zones. Most were in fact compositions for popular Mexican idols, written by urban songwriters from Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara. The musical subgenres from the popular tradition that were incorporated in the mariachi repertoire include the *canción ranchera*, *boleros*, *cumbias*, and *danzones*. The *canción ranchera* (a musical genre evoking the rural countryside) originated in the early twentieth century, during the nationalist post-revolutionary years, and became widely appreciated due to the Mexican film industry, when *rancheras* were composed expressly for films (Pérez Montfort 2007). Some of these were also homonymous to the film in which they were debuted, such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936) and *¡Ay! Jalisco No Te Rajes* (1941). The *canción bravía* (opposed to the *bel canto* technique) a sub genre of the *ranchera*, which is a bold and aggressive style of singing that dramatically expresses emotions with the gestures that complement a man's *bel canto* style and a woman's throat-centered voice (see Chapters Three and Seven). While the *canción ranchera* might be considered a musical genre of its own, individual pieces vary in rhythm, form, and style. For example, there are songs

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<sup>41</sup> José L. Hernández, director of Mariachi Sol de México and Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, shared this myth with me during a conversation in August of 2013, when he offered a master class at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi.

in 3/4 waltz-style, fast-paced 2/4 polka style, and slower dramatic 4/4 ballad-style, all written in the lyric form. Although scholars tend to refer to a *rancheras'* rural origins, folklorist Vicente T. Mendoza suggests that, while some of these songs are also in a lyric literary form, the majority, especially the *canciones bravías*, inherited the dramatic form from Italian opera (Mendoza 1982 and 1984).

The *bolero* also became an important musical genre included not only in the mariachi repertory, but also in many popular music ensembles all over Latin America. It originated as a musical dance genre from Spain in the mid eighteenth century, and evolved from the Spanish *seguidilla* (Espada 1997:121). While a genre called *bolero* now extends throughout Latin America, there are many formal differences between the way it is performed in Mexico, and, say, Cuba (Suárez Pajares 1999 and J. Salazar 1993). This musical genre may manifest itself as *bolero-capricho*, *bolero-son*, *bolero-mambo*, *bolero-tango*, *bolero-moruno* (flamenco influenced Cuban genre), *bolero-romántico*, *bolero-ranchero*, and *bolero-pop*, amongst others. In mariachi music, the last three are the most common. In addition to *rancheras* and *boleros*, mariachi groups also performed the latest popular dance music, such as *cumbias* and *danzones*. Songwriters of these popular musical genres [cumbias and danzones or all the genres] include Agustín Lara (1897-1970), Lorenzo Barcelata (1898-1943), Manuel Esperón (1911-2011), Pepe Guízar (1912-1980), Cuco Sánchez (1921-2000), José Alfredo Jiménez (1926-1973), Tomás Méndez (1927-1995), Ernesto Cortázar (1940-2004), and more recently, and Rubén Fuentes (b.1926), Armando Manzanero (b. 1935), Martín Urieta (b. 1943), Juan Gabriel (b. 1950).

In addition to these traditional and popular genres, which are native to Mexico, mariachi ensembles have also adopted many Spanish and Latin American popular music genres, which has contributed to mariachi music's versatility and international recognition. Mexican

musicologist Yolanda Moreno Rivas reflected upon the mariachi tradition's role in Mexican popular music, recognizing its growing value to many parts of the world:

The persistence and spread of the mariachi [tradition] has been so prolonged and widespread that mariachi or *ranchera* music today has come to signify —both in Mexico and abroad— a quintessential national music.

La persistencia y difusión del mariachi han sido tan prolongadas y amplias que en la actualidad la música mariachi o ranchera ha venido a significar —tanto en México como en el extranjero— la música nacional por excelencia.

(Moreno Rivas 1979:184)

Part of the tradition's success results from the adaptation to the standardized mariachi instrumentation of additional popular musical genres from outside Mexico, such as the *son joropo* from Colombia and Venezuela, and the *pasodoble* from Spain. Moreno Rivas contends that mariachi groups have not only played waltzes and ballads, but have also taken on the challenge of adapting concert music, such as symphonic pieces, thanks to the classical influence of Rubén Fuentes (Moreno Rivas 1979:184).<sup>42</sup>

As a result, in addition to the oral and popular musical traditions, mariachi ensembles have also integrated academic musical genres. The nineteenth-century European salon dance music arrived in Latin America in various waves, or "promotions" through migration (C. Vega 1944:156, 280). Musical dance genres such as the waltz, the schottische (*chotis*), the *danza*, the minuet, the polka, and the march each have their own history and evolution, and when they arrived in Mexico, they were either adapted to mariachi instrumentation or the musical form was used for newly composed pieces, such as the polka "*La Chuparosa*" (The Hummingbird) by

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<sup>42</sup> Rubén Fuentes (1926) is a Mexican composer who has studied classical violin in addition to mariachi music. In 1944, he joined Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán and several years later, he became the musical director of the group. His influence in mariachi music is pivotal. He introduced many mariachi musicians to musical scores, preparing the first symphonic pieces that included mariachi musicians.

Miguel Martínez and "*La Marcha de Zacatecas*" (The Zacatecas March). Just as salon dance musical genres migrated into the mariachi repertory since the nineteenth century, so did the music by Mexican classical composers, such as "*Sobre las Olas*" (Above the Waves) by Juventino Rosas, "*Rondinela*" by Gori Cortés, "*Estrellita*" (Little Star) by Manuel M. Ponce, "*Júrame*" (Swear To Me) by María Grever, "*Bésame Mucho*" (Kiss me Much) by Consuelo Velázquez, and "*Huapango*" by José Pablo Moncayo. The adaptation of academic music performed to mariachi instrumentation was not limited to Mexican composers. Mariachi groups have also adapted Antonio Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" and a medley of classical pieces first arranged by Louis Clark in his album "Hooked on Classics" (1981), which included fragments of music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Rossini, Handel, and Bizet, amongst others. Moreover, the influence of academic music on the mariachi tradition lies not solely on the repertory, but also in the manner of singing with the *bel canto* technique, which comes from the zarzuela and operatic traditions.

Finally, popular music was also performed in religious contexts, and has been found within and outside the Catholic Church. It was not until 1966 that mariachi ensembles began to perform liturgical musical pieces such as *Señor Ten Piedad* (Lord, have mercy), Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Offertory, Our Father, the Communion, and a variety of hymns. On Sunday, April 17, 1966, Canadian priest John Mark Leclerc implemented the first *Misa Panamericana* (Pan-American Mass), under the auspice of Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, in a small chapel in Cuernavaca, Morelos (LeClerc 1966). While this revolutionary mass sought to renovate religious celebrations with the use of local music and language, it was initially accused of celebrating a Catholic mass for tourists (Suárez 1970:24). It quickly became popular, and since the small

chapel could not hold many people, the *Misa Panamerica* came to be celebrated in the Cuernavaca Cathedral, and from there it went to other parts of Mexico and the United States.

Outside the Catholic Church, however, and long before 1966, traditional mariachi groups in Mexico participated in religious ceremonies, performing their music during religious processions, *soirees* (evening gathering) in honor of community patron saints, and social rites of passage. Although considered religious, the music consisted in a variety of instrumental genres, namely waltzes, *sones*, and *jarabes*, among others, and came to be grouped under the umbrella name *minuetes*, which should not be confused with the French-derived *minuet*, salon dance music that dates back to the eighteenth century. A *minuete* is thus an instrumental piece, with no lyrics, performed in a religious setting. According to Jáuregui,

Unlike *sones* and *jarabes*, which serve as the basis for festive communication within the living, *minuetes* constitute a religious plea, that is to say, a strictly musical prayer. They are not sung and are tendentially not danced to: only mariachi groups play these . . . representing their community that celebrates their patron saint, the faithful who pay a vow at a sanctuary, o the godmother who laments the death of her infant goddaughter or godson.

A diferencia de los *sones* y *jarabes*, que se ejecutan para 75atron como base de la comunicación festiva entre los vivos, los *minuetes* constituyen una plegaria, esto es, una oración estrictamente musical. No se cantan y tendencialmente no se bailan: 75atr los tocan el mariachi . . . en nombre de la comunidad que celebra su santo 75atron, de los fieles que pagan una manda en un santuario, o, en su caso, del padrino o la madrina que lamenta el fallecimiento de su pequeño ahijado o ahijada.

(Jáuregui 2012b:38).

Instrumental music in these religious contexts was important because there were no texts that could signify or communicate non-religious ideas.

In sum, mariachi ensembles perform a variety of musical genres that have their own form, stylistic features, and social contexts. These include the regional variants of the *son mexicano*, as above: *sones jarochos*, *huastecos*, *tixtlecos*, *calentanos*, *planecos*, and *jaliscienses*. Within these regional variations, there are also sub-variations, such as *sones abajeños*, *sones arribeños*, *sones*

*istemeños*, and so on. Today, mariachi musicians are constantly searching for a balance by performing both the traditional pieces that gave mariachi music its essence in the nineteenth century as well as the new pieces adapted to mariachi instrumentation. It is common for both traditional and popular mariachi ensembles to play the same *sones*, such as "*El Tirador*," "*El Carretero*," "*El Relámpago*" and many others, with slight stylistic differences. These stylistic differences depend on instrumentation, improvised texts, and performance methods and styles.

### *c. Performance methods and styles*

While musical genres and styles are concerned with categorical distinctions that involve the identification of similarities between different pieces, and may be used roughly interchangeably, in this section I refer to the methodical "how" of musical style, as opposed to the analytical "what" of musical genres. For example, within the *son* genres, a *son jalisciense* and a *son huasteco* each have local musical nuances that produce different performance styles. In a more extreme case, a *son jalisciense* is performed in a different style than a romantic *bolero*. They are unlike in form, singing techniques, bowing methods, and so forth. The description presented below centers on the modern mariachi methods and styles, and not the diverse instruments used with traditional mariachi groups. Further research on performance methods and styles concerning the traditional mariachi expression is very necessary. Such a study would engage historical musical recordings that include *sones* and *minuetes*, the experience of performing this music, and ethnographic research of living original traditional mariachi music ensembles.

Although many of the instruments used in mariachi ensembles are of European origin, when they arrived during the colonial period in Latin America, they were generally performed in a manner that produced a different sound and style, which is what distinguishes this music from

other parts of the world. So what is it exactly about a set of instruments that produces something called mariachi music? As mentioned above, as in many other musical traditions across the world, there are three general musical functions in mariachi music: the melodic, the rhythmic, and the bass. Considering the musical variations to each genre, very broadly, the *armonía* (harmony section, which comprises the guitarrón, the vihuela, the guitar, and the harp) determines both the tonality and rhythmic meter throughout the pieces, while the melody instruments in traditional arrangements generally perform the introduction, the *adornos* (ornamental figures or background melody), and the endings. While an in-depth stylistic analysis of the mariachi music repertory is necessary, this section will refer briefly to particularities of mariachi instruments, as well as the methods that have been published to help new musicians learn the particularities of regional and genre-based styles.

The guitarrón and the vihuela, acoustic instruments with deep v-arched backs, are unique to mariachi instrumentation. While the guitarrón was originally a five-stringed instrument used for the bass lines, within the last century, a sixth string was added so that it could be played in octaves, one high and one low note, simultaneously, to create a double bass feel. Although the guitarrón serves as the fundamental mainstay of rhythm and time by playing the bass line, its deep and profound pitches also enable the performer to play melodic bass patterns in pieces such as "*El Cascabel*" (The Rattlesnake) and "*Violín Huapango*" (Huapango Violin). Like other instruments, the guitarrón has a performance method that has developed over time.

Currently, there are two guitarrón method books I have come across. The first is *Método Teórico Práctico para Guitarrón* (Theoretical Practical Method for Guitarrón), by Romeo Baltazar Arteaga, which includes a fingering chart, some information on major and minor scales, "círculos armónicos" in six keys, but lacks practical application to performing mariachi music

(Baltazar Arteaga, no date). However, the lack of method books did not discourage musicians from developing their instrumental technique. Natividad de Santiago González (1940-1992), renowned guitarrón player for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán from 1959 to 1989, revolutionized the guitarrón performance technique, and complimented his knowledge by offering years of informal lessons to many guitarrón learners who succeeded with his useful tips. Feeling the need to publish a guitarrón method book, he teamed up with mariachi historian Jonathan Clark and published the most complete guitarrón method book *Método Práctico de Guitarrón* (Practical Method for the Guitarrón), in a bilingual edition (de Santiago González 1983). The method book describes the anatomy of the instrument, instructs on proper holding and playing positions, presents a series of major and minor scales, and applies the technique to basic mariachi musical pieces. Lamentably he did not live to write the second edition of this book, in which he had hoped to treat in detail the *son jalisciense*.

Although the strummed instruments also form part of the mariachi *armonía* section, each of these have different performance methods. For example, a vihuela is strummed with acrylic nails, or a fake index finger nail, whereas the guitar is strummed with a pick. This distinction itself makes the performance technique different, even if both the guitar and the vihuela are reading from the same score, and playing the same rhythm patterns. The techniques involving strummed instruments in mariachi music can vary from soft and romantic to rough and percussive. In various *sones*, *huapangos*, or *joropos*, the right hand performs an *apagon* (stopping) technique, which muffles the chord, creating a vibrant percussive sound. Like the guitarrón, the Mexican vihuela was also adapted for mariachi music. Unlike the Spanish vihuela, however, the mariachi vihuela looks and sounds nothing like its homonymous counterpart. On the surface, the vihuela is tuned similarly to a classical guitar, A D G B E, except the B and the E



are tuned an octave lower, which gives the effect that the G is an octave higher, and produces a high-pitched sound musicians have described as crisp and colorful.

A mariachi vihuela method book I have come across, also by Romeo Arteaga Baltazar, is *Método Teórico Práctico para Vihuela*, which provides a brief introduction to the instrument and includes a basic fingering chart (Baltazar Arteaga, no date). It has a section called *Ritmos* (Rhythm), but lacks practical examples or exercises. The method book encourages learners to listen to the music they want to learn in order to reproduce the sound on the vihuela (18).

Another vihuela method book is written by Guadalupe Alfaro, who, with the help of mariachi historian Jonathan Clark, had it published with Mel Bay (Alfaro 2008). It largely consists of an extensive chord chart and could be enriched with reading and rhythm exercises. Until the present, vihuela players have found and learned directly from great *maestros*, such as Víctor Cárdenas "El Pato" (b. 1934), former fifty-year vihuela player for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, currently a professor at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi.

Professor Víctor Cárdenas learned from his father and his uncle in his hometown Concepción de Buenos Aires, Jalisco, and later joined Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. During lessons I briefly had with him towards the end of 2013, I began to better understand how the knowledge and performance technique of this instrument is transmitted from Cárdenas, one of the most renowned vihuela players, to his students. After taking many notes, and recording my sessions with him, I realized that documenting with words what the hands and the heart do with the music is not an easy task. While there were technical items, such as giving the second and the third strums in a 3/4 waltz meter the same intensity (the first beat is played by the guitarrón), or softening the wrist with certain strumming exercises invented by "El Pato" himself, there are nuances to vihuela playing that cannot be written in musical terms. Some of these include, for

example, language used to help the learner understand how to play, playing along with the professor, and singing the melody along with the strummed rhythm patterns. All in all, if Víctor Cárdenas were to publish a vihuela method, which would be an enormous contribution to this area of mariachi research and education, it would ideally include audiovisual elements to enhance what cannot be written on paper.

Unlike the vihuela, there are a myriad of guitar method books, but only a few that specifically teach how to play mariachi music on this instrument. Some refer to the tradition *son* in general, and are not specifically for mariachi musicians. Historian Alejandro Martínez de la Rosa and his collaborators published ...*Con Mi Guitarra en la Mano: Tablaturas Para Guitarra de Golpe y Vihuela* (With my Guitar in Hand: Fingering Chart for the Guitarra de Golpe and the Vihuela) (2005). Rather than offering a practical method concerning how to play *son* styles with this instrument, the authors describe the history, construction, and current use of the *guitarra de golpe* in the *son de arpa grande* tradition, which has been thought of as a tradition closely related to mariachi music.<sup>43</sup> In *La Guitarra de Son: Un Método Para su Aprendizaje en Diferentes Tonos* (The *Son* Guitar: A Method for Learning in Different Keys), published in *Cuadernos de cultura popular* (2002), Francisco García Ranz and his collaborators describe the secret to being able to transpose on the guitar. Concerning guitar method books explicitly for mariachi music, the *Método de Guitarra Para Mariachi* (2002) by Michael Archuleta, presents a complete practical method that covers the basics, from tuning to step-by-step fingering and strumming techniques.

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<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the modern mariachi ensembles have stopped using the *guitarra de golpe*, although some traditional groups are rescuing its use and knowledge.

According to mariachi harpist William Faulkner, Mexico has more harp variations than any other country (Faulkner 2014).<sup>44</sup> As mentioned above, in mariachi ensembles, the harp plays both the bass as well as melodic lines. Originally, however, it was mainly used as a bass instrument. In many mariachi groups, the harp came to be replaced by a guitarrón for several reasons. First, without tuning levers, harps are strictly diatonic, which may be problematic for more recent musical pieces that frequently change keys. Second, as mariachi groups became less stationary, meaning that they also performed in more than one spot within a few hours, the size and weight of harps made it become problematic for these groups to move around in order to perform.<sup>45</sup> Third, the trumpets and increased number of violins began to drown out the sound of a single harp, whether functioning as a melodic and/or bass instrument. Although a work-in-progress, William Faulkner offers a concise and complete online mariachi harp method guide, which presents basic left and right hand exercises, which include solos with tag endings as well as the basics for learning how to play *sones*.

Violins in mariachi ensembles may use a similar performance technique to that in Western classical music, but with specific accents and bowing strokes, as well as improvisational glissandi, which are important for particular genres of the oral tradition. Ethnomusicologist Lawrence Saunders wrote *How To Play Mariachi Violin* (1992), which includes a brief history of mariachi music as well as musical transcriptions of five different pieces. Similarly, ethnomusicologist and mariachi educator Laura Sobrino, who transcribed and arranged the music

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<sup>44</sup> For more information about the Mexican harp in general, and mariachi harp tutorials in particular, see his website: <http://www.jaliscoharp.com/history.html>

<sup>45</sup> Even a guitarrón is more mobile, despite its large size, given that these instruments can be hung on the musician's back because of its lighter weight.

in *Mariachi Violin Transcriptions* (2002), documents with music notation some of the stylistic intricacies of the mariachi violin style.

The last instrumental performance style I would like to reflect upon is the trumpet, also the last to enter the now standardized mariachi instrumentation. The origin of the trumpet mariachi performance style is attributed to Miguel Martínez, the first trumpet player to form part of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. Listening to the early recordings of mariachi groups with the trumpet, one may aurally follow the trumpet as it imitates both the melody and the sung voice. As the only brass instrument in a string ensemble, Miguel Martínez played with less volume and developed a vibrato technique that has an approximate frequency equal to eighth notes. When two trumpeters perform together in one mariachi group, they must both vibrate the same in order to sound correct. In recent years, Federico Torres Martínez, trumpeter of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán of almost 50 years, with his son Federico Torres Alfaro, trumpet professor at the recently created Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, have designed a mariachi trumpet method book called *Método Fedes: técnica y el estilo de la trompeta de mariachi* (in press). The research for this method book has taken over a decade, and includes breathing exercises, warm-ups, and vibrato techniques. In addition, it encompasses flexibility, articulation, and rhythm routines, applied to mariachi pieces written by Miguel Martínez, Rigoberto Alfaro, Jesús Rodríguez de Hajar, Silvestre Vargas, Rubén Fuentes and Federico Torres himself.

The regional performance styles for each of these instruments vary both individually and within various mariachi groups. For example, the regional *sones* each have their own cadences and endings. The *sones planecos* from the *Tierra Caliente* (Hot Lands) region of Western Mexico end differently than a *son jalisciense*. This regional diversity is what modern mariachi ensembles have attempted to adopt into their repertory. Discrepancies can arise due to distance

from the regional traditions and their performance contexts, and consequently, some musicians of these regions call it a "mariachi-ization" of their music.

While the method books and guides mentioned above refer to individual mariachi instruments, there are two publications that were written to offer a methodical teaching-learning system for the mariachi ensemble as a whole, both published in the United States: *Mariachi Mastery: La Maestría del Mariachi* (2006), by Jeffrey Nevin, and *¡Simplemente Mariachi!* (2007), by Marcia Neel and Francisco Grijalva.

These method books are relatively new, and while much work is still necessary for mariachi music educators, their elaboration and publication add to the sustainability of mariachi music. The ensemble method book is complemented by individual instrument books that are used in workshop settings. This can pose a risk, however, because as individuals explain how to perform music that was formerly entirely an oral tradition, they approach the challenges of rendering oral instruction into written instruction differently. Capturing what can be captured, however, helps to ensure the future sustainability of the tradition.

#### *d. Singing styles and forms*

The fourth element that characterizes the mariachi tradition is the singing styles and forms from various regions in Mexico (Stanford 1972, Sánchez 2002 and 2011). The thematic content in these verses provides the overall essence of what is sung and what is meant. According to their content, literary works can be classified into three broad categories, also referred to as literary genres. Following Aristotle's *Poetics*, there are three general literary genres: Lyric, Narrative/Epic, and Dramatic. The lyrical genre is the natural medium in which songs have historically existed. Since the lyrical impulse naturally tends to become a song, a thin line between poetry and singing sheds light on other forms of sung texts that are not entirely in

the lyric category, such as operas and narrative songs. The narrative/epic genre recounts heroic deeds, although it has also been loosely used to describe novels and motion pictures. The dramatic genre includes melodrama, comedy, and/or tragedy.

Yet literary genres cannot solely be understood as rigid categories, since they tend to cross their own boundaries. There are songs whose lyrics are pure poetry and others that are a mixture between lyric and narrative or lyric and dramatic. A *corrido*, for example, is a poem that tells a story, and while many have referred to these as narrative songs, they can also be understood as dramatic.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, songs that are both lyric and dramatic, such as *rancheras*, vividly present the drama in the performance itself, in such a way that the performer acts and embodies characters, like the characters in dramatic music. As such, *rancheras* have inherited the theatricality of Spanish zarzuelas, which became popular in nineteenth-century popular music and during the Golden Era of Mexican Film (1936-1969). In zarzuelas, as in *rancheras*, singers embody the song and text by offering a compelling representation of a particular character, such that the audience forgets the singer is a mariachi musician, and instead imagines the interpreter *being* that romanticized victim lost in love.

Many scholars have studied the thematic content in *rancheras* (Jáquez 2003, García 2004), in *corridos* (Mendoza 1954, Custodio 1975, Herrera-Sobek 1990, A. González 2007), and in *sones* (Stanford 1972, Sánchez 2011, R. González 2009). The themes in the *sones*, for example, contain frequent expressions of *picardía* (double entendre), sensuality, and eroticism, which are often designed to refer to or identify with nature. Historically, the authors of the lyrics

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<sup>46</sup> An excellent example is the *corrido* "Contrabando y Traición" (Smuggling and Betrayal) by Ángel González, was released by the norteño group Los Tigres del Norte in 1974. This *corrido* narrates the story of Camelia *La tejana* (the Texan), a woman who kills her lover for money and drugs.

in these traditional pieces remained anonymous. In many cases, these texts were improvised on the spot, and the tradition of improvising text continues in certain musical traditions of Veracruz and Michoacán.

The literary sung styles and forms from various regions in Mexico are tied to a particular melody and rhythm; however, they are also loosely adaptable to musics in other styles and genres from other regions in Mexico (Stanford 1972, Sánchez 2002 and 2011). While much of the sung literature is tied to a particular melody and rhythm, there are some verses that are loosely adaptable to other melodies from other regions. Texts can migrate from one regional variant to another such that a verse from a *son calentano* piece may also be sung in a *son jalisciense* style. As ethnomusicologist Rosa Virginia Sánchez has shown with the *son huasteco*, a verse in one song may appear altered or unaltered in another, even within the same regional variant (Sánchez 2007).

In contemporary mariachi performances, many *huapango* texts have become disassociated from their original context in the *huasteca* region, were adopted into the music recorded in Mexican urban contexts when entering the global recording industry. Today's songwriters do not always refer to traditional poetic form to create new *sones*. Some of them have begun composing songs specifically in the poetic sung form, not always cognizant of the original poetic structure or rhyming scheme.

Ethnomusicologist Rosa Sánchez differentiates these from the traditional pieces:

Due to their fixed literature, proper to the songs, it is best to refer to these as huapango-songs, that, among other things, include a chorus part, a characteristic completely foreign to *sones huastecos*.

Por su estructura literaria fija, propia de las canciones, convendría más denominar a estos últimos canciones–huapango, los que, además, y entre otras cosas, incluyen estribillo, elemento completamente ajeno a los *sones huastecos*.

For Sánchez, "huapango-songs" may include those pieces that adopted the traditional huasteco/huapango form and rhythm patterns in order to create new pieces outside the traditional context. Some of these include "*La Malagueña*" (The Woman from Málaga), "*Rogaciano el Huapangero*" (Rogaciano the Huapango Singer), "*Cucurrucucú Paloma*," (Cucurrucucú Dove), "*El Pastor*," (The Shepherd), "*El Jinete*," (The Horseman), and "*Ruega Por Nosotros*" (Pray For Us). Many of these pieces were specifically composed to form part of the Mexican films that gave mariachi music heightened popularity, and were made popular by the noted falsetto singer Miguel Aceves Mejía (1915-2006).

Most popular music consumers may pick up on this distinction, but some musicians who continue to follow traditional poetic and sung forms may not regard these new creations as untraditional. For songwriters like Rubén Fuentes, who did not limit new *huapangos* to the existing musical form in the *son huasteco*, their pieces entered the popular music scene with the new musical form, which includes a chorus, allows for an apogee in the music and the text, and introduces a *bel canto* singing style.

The poetic form, on the other hand, is the organization of text (syllables, number of lines, rhyme scheme). In traditional *sones*, the verses have a literary form and a sung form that do not always coincide with each other (further described in Chapter Seven). As in the case of *huapangos*, the genres *rancheras*, *boleros*, *corridos* and other similar types of non-improvised songs, also have a straightforward poetic form. In addition to including a chorus part, these forms generally consist of four-line verses with an (ABAB) rhyme scheme, and have a trochaic tetrameter meter even though the rhyme scheme may alter between (ABAB), (AABA), and (ABCB).

Another important factor in understanding the literary sung styles is the image of the *charro cantor* (singing cowboy), which in Mexico is represented by a man dressed in a *traje de*



*charro* who sings rural songs accompanied by a mariachi ensemble. The first *charro cantor* of Mexican music was Tito Guizar (1908-2000), who was featured in the famous Mexican film *Alla en el Rancho Grande* (1936), wearing a *charro* outfit and singing *ranchera* songs with his guitar. It was Jorge Negrete, however, who epitomized the image and voice of the *charro cantor*, in the film, *¡Ay, Jalisco no te rajes!* (1941), accompanied by a full mariachi ensemble. Yet the tradition of the singing cowboy does not originate in Mexico; it begins in the United States with singing cowboys such as Ken Maynard (1895-1973), Tex Ritter (1905-1974), Gene Autry (1907-1998), and Roy Rogers (1911-1998), who were featured as singing actors in the earliest Hollywood Western films, beginning in the 1930s.

While the vocal qualities of the American singing cowboys emphasized a country sound and vocal technique, many of the performances in the films of the Golden Era featured a *bel canto* singing technique. With a great diversity in the musical genres performed, it is difficult to say that only one singing style or technique exists. In fact, *rancheras*, *huapangos*, *sones*, and *boleros*, each have their own singing style. For example, even with Pedro Infante's *bel canto* technique, his style of singing "Ella" (*ranchera*) differs from his famous "Amorcito Corazon" (a bolero).

#### *e. Dance styles*

The fifth element refers to the dance styles that are vital to the musical practice (Stanford 1972, Sheehy 2006 and 2007). In European history, many dance genres originated together with musical genres, such as the pavane, the minuet, and the waltz. In Mexico, in addition to the diverse indigenous ceremonial and social dances that survived Spanish colonialism, there are also mestizo regional dance styles, such as those from Veracruz, Guerrero, Michoacán, Nayarit, Chihuahua, and Jalisco. The traditional mariachi expression conserves the dance art form in

which *sones* are danced over a *tarima*, a wooden platform. These dancing patterns are considered to be part of the music's rhythm, as feet percussively stomp, or "play," the rhythms that distinguish and reinforce the music's meter and character. A *fandango* (described in detail below) combined music, singing, and dance. Figure 2.1 is a fandango painting from the Elisa Osorio Bolio de Saldivar Library, which illustrates a couple dancing to music played by a harp, other stringed instruments, and singers (Jáuregui 2007a:37). The dance is characterized by lively footwork in couples that varies by region. Since the music was meant to be danced to, not just listened to, there were occasions in which the dance itself was also referred to as "mariachi."



Figure 2.1: Mariachi Fandango painting from the Elisa Osorio Bolio de Saldivar Library.

In the popular mariachi tradition, the dancing styles also encompass the popular music performed and the *tarima* is no longer used. Referring to dance in the popular mariachi expression is impossible without giving credit to dancer and choreographer Amalia Hernández (1917-2000). With Carlos Chavez's (1899-1978) *Sinfonía India* (1935), which features musical elements of the Yaqui Indians, Blas Galindo's (1919-1993) *Sones de Mariachi* (1940), which

takes traditional *sones* to the orchestral concert stage, and José Pablo Moncayo's (1912-1958) *Huapango* (1941), which features three *son jarocho* pieces, the national music scene was only missing the dance element. In 1952, Amalia Hernández took interest in staging samples of indigenous, mestizo, and modern dance forms and in 1953 the *Ballet Folklórico de Amalia Hernández* was born. Her small dance company took interest in expressing the different popular dances from diverse regions in Mexico and, with government subsidies, came to represent Mexican folkloric dance. While the dance company gained national and international recognition, Amalia Hernández was aware that taking popular expressions to a theater stage involved sacrificing part of their authenticity upon converting it into an entertainment show. Her mission was thus to conserve the spirit of the tradition, despite its transformations.<sup>47</sup>

Mariachi groups have since accompanied organized dance troupes like those formed by Amalia Hernández in her Ballet Folklórico de México, in a context that attempts to emulate on a stage the regional music and dance that is performed on the rural ranches. Amalia Hernández's choreography has received similar responses as the modern mariachi tradition, such as the decontextualization and standardization of regional expressions (Hellier-Tinoco 2011, Shay 2002). Despite some critiques, the transformations of these regional expressions to the entertainment stage has shed light on the nationalization of Ballet Folklórico and its value as a kind of invented tradition.

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<sup>47</sup> See article *Amalia Hernández: Audacias y Fuerza Creativa* <http://www.uam.mx/difusion/revista/feb2002/tortajada.html> (accessed June 28, 2014).

*f. Performative space*

Understanding the instruments, musical genres, methods and styles of performance, popular song styles, and the dance elements has opened up a panoramic view of the mariachi tradition. But where do all of these elements converge? Prior to the invention of recorded sound, with Thomas Edison's phonograph in 1877, the only way to listen to music was to have it performed live. Since there was no possibility of reproducing popular music (art music was able to survive through meticulous and prescriptive musical scores), the natural tendency was to sing lyrics and play melodies and rhythms as the musicians saw fit for that occasion.

As briefly mentioned in the Chapter One, one of the original contexts for what became known as the mariachi tradition was the *fandango*. The *fandango* is a festive space where music, singing, and dance came together in a social community gathering. Early colonial chronicles refer to *fandango* events in Mexico during the colonial period (1521-1810). The earliest documents by ethnographers, colonial chroniclers, of the Americas date back to 1728. Each interpreted this festive space either positively or negatively, depending on whom the chronicles were written for and for what purpose.

Within the *fandango* context, Álvaro Ochoa Serrano refers to the *mitote*, which means "baile" (dance) in the indigenous language náhuatl (1994:53). Ochoa Serrano comments on colonial chronicles of the sixteenth century that describe a *mitote* as follows:

. . . we find in Tacámbaro, when its habitants received the Augustinians in 1538 "with much joy and with demonstrations of their dances and uses of the *mitotes*;" in Huainamota-Jala, on the other hand, the *chichimecas* burned the Franciscan convent in 1585 "and the silver chalices in it they made earrings, feathered headdresses, and medals for their *mitotes* and dances."

. . . encontramos en Tacámbaro, cuando sus habitantes recibieron a los agustinos en 1538 "con grande alegría y con demostraciones de bailes y mitotes a su usanza;" en Huainamota-Jala, en cambio, los chichimecas quemaron el convento franciscano en 1585

"y de los cálices de plata que en él había hicieron zarcillos, penachos y medallas para sus mitotes y bailes".

(Ochoa Serrano 1992:72)

The earliest reference to the word "mariachi" is a 1852 letter written by Father Cosme Santa Anna, in Santiago Ixcuintla, Nayarit, which in fact refers to a festive space, and not an ensemble. Referring to "mariachis" in front of his local parish in Rosamorada, Father Santa Anna writes:

On the completion of the church services at my Parish, on Holy Saturday I find that on the plaza, just in front of the same church, there were two fandangos, a game table, and men on foot and on horseback screaming like mad due to the liquor they drink and that is already a very unfortunate disorder: I understand that this occurs every year during the solemn days of the Lord's resurrection and we know how many crimes and excesses occur in these entertainments, which in this area are generally called *mariachis*.

Al acabarse los oficios en mi Parroquia en el sábado de gloria encuentro que el la plaza y frente de la misma iglesia se hallan dos fandangos, una mesa de juego y hombres que a pie y a caballo andan gritando como furiosos en consecuencia del vino que beben y que aquello es ya un desorden muy lamentable: sé que esto es en todos los años en los días solemnísimos de la resurrección del Señor y solo que ya sabemos cuantos crímenes y escesos se cometen en estas diversiones, que generalmente se llaman por estos puntos mariachis.

(J. Meyer 1981:117 and Jáuregui 2009:26)

In addition to referring to this festive space as a *fandango*, there are also documents in the early nineteenth century that describe it using the words "mariache." Of the earliest to make this explicit reference is a statistical essay published by Julio Pérez González, in which he refers to illnesses caused by prolonged social festivities. According to Pérez Gonzales, these customs are unfortunately common in the small towns and villages along the San Blas, Santiago Ixcuintla y Acaponeta coasts, in which the people:

. . . form public dances, which they call "Mariaches," with rustic music, in the open air; and they surrender themselves to this entertainment genre with frenzied enthusiasm, where there is an abuse of alcohol, and generally, for two or three consecutive days.

. . . forman bailes públicos, que llaman "Mariaches", con una música rústica, al aire libre; y se entregan con frenético entusiasmo á ese género de entretenimiento, en el que se abusa de las bebidas alcohólicas, y regularmente, el baile se prolonga por dos ó tres días consecutivos.

(Pérez González 1893:3-4, cited in Jáuregui 2012a:43)

Despite the negative connotations and stereotypes that associate this tradition with alcohol, this example illustrates how the music and the dance are inseparable.

In a similar example, writer Enrique Barrios de los Ríos (1868 – c.1925) experienced first-hand the customs and linguistic habits of Mexican indigenous and rural life through his travels in Nayarit at the turn of the nineteenth century. In his published journal, he referred to *mariache* both as a foot drum and a festive space, connecting the tradition with this local culture (Barrios de los Ríos 1908). Like the *fandango*, *mariache* is the musical environment in which it all comes together.

In addition to the outdoor social gatherings that are prolonged for two or three days, there are other types of performative spaces, such as in religious ceremonies, entertainment stages, and social rites of passage. The advent of live radio programs divided the musicians from the community. While mariachi musicians were no longer enjoying the same festive event with the community in the same physical space, radio broadcasts did extend the audience to reach more communities, and farther away. Although the close contact musicians had with their communal audiences began to decrease, they created new relationships with other communities.

Many musicians and scholars today would affirm that the *fandango/ mariache* tradition, along with its community values and improvisatory features, are becoming extinct. The prevailing sentiment amongst these scholars is that the media homogenizes and distorts regional musical peculiarities, which ultimately suggests a loss in authenticity. However, with the arrival of media communication (such as radio, television, commercial recordings, etc.), this festive

space has expanded into traveling caravans, theaters, restaurants and clubs, warm-weather outdoor plazas, and increasingly universities and schools with considerable student populations. In this wider performance context, mariachi music transformed into an expression performed in order to be *listened* to rather than be *danced* to. Nonetheless, mariachi ensembles continue to perform live music in diverse festive contexts, even if those spaces are no longer called *fandangos*, *mitotes*, or *mariaches*. These contexts today include *quinceañeras* (rite of passage ceremony of a 15-year old young woman), birthday celebrations, weddings, concerts, etc. — where music, dance, and song come together in a local, albeit modernized, community context. With the inclusion of mariachi music in educational spaces, the performance ambit has extended into classrooms and educational-related performance opportunities.

*g. Performance clothing*

Traditional music ensembles did not usually have a uniform with which they performed; rather, they gathered with community musicians in their quotidian work clothes. These performers generally worked the land and took on music as a hobby. Their work clothes were made of light colored cotton fabrics, which came to be called a *traje de manta*. The *traje de charro*, on the other hand, although ubiquitously Mexican, inherited its name and style from the Spanish horsemen who came to settle in Mexico. *Charro* comes from the Basque word *Txarro*, which translates to *jinete* (horseman). In eighteenth-century Salamanca, Spain, the word carried derogatory meanings when referring to an unpolished and uneducated person (Medina Miranda 2009:98).

Many traditions arrived in Mexico with Spanish colonization, among them, styles of dress. In the seventeenth century, haciendas and ranches emerged, and by the nineteenth century, many of their ranchers and horsemen were called *charros*. Their outfit consisted of a decorated

jacket, fitted pants with silver lining, and a large brimmed hat. Many of these *charros* had the ability to ride horses, work the rope, and participate in *charrerías* and *jaripeos* (rodeos). Maximilian I of Mexico (figure 2.2) understood this symbol upon his arrival in 1864, when he was crowned emperor of Mexico, with the backing of both Mexican conservatives and Napoleon III. The aim of appearing more Mexican drove him to design a royal version of the *traje de charro*, which ennobled the attire. In his Private Secretary's journal, *Maximiliano Íntimo: El Emperador Maximiliano y Su Corte*, published in 1905, José Luis Blasio writes, "durante todos los viajes todos vestían de traje de charros mexicanos, llevando pantalón negro, con botonadura de plata, chaquetas y sombrero jarano" (during all of their travels they all wore a Mexican *traje de charro*, with black pants, silver buttons, a jacket, and a *jarano* sombrero) (Blasio 1905:2).



Figure 2.2: Portraits of Maximilian I of Mexico (1864) by German painter Franz Xaver Winterhalter.



The Mexican elite, however, was not very impressed with Maximilian's attempt.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Mexican *traje de charro* is extremely jaunty and is truly national when on horseback, that a monarch presented himself wearing it did not correspond to a serious reception ceremony. All things have their appropriate place and time; and those were certainly not the moments when the cream of society received him with all the luxury attire that can be epitomized in a ballroom, and with which he too should have chosen to present himself with. That *traje* was special for the people of the countryside but not of the cities. The people lived in the former wore it only when on horseback; but never before had a Mexican authority dressed that way when visiting towns or in official acts.

Aunque el traje del ranchero mejicano es sumamente airoso y es verdaderamente el nacional cuando se monta á caballo, no correspondía á la seriedad de un acto de recepción, presentarse con él un monarca. Todas las cosas tienen su lugar y tiempo oportunos; y no eran ciertamente aquellos instantes en que lo más granado de la sociedad le esperaba vestida con todo lujo que puede desplegarse en un salón, los que debiera haber elegido para presentarse con él. Aquel traje era el especial de la gente del campo y no de las ciudades. Las personas que habitan en ésta se lo ponen únicamente para montar á caballo; pero jamás ninguna autoridad mejicana se vestía así al visitar alguna población ni en ningún acto oficial.

(Niceto Zamacoise [1877-1882] cited in Medina Miranda 2009:211-212)

Maximilian's Monarchy in Mexico ended July 19, 1867 when former President Benito Juárez had him executed on the *Cerro de las Campanas*, Querétaro. Emperor Maximilian of Mexico chose to wear this attire for his execution?, taking it out of the horsemanship context in and making it the referent for one of the first visual symbols of Mexico. This ultimately gave rise to the idea that one could dress as a *charro* without having the ability to be one.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, *orquestas típicas* (typical salon bands) became popular in urban environments. They catered to popular, middle and upper classes, performing waltzes, schottisches, and mazurkas, but also *sones* and *jarabes* (Pérez Montfort

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<sup>48</sup> The *traje de charro* had a specific purpose in the countryside society, hence the prejudice against the attire, and against mariachi in general.

2013:83). As these nationalist orchestras dressed in a *traje de charro*, this was already considered a folkloric costume by the end of the nineteenth century (Madrid 2011:104). Figure 2.3 shows the Orquesta Típica Esperanza Otero, photographed in Chicago 1931, wearing the typical *traje de charro* in order to visually represent Mexico (Jáuregui 2007:90).



Figure 2.3: Orquesta Típica Esperanza Otero in Chicago (1931).

By 1907, a mariachi ensemble from Jalisco was described by two newspapers, *El Mundo Ilustrado* and *El Imparcial*, performing with a "traje nacional" (national suit), during a garden party at Chapultepec woods (Jáuregui 2007a:54-55). . Following this, a growing number of mariachi ensembles began to wear the *traje de charro* for civic events. After the Mexican Revolution, in 1910, there was a need for national symbols that differentiated Mexico from its colonizing country, the *charro* image quickly extended from horsemanship to patriotism and

nationalism.<sup>49</sup> However, due to its cost, these suits would be out of reach for many groups, and many continued to wear quotidian clothing, or the *traje de manta*.

When Mexican films featured the *charro cantor* (singing cowboy), beginning in 1936, this character also wore the *traje de charro*. First Tito Guizar (1908-2000), followed by Jorge Negrete (1911-1953), Pedro Infante (1917-1957), Javier Solís (1931-1966), José Alfredo Jiménez (1926-1973) and Miguel Aceves Mejía (1915-2006). All of these men dressed in a *traje de charro* and sang their pieces accompanied by a mariachi ensemble. These groups, however, did not always wear a *traje de charro* when featured on these films.<sup>50</sup> It was only with the films with Jorge Negrete, around 1950s, that mariachi ensembles also began to wear a *traje de charro*.

Symbolically speaking, the *charro cantor* character was generally a *hacienda* owner who lowered his status by wearing a *traje de charro* to sing with the mariachi group, where the mariachi musicians, who represented the lower classes, went up in social status by wearing the same clothing. This effective situation created and promoted a new image of the nation in which an emerging popular culture and an elite culture converged to create the *charro* man: a masculine symbol that came to represent with mariachi music the macho Mexican man.

The women featured in these same films, however, did not wear the *traje de charro* so visually associated with men. Rather, women like Lucha Reyes (1906-1944), Irma Vila (1916-1993), Matilde Sánchez *La Torcacita* (1927-1988), Sofia Álvarez (1913-1985), Guadalupe *La Chinaca* (1914-1976), Manolita Arreola (1920-2004), Lola Beltrán (1932-1996), and Lucha

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<sup>49</sup> El traje de faena, el traje de media gala, el traje de gala y el traje de gran gala con su modalidad de traje de etiqueta. Los elementos de los trajes charros a su vez tienen lo siguiente: La camisa, el sombrero, el chaquetín, la corbata de moño, la faja o el ceñidor, el cinto, el pantalón, los botines, las chaparreras y espuelas. Estas dos últimas son indispensables cuando se trabaja con ganado o cuando se anda charreando.

<sup>50</sup> An example of a Mexican film featuring a mariachi ensemble that does not wear a *traje de charro* can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rd-hf2XjqXI>.

Villa (b. 1936) wore outfits tailored for women; some were feminized versions of the *traje de charro* while others were regional Mexican dresses. A review of the diverse ways in which women have presented themselves visually is presented in Chapter Seven.

In recent years, a "traditional mariachi" revival movement has arisen, and many of these groups do not wear the *traje de charro* in an effort to return to mariachi performance practice to those prior to the changes to the tradition caused by the intervention of the mass media. A popular mariachi ensemble, however, is unthinkable without a *traje de charro*. The *charro* tradition has transformed itself, having found a new vitality by adapting itself to new and changing ways of living Mexican culture.

#### *h. The word "mariachi"*

In the search for the history and meaning of the word "mariachi," there have been various attempts to assign to it a cultural signification based on, for instance, what the etymology of the word might reveal. The philological tradition, which gave rise to etymological research, has allowed researchers to study the history and origin of words in order to understand how their form and meaning can aid in the understanding of tradition and innovation throughout history. Learning how certain words were used through time, in the case of languages that have a long written history, might provide further knowledge concerning the historical contexts in which that word was used.

In his published journal, Enrique Barrios describes a "mariache" as a wooden foot drum the community used to dance upon, to music made by a harp, a violin with a *vihuela*, or a violin with percussion instruments. He added that these festive dances were surrounded by a multitude of *mariaches* pleasantly entertained and engrossed in a joyful and noisy dance (Barrios de los Ríos 1908:43-44). He referred to *mariache* both as a platform and a festive space [and people,

the dancers, yes?], never using the word "mariachi" as we know it today, and never ascribing any kind of meaning to the word itself. Connecting "mariachi" with this local culture thus legitimates it as an indigenous, (i.e. non-European) tradition.

The word appears in historical documents as the name of several towns, as the name of a fandango, as the *tarima* (a stratus or a moving floor used to dance upon), as the name of a group of musicians, and as the music played by these musicians. The word has its own history, and the ensemble has its own, and at some point in the nineteenth century these two merge. The ensemble was not always called "mariachi" and the word did not always refer to the ensemble. When the first musicians traveled to Mexico City for professional opportunities and appeared on national radio and international films, these groups were already called "mariachi."

The first published attempts to search for the origin of the word "mariachi" can be traced to 1925, when Mexican journalists and mariachi connoisseurs first became concerned with understanding the cultural elements in the mariachi tradition upon its arrival in Mexico's capital. Available written documentation has revealed three general arguments, or theories, that link the word "mariachi" variously to French, indigenous, or mestizo/regional origins or influence. However, more than claiming an etymology of "mariachi," these speculators have sought extra-musical cultural significations and ideological justification from this word's history.

The association between the word "mariachi" and the French word "*mariage*" was, at first, an important political and ideological tool. Perhaps the earliest documented reference to mariachi as a modification of the French word for *mariage* (marriage) was in 1875, when General Ignacio Martínez's visited throughout Guadalajara, and documented his experience in his book *Recuerdos de Un Viaje en América, Europa y Africa*:

. . . The crowd as large, and when the time came, instead of an orchestra it was what they called a *mariage*, a kind of street band, composed of three to four itinerant musicians with out of tune instruments.

. . . La concurrencia fue numerosa, y llegada la hora, resultó en vez de orquesta lo que ellos llaman un *mariage*, una especie de murga, compuesta de tres o cuatro músicos de la legua con instrumentos desafinados.

(Martínez, cited in Jáuregui 2007a:40)

The phonetic resemblance to the French word *mariage* impacted authors that followed. In Mexico City's *Universal* newspaper (1925), journalist Manuel G. Linares cites a radio concert prologue spoken by Jacobo Dalevuelta:

Mariachi —concluded our colleague— originates, may it be known, from the time of the French Intervention and its original term means, in French, marriage, that through a frequent deformation finally became "mariachi."

El mariachi —terminó el compañero— arranca, que se sepa, de la época de la Intervención francesa y su voz original significa, en francés, matrimonio, que por una frecuente corrupción vino a parar en "mariachi".

(Linares, cited in Jáuregui 1999a:23)

Journalist Jacobo Dalevuela also published his article "*El mariachi de Cocula*" (The Mariachi from Cocula) on August 9, 1925 in *El Universal Ilustrado*, which was later republished in his anthology of articles *Estampas de México* in 1930. In it, he shared a conversation with Salvador Flores, a member of a mariachi ensemble from the small town of Cocula, in the state of Jalisco.<sup>51</sup>

Interested in knowing what "mariachi" signified, he asked:

—Why are you called mariachis? — I asked Flores.

And turning his eyes, almost shut by the vihuela's [strumming] action, smiling because of the disconcertedness of the question, he responded:

—Well we don't know, but we are mariachi.

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<sup>51</sup> Cocula is a town in the outskirts of Guadalajara, Jalisco. It is the contested birthplace of mariachi music because the origins of mariachi ensembles are found in various parts of Western Mexico, not only in Cocula. The town proudly refers to itself as *la cuna del mariachi* (the cradle of "mariachi").

—¿Por qué se llaman ustedes mariachis? — Le pregunté a Flores.  
Y moviendo sus ojos, casi apagados por la acción de la viruela [sic], sonriendo por lo desconcertante de la pregunta, me respondió:  
—Pues no lo sabemos, pero somos mariachi.

(Dalevuelta, cited in Jáuregui 1999a:28)

Later in this article, an unknown person, in what Dalevuelta perceived as an *alarde de erudición vernácula* (a display of vernacular erudition), responded:

The name "mariachi" given to these singers originated from the French word *mariage*. These artists are known to play, since remote times, in weddings and during the Intervention, the French and Belgian soldiers called them *mariages*. Later the word was disfigured, into its current form.

El nombre de "mariachi" a estos cantadores tiene por origen el vocablo francés *mariage*. Estos artistas acostumbran tocar desde tiempos muy remotos en todos los casamientos y cuando la Intervención, los soldados franceses y los belgas les llamaron *mariages*. Después se corrompió el vocablo, hasta nuestros días.

(Dalevuelta, cited in Jáuregui 1999a:29)

Twenty years later, in 1945, writer and *charro*<sup>52</sup> Leovigildo Islas Escárcega published *Vocabulario Campesino Nacional: Objeciones y Ampliaciones al Vocabulario Agrícola Nacional Publicado por el Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Lingüísticas en 1935* (National Peasant Vocabulary: Objections and Expansions to the National Agricultural Vocabulary Published by the Mexican Institute of Linguistic Research). In this publication, Islas Escárcega noted the phonetic relationship between mariachi and *mariage*, perpetuating the idea that "mariachi" could also have French origins (Islas Escárcega 1945). This idea was later revisited by Mexico's renowned literary critic Alfonso Reyes, in his 1959 publication of *Nuestra Lengua* (Our Language), which circulated widely that same year as a pamphlet to all students in the

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<sup>52</sup> A *charro* refers to a traditional Mexican horseman.

public education system (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*). In it, Reyes explored words from other languages used in Mexican Spanish, suggesting that the origin of "mariachi" was influenced by the French invasion of Mexico,<sup>53</sup> and that it was plausible for the word to have been derived from the French word *mariage* since many mariachis performed at weddings (Reyes 1941).

Many mariachi followers have since adopted this French association as culturally legitimating, perhaps because of the perception that French influence on art would elevate its cultural standing. This would legitimate mariachi music culturally because it would associate mariachi music with the elite and more refined French culture, as opposed the Spanish culture, which Mexico was becoming independent from. Entrepreneur and Mexican popular music connoisseur Raúl Martínez Villareal referred to the meaning of the word "mariachi" in his book *Memoria Musical de México* (Musical Memory of Mexico), citing Alberto Ángel's *México de mis Amores*:

In the book *México de mis Amores*, published by Alberto Ángel ("The Raven") and edited by Selector, on page 46 he says: "Many years ago in the era of Porfirio Díaz, political subservience was more or less the same as now, except that in that era what the world considered to be the most elegant was the French. Idiomatic foreign expressions were not in English, as they are today, but in that sensual and delightful language spoken by María Antonieta."

En el libro *México de mis Amores*, que publicó Alberto Ángel ("El Cuervo") y editado por Selector, en la página 46 nos dice: "Hace muchos años en la época porfirista, el servilismo político era más o menos el mismo que en la actualidad, sólo que en aquella época lo que el mundo consideraba como lo más elegante era lo francés. Los extranjerismos idiomáticos no eran del inglés, como ahora ocurre, sino de aquel sensual y delicioso idioma de María Antonieta".

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<sup>53</sup> He does not specify whether he refers to the first invasion (1838-1839) or the second invasion (1862-1967). Even if it would seem obvious he refers to the second, the point is that there were many French living in Mexico throughout most of the nineteenth century, so the fact there is document that states it is found before the Intervention does not really "prove" that "mariachi" does not come from the French word for *mariage*.



Note that in Dalevuelta's example, mentioned above, not even the mariachi musicians he interviewed knew why they themselves were called mariachis, or where the word originated. Despite the lack of philological research to support this claim, to this day many people all over the world believe that the word "mariachi" comes from the French word *mariage*. That this phonetic, and semantic, association was invented is not the issue here. The reality is that this was the idea broadcasted on public radio show featuring mariachi music.

In certain respects this explanation is plausible: we know that the French did occupy Mexico, that mariachi musicians did perform at weddings, and that much of the repertoire since the nineteenth century did include European salon music, such as waltzes, schottisches, minuets, and polkas. But mariachi ensembles are not the only kinds of groups that have performed at weddings, so why give *that* name only to these ensembles? Scholars have consequently invested time in rejecting this theory. Historian Jean Meyer's discovery of an 1852 letter written by Father Cosme Santa Anna, in Rosamorada, Nayarit, is the first known document with the word "mariachi," referring to "estas diversiones, que generalmente se llaman por estos puntos mariachis" (these entertainments, which in this area are generally called "mariachis") (J. Meyer 1981:117 and Jáuregui 2009:26). For mariachi scholars, that this document predated the French Occupation in Mexico, which satisfied their ideological cravings that affirmed "mariachi" could not be French since the world existed in Mexico before the French invasion. This has vindicated some while offending others.

In his article "*Una bella manifestación de arte popular mexicano*" (A Beautiful Manifestation of Mexican Popular Art) (1925), journalist Manuel G. Linares, quoting Dalevuelta, referred to mariachi, in general, as an indigenous art with a French name.<sup>54</sup>

Let us go to the Indian . . . Within these Mexican manifestations of indigenous art, noteworthy is the work by the mariachi from Cocula, Jalisco, with whom I have spent unforgettable hours listening to their songs and their *sones* and their *corridos* . . . The mariachi begins, let it be known, during the time of the French Intervention and its name signifies, in French, matrimony, that by a frequent modification [of language] it came to be "mariachi." The cultivated writer and historian Salado Álvarez promised a study regarding this subject that without doubt will be of true interest.

Hay que ir al indio . . . Entre estas manifestaciones mexicanas de arte indígena es notable la labor realizada por los Mariachis de Cocula, jaliscienses, entre los que he pasado horas inolvidables oyéndoles sus cantos y sus sones y sus corridos . . . El mariachi arranca, que se sepa, de la época de la Intervención francesa y su voz original significa, en francés, matrimonio, que por una frecuente corrupción vino a parar en "mariachi". El culto escritor e historiador, el señor Salado Álvarez, prometió para en breve un estudio sobre este asunto, que sin duda tendrá verdadero interés.

(Linares, cited in Jáuregui 1999a:23)

While Dalevuelta continued to perpetuate the story of mariachi's French origins, he does not leave out the importance of Mexico's indigenous culture. He idealizes the "noble savage."

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Mexicans began seeking a national identity in the indigenous traditions and local/regional cultures that survived colonization. In 1935, José Ignacio Dávila Garibi became known for declaring that the word "mariachi" originated from the Coca indigenous language. This association would contest the French association in order to link the mariachi tradition to its native Mexican ancestry. Interestingly however, before the Spanish arrival in this region, the Coca indigenous group occupied these lands and by the twentieth

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<sup>54</sup> See Manuel G. Linares, "Una bella manifestación de arte popular mexicano" (*El Universal*, issue 37, 1925).

century, their language had not been in use for centuries. Despite this, Dávila Garibi claimed that the word "mariachi" originated from the Coca indigenous language (Dávila Garibi 1935:291).

As late as 1982, historian and engineer Hermes Rafael [Méndez Rodríguez] conducted a thorough review of the Coca explanation in his book *Origen e Historia del Mariachi* (Origin and History of Mariachi), analyzing each syllable in order to find an etymological tie to this language (figure 2.4).

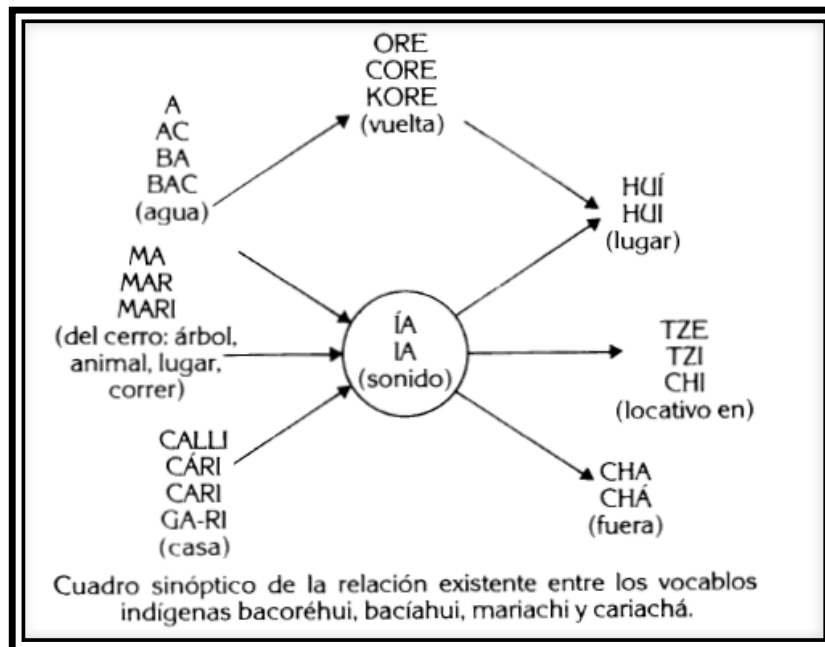


Figure 2.4: Diagram suggesting the phonetic association between the word "mariachi" in Coca language.

Although Hermes Rafael does not explicitly say it, we could assume that according to this diagram in figure 2.4, "mariachi" is the combination of elements of Coca words that translate to "sound there in the sierra trees."

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Stanford provides yet another theory. He has suggested that "mariachi" came from a combination of the name *María* (the Virgin Mary) plus the diminutive "che" from the Nahuatl language. Stanford added that "so widespread is this singing of Mary that

even the ensemble name *Mariachi* is based on the fact" (Stanford 1972:73). It is curious to think that male-dominated mariachi music would be named after the most widely revered woman in Catholicism, particularly since it is a tradition historically associated with secular activities and has been an object of denigration as a musical ensemble. In yet another theory, in 1973, Pedro Castillo Romero suggested that the word "mariachi" came from the indigenous language spoken by the Pinutl, the sister language of the Cora, and that it referred to a *tarima*, a platform or a moving floor used to dance upon. According to Castillo Romero, the word was based on the name of a tree in northwestern Mexico, of the acacia family, from which these wooden platforms were constructed.

Such was the desire for the word "mariachi" to be significant to those who live and research it that legitimating an etymological study became a commonplace task. Although these scholars have sought to find in "mariachi" etymological roots in indigenous customs or the name of the Virgin, the legend of the French origins still survives. But the task does not end with either French association or indigenous idolizing; we also find researchers who deem it important to draw upon mestizo legitimation, locating mariachi within local patriotisms.

For over a century, Mexicans have been involved in trying to understand what "mariachi" is. In 1981, renowned Mexican historian (of French origin) Jean Meyer assumed the serious task of reviewing many of these aforementioned documents. He summed up this battle for local patriotisms:

From don Nacho Dávila Garibi (1888-1981) to Pedro Castillo (1973, *Santiago Ixquintla, the cradle of mariachi*), who do not lack advocates for an American origin of the word. Local patriotisms have turned this into a passionate discussion: is it [mariachi] from Tecalitlán, Cocula, or Santiago Ixcuintla? The word is fought over, though not the musical ensemble so successfully promoted by Jalisco.

De don Nacho Dávila Garibi (1888-1981) hasta Pedro Castillo (1973, *Santiago Ixquintla, cuna del mariachi*), no faltan los defensores de carácter americano de la palabra. Los

patriotismos locales han vuelto apasionada la discusión ¿será de Tecalitlán, de Cocula o de Santiago Ixcuintla el mariachi? Se pelea el vocablo, desde luego, no el conjunto musical promovido tan exitosamente por Jalisco.

(J. Meyer 1981:117-121)

Meyer did not defend one theory over the other, but did leave room for us to doubt all of them.

As this section concludes, it is also important to highlight distinctions between authors who have based their research on the meaning of the word, those that base their findings on historical documents, and those who base their findings on an ideological basis, with little or no historical documents to support their etymological theory. To contextualize the historical and ideological theories, I propose to ask some questions. What kind of impact did the French Occupation really have on autochthonous music in Mexico? Were these ensembles really named after only one of the social events they performed for? Was "mariachi" named after a wooden dance platform? Did it originate from the town of Cocula in Jalisco? Arguments attempting to prove one theory over the other are plentiful, but the important thing to consider is that these are used primarily for claiming cultural or regional legitimation, issues unrelated to the music itself. The reality is, however, that "mariachi" is from all of these places and from all of these people. While etymological research has led us to understand how the form and meaning of words developed, the etymology of a word is not necessarily equivalent to the history of its tradition. This leads us to the question of how cultural authority affects the musical knowledge sedimented in the individual and collective memories of mariachi tradition-bearers. In the case of mariachi music, cultural authorities include some leading musicians, scholars, and more recently, policy-makers.

## 2. The *aporia* of mariachi history

As we reflect upon the aforementioned eight elements that define the mariachi tradition and its evolution, we are faced with the challenge of understanding and accepting mariachi history as a linear process through time. These descriptions have permitted us to perceive a sense of plurality in the origins, or micro-histories, that refer to the entire mariachi tradition, shedding light on the reality that both the traditional and the modern mariachi expressions share the same history, despite the rupture in the tradition since the beginning of the twentieth century. That each element evolves and continues throughout history plotting its own succession of events ultimately delivers a sense of linear continuity within that element. However, when the eight elements are combined in order to illustrate an overall linear succession of events of the entire tradition, we see that there are ruptures and discontinuities in what would come to be a history of mariachi music.

As explained in Chapter One, the ensembles of this tradition were not always called "mariachi" and the word did not always refer to the ensemble. Furthermore, different mariachi ensembles from different regions had very different instrumentation, and not all of them were called "mariachi." The eight elements to which I am referring each have their own histories, and have a part in the emergence of the twentieth-century standardization of the urban mariachi tradition. As a result of this rupture and discontinuity, we are faced with what I refer to as the *aporia* of mariachi history: what is at once understood as a historical succession and continuity of events is opposed with the multiple histories in the eight elements of the mariachi tradition that reveal a non-linear and discontinuous past.<sup>55</sup> The historical succession and continuity of events to

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<sup>55</sup> *Aporia* is from the Greek *apeiron* (boundless, infinite), and is a term used for a puzzling question or theme that generates other questions, but has no clear and simple resolution.

which I refer are a result of the narrative that produces this continuity. In a sense, writing the narratives presented in the following chapters, which draw upon women's memories, voices, and testimonies, contest "official" versions of events (Beiner 2007). These aim to draw together multiple and sometimes fragmentary threads or strands that contribute to the multiple histories that figure in the rise and development of mariachi music. These important contributions have been consciously or unconsciously left out due to hegemonic male recountings of mariachi history. As such, I aim to configure the history of the mariachi tradition by drawing a particular configuration from the multiple contributing factors.

Anthropologist Jesús Jáuregui has proposed in various academic contexts reasons why the mariachi tradition cannot have a linear history. According to Jáuregui:

Trying to specify the date and place of origins of a popular institution is a false problem. The oldest document found is not proof that the place and date in which it is mentioned constitutes the 'then and there' of the mariachi's origins. The written references allude to a situation after the creation and dissemination of the 'social fact.'

Intentar precisar la fecha y el lugar del nacimiento de una institución popular es un falso problema. El documento más antiguo en turno no es prueba de que el lugar y la fecha que en él se mencionan constituyan el 'entonces y el allí' del origen del mariachi. Las referencias escritas aluden a una situación posterior a la conformación y difusión del 'hecho social'.

(Jáuregui 2012a:223)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, documents referring to the mariachi tradition prior to the 1920s are fragmentary and dispersed, and consist in traveler's testimonies, litigation and parish records, festivity chronicles, newspaper articles, dictionary entries, census notes, etc. (ibid.:224). Moreover, mariachi music is a tradition that is multiple, complex, and polysemic.

Unlike the methodological results of the natural sciences, historiography is not value-free. The writers of history have value judgments that indeed affect their historical accounts. As historian Michael Bentley observes the following in regard to those who recount history,

[t]he argument is that history is inescapably value judgmental has often turned on the consideration that, in elaborating their accounts, historians have to select. Their obligation with regards to a chosen subject matter is presumably to tell us what is important about it. And importance seems to be a category of value, although a very general one which may well, in the end, incorporate all the others: moral, aesthetic, prudential and so on.

(Bentley 2002:753)

What then of those who are the historical actors?

In his chapter "Philosophy of Historiography," historian Peter Kosso describes the difference between historical facts "as real situations" and historical facts as "true descriptions of situations" (Kosso 2009:12). For Kosso, a real situation would exist in the past, whereas a true description would exist in the present. There are social actors involved both in the recounting of history as well as the historical actors who make history. In the former, recounting history is concerned with what is chosen to be remembered, or even, forgotten. In the latter, historical actors, such as individuals, communities and/or institutions, play a central role in the happenings of societies. An excellent example of history makers is those women mariachi performers who were written out of this tradition's history mainly by men. The recounting of history has affected how women have been represented in the mariachi tradition, whereas the actors who make the history (both women and men) have influenced existing gender roles and social values relating to this tradition. Those who choose to remember mariachi music as male-dominated inevitably bring these roles and values to the idea of female participation in mariachi ensembles.

Since little historical evidence can contribute to an official male-centered mariachi history, or a definition of this tradition, the accounts passed on to subsequent generations have thus legitimated this dominant historical narrative. Counter-narratives have also revealed the rich diversity in the socio-musical contributions presented as a linear process through time. Yet the unwritten narratives presented in this study offer an opportunity to retell historical accounts of this musical expression, which will not only reveal mariachi music as a popular performing art,



encompassing both rural and urban origins, but will also consider the vital role of women mariachi musicians. While I argue that both traditional and popular expressions have the same history, the globalizing effects since the 1920s present a moment of rupture in the tradition. Thus, for the historian, a historical consciousness would raise two vital tasks faced by mariachi scholars today. The first is the interpretation of historical archives, such as published documents and audiovisual materials, whereas the second is the interpretation of experience, based on ethnographic research, which is a different kind of historical evidence.

*a. Legitimation and authenticity*

The challenge in legitimating mariachi music is not only about posing respect and dignity upon this tradition; it is also about the need to change ideological attitudes. In "The Types of Legitimacy," sociologist Max Weber introduced legitimacy as one of the dominant elements in securing authority of three kinds: legal, traditional, and charismatic (Weber 1978:212, 215). Of these three, it could be said that a traditional authority governs the idea of authenticity in mariachi music. According to Weber, this kind of authority is "traditional if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in by virtue of the sanctity of age-old rules and powers" (ibid.:226). Ideology is what ultimately legitimates authority because no dominant authority governs with force or domination alone (Ricoeur 1986:13).

Concepts such as authenticity and ideology are vital in revealing intentions and reasons for understanding interpretations at given moments in time, and by given writers. For instance, authenticity is an essential qualifying requirement for inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In order to understand cultural authenticity at the international level, forty five participants from twenty-eight countries gathered in November of 1994 to elaborate the *Nara Document on Authenticity*, which, in short, refers to the form/design, materials/substance,

use/function, tradition/technique, location/setting of cultural expressions.<sup>56</sup> Rather than consenting to a universal definition of authenticity, the *Nara* document fosters the idea that authenticity is relative, such that particular views are not necessarily right or wrong, but that they are self-evident. In this sense, judgments are based on the interpretations of one's own cultural experience in relationship to that of others (UNESCO 1994).

In an attempt to understand both the historical and socio-cultural processes as a conception of ideology, along with the grounds upon which knowledge is judged, philosopher Karl Mannheim aimed at relationism. Ricoeur later pointed out, however, that his attempt to master the paradox ended in relativism (Ricoeur 1986). As a result, according to Mannheim, and what is now referred to as "Mannheim's paradox," a viewpoint cannot be expressed as ideological without first having an ideological viewpoint to start from (Freeden 2003:15). The struggle for legitimation is fought on many fronts. Whether the mariachi tradition's cultural origins are legitimated as French, indigenous, or a regional identity would seem to be more of a concern for researchers and policy-makers than for the musicians themselves. Those at the forefront creating policies or making decisions and histories that reflect and affect the tradition impose authority over a musical expression that is caught between preservation of authentic performance methods and the innovation involved in the modification of musical styles and musical language.

In this respect, philosopher Paul Ricoeur's offers a distinction between enunciative and institutional authority. Following Leclerc, Ricoeur describes enunciative authority as the symbolic power to persuade through a text or an assertion in order to engender belief, whereas

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<sup>56</sup> For further information, see <http://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf> and Sophia Lobati's "World Heritage, Authenticity and Post-authenticity" and Laurajane Smith's "Uses of Heritage."

institutional authority refers to the legitimate and official power that imposes obedience on those it claims to direct (Ricoeur 2007:94). In this way, the mass media that constructed the foundation for mariachi music to become a national musical symbol of Mexico, and UNESCO's declaration as an intangible culture of humanity, can be understood as institutional authority. Similarly, scholars who have successfully contributed to mariachi music's social and historical knowledge can be understood as enunciative authority. A history, ultimately, has the enunciative authority to impose an ideological function by automatically legitimating what is written and occluding what is not.

For the music makers —whether the origins are French or not, with trumpets or not, from Cocula or not, "traditional" or not, male or not— the overall aim is to gain general acceptance as a valid, worthy, and dignified form of music making. As traditions are transformed and notions of authenticity become questioned, the struggle for legitimacy takes on a new scope. For example, various critics (general public, higher class citizens, researchers, etc.) automatically consider musical expressions found in some areas of the mainstream culture negative. That mariachi music in Mexico gained worldwide popularity in a mainstream Mexican culture ultimately produced negative judgments that affected the views of its authenticity, and negatively impacted its social standing. Although mariachi music is a Mexican national symbol, and UNESCO recently placed this tradition on the *Representative List of the Intangible Culture of Humanity* (2011), the tradition continues to engage in a struggle for social, cultural, and musical recognition. Furthermore, as a musical culture unanimously recognized as male-centered and so strongly tied to Mexican nationalism, the growing participation of women in mariachi music performance created a new front in the struggle for this tradition's legitimation.

A case of institutional authority that operates to legitimate a cultural practice is the *Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi* (Ollin Yoliztli Mariachi School at Garibaldi), of Mexico City's Department of Culture, and projects similar to these, which are important in the revitalization and sustainability of mariachi music in Mexico. I am reminded of the press conference held on September 5, 2013 that announced the opening of the school, in which a journalist asked, "Now that the school will be offering a technical degree in mariachi music, will mariachi musicians be at the same level as classical musicians?" Beneath the surface, what this journalist wanted to know was whether mariachi performers would have the same kind of social recognition as classical musicians. The question aroused interest because, for the past few decades, despite the rise of mariachi music's popularity worldwide, it has been subject to increasing disdain from the Mexican public.

Today, after mariachi music's long history as an oral tradition, mariachi musicians in Mexico may now have an opportunity to earn a professional degree in "Music Performance, with a Concentration in Mariachi Violin, Trumpet, Guitarrón, Guitar, Vihuela, or Harp."<sup>57</sup> Although the curriculum is designed to prepare students in mariachi music performance, the coursework in this three-year program also aims to provide students with formal educational qualifications for those seeking to further their studies at major music schools in Mexico. My response to this journalist was that the first aim was to dignify mariachi music.<sup>58</sup> The school's professors and local mariachi musicians, having experiences at some level the lack of dignity here described, are now being recognized for their musical merit. In the future, the students of this program will

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<sup>57</sup> The Spanish is *Técnico Profesional en Ejecución Musical en la Especialidad de: Arpa, Guitarra, Guitarrón, Trompeta, Vihuela y Violín de Mariachi*.

<sup>58</sup> For the online version of this article, see <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/2012/09/05/nacional/857596>

have experienced a formal educational experience and could aim to become professors at this same institution, or create new schools elsewhere.

*b. The media's impact on tradition and modernity*

In Mexico, the earliest field recording of a mariachi music, which dates back to 1908, captured the acoustic sound of the Cuarteto Coculense on wax cylinders. Today this historical recording is commercially available with Arhoolie Records (Clark 1994).<sup>59</sup> Years later, Mexico City's first radio program was inaugurated on September 27, 1921, and within two weeks, a second one followed in Monterrey, Nuevo León. Thirty-two radio stations were established by 1930, among them the renowned XEB *El Buen Tono* and XEW *La Voz de América Latina Desde México*, now *Radio Televisa*, which featured live musical presentations, spoken entertainment, and local news. Mariachi groups from Cocula, Jalisco later traveled to Mexico City to debut on the first live radio programs in 1925 performing their traditional regional music (Jáuregui 1999a). During this nationalist phase, Mexican radio became an important tool for repairing a nation divided by economic and political crisis (Fadul Gutiérrez 2003). Diverse musical styles and performers filled national radio waves not only in large cities, but also in the most remote and forgotten parts of the country. The first mariachi ensembles to have their own programs on Mexican radio were Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo and Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán.

Mariachi Coculense de Cirilo Marmolejo, still without trumpets and in their traditional white cotton attire, appeared in the first Mexican sound film, *Santa*, in 1931. Mexican film history documents a similar path. In *Historia Documental del Cine Mexicano* (Documental

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<sup>59</sup> For a review of an earlier field recording in the United States, see Lauryn Salazar, "From Fiesta to Festival: Mariachi Music in California and the Southwestern United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles).

History of Mexican Film), film critic Emilio García Riera offers an 18-volume analysis, from the first sound film *Santa* (1931) to the last films that he considered to be the end of this classical era (1976) (García Riera 1992-1997). Each film reviewed in these volumes showcases the soloists/actors as well as the mariachi ensembles that came to define *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) to the world. Using film to present (and create) national and local interests necessarily involves cinematographic decisions that may promote or subvert ideologies. As film critic Louis Giannetti (2001) points out in *Understanding Movies* (2001), "ideology is another language system in film, albeit an often disguised language that often speaks in codes" (Giannetti 2001:417). This disguised language in Mexican films is slowly being decoded.

Yet radio and films were not the only mediated opportunities available to mariachi ensembles. By the early 1950s, a series of Mexican magazines had circulated the nation, which ultimately informed the public of the ideal woman and her role as a mother, wife, in the home and at church. It was during this time that a series of groups, including all-female mariachi ensembles, joined the cast of the first touring caravans (Chao Ebergenyi 1995). A decade later, televised popular culture programs created stars, and groups such as Mariachi América de Jesús Rodríguez de Híjar became stars on the premiere nationwide entertainment television program *Siempre en Domingo*, which debuted in 1969 (Paxman and Fernández 2013).

Culture industry mediators not only modified the performance meaning; they also significantly impacted the musical expression itself with the inclusion of trumpets, standardizing their appearance with *trajes de charro*, and creating performance opportunities all over the mass media. This ultimately led to mariachi music gaining national and worldwide projection as a musical symbol of Mexico. Like many other popular music associated with nationalism across

the world, mariachi music also became a cultural commodity that could be bought and sold, and became subject to the ferocious copyright laws.

Despite the strong presence of traditional and popular music in the mass media since the 1920s, very little space is offered to mariachi music on radio, television, and film today. Furthermore, the last decade has seen an enormous decline in the number of commercial records produced that feature mariachi music. As the popular artists of the Golden Era of Mexican Radio and Film (1936-1969) are passing away, no new artists are arising that can sell the millions of records to take their place.<sup>60</sup> Mariachi music no longer has the commercial space and recognition it once had decades ago. While some researchers might argue that the traditional mariachi expression is in need of legitimation, so too does the popular mariachi music need more sustainability options in order to exist and coexist with the musical traditions that existed before the mass media.

### *c. Traditional mariachi revival movement*

Since the late 1990s, the state of Jalisco has been the site of genuine interest in the recuperation of traditional mariachi expression, which has been occluded by the mass media promotion of popular mariachi. Scholars such as Jesús Jáuregui, Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, and Arturo Chamorro have been key in providing historical information that would allow young musicians to value and desire to learn this musical expression. In his article "El Mariachi Como Elemento de un Sistema Folklórico" (Mariachi as an Element of a Folkloric System), Jáuregui elaborates a model influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism, which

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<sup>60</sup> For an interesting article describing popular singer Pepe Aguilar's take on this topic, see <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/07/12/11an1esp.html>, accessed June 15, 2013.

systematizes the differences between "traditional mariachi" and "modern mariachi" (Jáuregui 1987:95-97). The issue is not so much in the creation of these kinds of categories, but rather how some musicians have utilized these categories to focus on preserving the traditional version over the modern, to the extent that the latter becomes disrespected and publically disdained.

Today, one can turn on the radio or television, and instead of coexisting with the rest of the people in a festive space in a small town, the members of the community listen to music in different ways. As Gadamer argues:

The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change.

(Gadamer 2004:282)

If the condition that once affirmed, embraced, and cultivated a tradition changes, then the tradition itself changes. Those traditions that cannot adopt and respond to changes in society would be replaced with new tradition, and become either a museum culture or forgotten in time.

These changing conditions impact how individuals relate to their tradition, which creates a consciousness that leads them to want to preserve their customs or accept the changes as a part of tradition's progression. Gadamer goes on to say:

. . . preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything that anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.

(ibid.: 282-283)

According to Gadamer, there is a renewal in preservation because traditions are not static, and that preserving something from the past by passing it on to the next generation is an act of reason that recognizes the superior authority of what is being passed on and accepted.



For instance, in the article "Lucha el Mariachi Contra el Estereotipo" (Mariachis Fight Against Stereotype) published in *El Universal* (2009), an unidentified author interviewed Mexican ethnomusicologist Arturo Chamorro regarding his perspective on the problems and changes that "traditional" mariachis face:<sup>61</sup>

"Rather than a [mere] transformation, these [modern] ensembles have become deformed from the moment they decided to enter the world of commercialization, where economic interests are the priority," stressed Chamorro.

"Más que transformación, estas agrupaciones [modernas] se han ido deformando desde el momento que quieren entrar al mundo de la comercialización, donde lo que tiene prioridad son los intereses económicos", subrayó Chamorro.

("Lucha el Mariachi" 2009)

Despite the title of this article, it did not entirely cover the stereotypes mariachi ensembles in general are trying to overcome, but rather it perpetuated the idea that "modern" mariachis are products of a culture industry that is inhibiting the preservation of the "traditional" version.

Chamorro's comments about the popular mariachi expression strengthened the awareness that there was something important to discover and preserve in regards to traditional mariachi music. Researchers drawn to traditional Mexican music have supported this standpoint, often at the expense of delegitimizing the popular mariachi tradition.

The prestige enjoyed by *mariache*, *sones* and *mezcal* was granted by the Mexican state and its nationalist project of the 1930s (in which the mass media of communication is not exempt), who converted these in national symbols and of Mexicanness abroad, almost at the same level as the eagle over the cactus. It should therefore not surprise us that there are now desires to appropriate these traditions that until only a half a century ago were the "customs" of ranchers, drunks, or brothels and that today are part of the "Mexican culture."

El prestigio que gozan mariache, sones y mezcal les fue concedido por el Estado mexicano y su proyecto nacionalista de los años treinta (del que no están exentos los

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<sup>61</sup> "Lucha el Mariachi Contra el Estereotipo," in *El Universal*, July 12, 2009 (<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/59878.html>)

medios masivos de comunicación), quienes los convirtieron en símbolos nacionales y de lo "mexicano" en el extranjero, casi al mismo rango del águila sobre el nopal. No debe pues extrañarnos que ahora surjan deseos de apropiarse de estas tradiciones que sólo hace medio siglo eran "costumbres" de rancheros, de borrachos o prostibularias y ahora son parte de la "cultura mexicana".

(Gaspar and Martínez 2001:73-74)

For these authors, the mariachi image and music that was converted into a symbol of the nation and Mexicanness and the traditional mariachi expression seem to be two different customs. In this paragraph, they are referring to the popular mariachi expression as having in its roots in customs of ranchers, drunks, and brothels, thereby attempting to prove that the traditional and the popular mariachi expressions have different histories, such that the traditional version is not deformed by the media or nationalistic actions. The authors go on to say:

The music of every region, like its great food, has its proper ingredients. Radio and television today uniform, deform, and kill the musical peculiarities of each region. Now, mariachi music in many occasions are neither regional nor do they have their own way of tuning.

La música de cada lugar, como la buena comida, tiene sus propios ingredientes. La radio y la televisión en la actualidad uniforman, deforman y matan las peculiaridades musicales de cada región. Los mariachis ya en muchas ocasiones ni son regionales, ni tienen su propia manera de afinación.

(Gaspar and Martínez 2001:73-74)

These attitudes, although they categorically separate the traditional from the popular mariachi expressions, have fostered a newfound consciousness and respect for the musical traditions in the sierras of Western Mexico that have continued their way of living independent of the media's influence. This consciousness is responsible for the recent traditional mariachi music revival that is growing strong in parts of Western Mexico, and more recently, also in Mexico City.

Music revivals are not a new phenomenon across the globe. Their emergence seeks to oppose the dominant musical tradition in a different way than musical vanguards or

postmodernist attempts. Whereas postmodernism is a rupture against tradition, musical revivals do just the opposite: rupture against both contemporary and vanguard expressions. For ethnomusicologist Tamara Livingston, a music revival is a "social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past" (Livingston 1999:68). In these movements, musicians aim to express their music through values based on historical and cultural authenticity. Defending or protecting traditional practices in a globalized world is linked to understanding their function in modern times as representations or cultural constructions of a historical past.

Since 2002, the *Secretaría Cultural del Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco* (Department of Culture of the State of Jalisco) has organized the *Encuentro Nacional de Mariachi Tradicional* (National Festival of the Traditional Mariachi) in an effort to create the awareness that traditional mariachi music in the Mexican community is not merely a precursor to the modern version. This revival effort promotes the tradition as a musical expression still alive and performed today, stressing that it should be preserved and recognized at the national level. From the 2002 to 2008, the organizers of the *Encuentro* held a competition for the most authentic traditional mariachi ensemble, selecting a different group each year. Since 2008, this activity is no longer called a competition, though there are still prizes for those groups that best represent the "traditional mariachi." In 2010, I had the opportunity to act as one of the judges on the panel for this festival. The groups performed before judges who assessed the performance based on "authenticity" in their performance, their musical presentation (intonation, quality, rhythm), and repertoire. An

invitation for the *XI Encuentro Nacional de Mariachi Tradicional*, held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, from August 27, 2012 to September 2, 2012, stated:<sup>62</sup>

Traditional mariachi ensembles that play early music of traditional roots may participate. In this *Encuentro*, the participation of mariachi ensembles with a trumpet will not be considered.

Podrán participar Mariachis Tradicionales que interpreten música antigua y de arraigo tradicional. Dentro de este Encuentro no se contempla la participación de mariachis con trompeta.<sup>63</sup>

The present is a global era where both preservation and innovation are dependent on individual and community interests, as well as driving market demands. The festival organizers sensed this problematic and began to offer the "Gerónimo Méndez" Prize for the most innovative group within the mariachi tradition:

"Gerónimo Méndez" Prize, for their contribution to the enrichment of traditional music. (New arrangements, compositions, instruments).

Presea "Gerónimo Méndez", por su aportación al enriquecimiento de la música tradicional. (Nuevos arreglos, composiciones, instrumentos).

This prize might seem, at first glance, to pose a contradiction of values. Yet music revivals support musicians and ensembles that experiment with new arrangements and compositions. In reality, traditional and modern mariachi ensembles have the opportunity and freedom to enter and exit these two categories created by researchers and policy makers, depending on their own interests. The traditional mariachi music revival has promoted a recent concern for a historically informed performance. Much of this practice is based on historical research and generally refers to the publications by anthropologist Jesús Jáuregui, historian Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, and

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<sup>62</sup> The electronic version of this invitation is available at: <http://noticiasdelgobiernodejalisco.blogspot.mx/2012/06/convocan-la-comunidad-mariachera.html>

<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it was the Encuentro Tradicional, not the Encuentro Internacional, that invited Miguel Martínez and gave him a medal, featured lectures in his honor at the academic Colloquium.

ethnomusicologist Arturo Chamorro. In addition, their repertory is dependent on historical field recordings, such as those by Thomas Stanford and Henrietta Yurchenco, but also those recently recovered by Jesús Jáuregui.

*d. Toward a mariachi history with women included*

Women have long been left out of history books. Having reflected upon the eight elements that describe the mariachi tradition and its evolution, and uncovering the aporia of mariachi history, which challenges a linear continuity in the succession of events, it is understandable that many people, facts, events, works, and ideas have been occluded from the historical information related to the mariachi tradition. Women musicians and facts related to their participation in mariachi music are an excellent example of this occlusion, namely because they are rarely mentioned in published findings. The few bibliographical references that refer to women mariachi musicians are under the authorship of Jesús Jáuregui (1987, 1990, 1999, 2007), Candida Jáquez (2000), Leonor Xóchitl Pérez (2002), Daniel Sheehy (2006), Russell Rodriguez (2006), Antonia García-Orozco (2006), and Reifler Flores (2013).

Although these sources provide an important beginning of a revision of standard histories of mariachi that exclude women, there is still room for much more detail on the history of women in this tradition. For this reason, the ethnographic work presented in this dissertation provides much additional data for this history, including photographs from private collections and personal narratives that confirm the participation of women as instrumentalists and creators in the mariachi tradition. In mariachi music, for example, women musicians were absent from the mariachi historical record, in comparison to men mariachi musicians, because they were not conspicuous in historical films or present in nationalist agendas. These performance spaces were for men mariachi musicians, not women. By reflecting upon the women presented in this

dissertation and their biographies, it is possible to understand something about the historical moments they lived through (and are continuing to live through), and how each have contributed to their own socio-musical surroundings. Moreover, such historical narratives also make it possible to gain new perspectives on various aspects regarding their historical moment in general.

By bringing together women's narratives, I aim to bring together disparate chronologies in order to interpret a meaning that goes beyond the story they have offered me. In the chapters that follow, I do not aim to generalize the reality of women's lived musical experiences, nor can I deem published documents as absolute authoritative truth. I only aim to contribute (however small the contribution) to a panoramic view of the mariachi tradition—with women included.

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### Chapter Three: The legacy of singing divas, duos, and trios

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*The best success of cultural nationalism turned melodrama is the creation of the canción ranchera that reflects the spirit of the corrido's narrative, it schematizes and recreates it like a desperate monologue, adding to it the pedagogy of the romantic song. Two origins: mariachi [music] and the cinematographic success of the comedia ranchera.*

*El mejor éxito del nacionalismo cultural vuelto melodrama es la creación de la canción ranchera que recoge el espíritu narrativo del corrido, lo esquematiza y recrea como monólogo desesperado, le añade la pedagogía de la canción romántica. Dos orígenes: el mariachi y el éxito cinematográfico de la comedia ranchera.*

Carlos Monsivais, "Notas Sobre Cultura Popular en México" (1978)

Representations of femininity in Mexico have historically been modeled after mythical, moral, and gendered archetypes such as La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (M. Meyer 1990, Tuñón Pablos 1999, Nieto-Gómez 1997).<sup>64</sup> While these feminine archetypes have been useful in understanding a woman's place in Mexican culture, one cannot ignore the gap between these mythical prototypes and women's lived experience. In her book *Mujeres de Luz y Sombra en el Cine Mexicano: La Construcción de Una Imagen, 1939-1952* (Women of Light and Shadow in Mexican Film: The Construction of an Image, 1939-1953), feminist historian Julia Tuñón Pablos undertakes the important task of profiling the archetypes of women created in Mexican film. These include the innocent virgins and those who end up in a brothel, the mother-saint and the cabaret dancers, the suffering woman and the seductive lover, and, of course, the women who walk across the dance floor to Agustín Lara's music (Tuñón Pablos 1998). In sum, these can be reduced to women in the home and women on the streets.

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<sup>64</sup> La Virgen de Guadalupe, as a pure and moral virgin who personified the postcolonial and indigenous feminine ideal; La Malinche, as a traitor and hypersexualized incarnation of the feminine immorality; and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, as an intellectual, a poet, and a nun.

In addition to the female prototypes, Tuñón Pablos reflects upon the extent to which this cultural baggage has weighed upon the real women in society, not merely those on the big screen. She desacralizes these contrived images in order to locate them in their real social dimension. In this sense, women who have lived against this cultural baggage in the traditional and popular music scene in Mexico have found ways to make this musical tradition their own, despite their image being associated with women on the streets, and despite the enunciative and institutional authorities that impose their views. In sum, this chapter attempts to deconstruct the gendered cultural ideologies that have impacted women's participation as singers of mariachi music. This deconstruction flows into the following chapters.

### **1. The problem of gender construction**

Insights into the significance of "woman" and "man" have turned away from the natural sciences, which have historically demonstrated through chromosomal genetics that people are biologically born into female or male phenotypes, also referred to as one's sex.<sup>65</sup> It is probably that the social construction of gender as sex leveraged the scientific explanation of sex, which subsequently associated social characteristics with femininity and masculinity. For example, femininity has been associated with being submissive, weak, and relegated to the domestic space (Ziegler 2008:32-33). Latina feminist Marysol W. Asencio suggests that definitions of masculinity incorporate concepts such as dominance, toughness, or male honor and that these systems of beliefs have an effect on the traditional gender role socializations (Asencio

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<sup>65</sup> Scientific research has also demonstrated that there are occasionally chromosomal and hormonal "anomalies" in born females and males, whom are referred to as androgynous or intersexual.



1999:108). Associating these qualities with one's biological sex is an essentialist and socialized way of understanding the gendered physical body.

Neither the natural sciences nor the human sciences willingly objected to social associations of gender as sex. In fact, renowned social scientists continued to perpetuate such essentialist ideas by applauding the idea of gender roles as practiced in various societies across cultures. Sociologist Mary Holmes recalls that Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim — all pivotal figures in the development of sociology as a discipline— considered women's subordinate social role as natural, adding that it was "slightly odd that these thinkers should view sex roles as 'naturally' determined, given that they were busy stressing how social forces affected everything else" (Holmes 2007:3-4).

It was feminists who finally objected to gender essentialism because, as philosopher Charlotte Witt suggests, "it is exclusionary, incompatible with social and political change, and reactionary" (Witt 2011:xii). In fact, the biological theories of sex difference have been frequently challenged by the lived experience of gender. Further inquiry into the social understanding of sex leads us to philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex), originally published in 1949 in two volumes, which referred to sex as a social construction. In the second volume, "Woman's Life Today," de Beauvoir began with an analysis of a woman's formative years, opening the chapter on "Childhood" with her renowned and widely celebrated observation:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

(de Beauvoir 1953:273)

Feminists since the 1970s have further revealed society's role in the construction and governing of codes and conventions by which these genders behave (Millet 1970, Oakley 1972, Richardson 1977, Kessler and McKenna 1978). The categories "sex" and "gender" necessarily distinguished between biological difference (female and male sex) and gender difference (female and male identification).

Yet the social association with biological sex does not always coincide with how people identify with their body and sexuality. For this reason, scholars have introduced more socially fluid ways of approaching gender. In his three-volume *The History of Sexuality*, for example, philosopher and historian Michel Foucault leads us through to the historicization of sexuality, which has undergone changes through various socio-historical perspectives (Foucault 1978). Furthermore, gender theorists have elaborated upon the social body as intersectional with other social-cultural identities (Crenshaw 1991), as a performative identity (Butler 1990), and as a multiplicity of gender identities (Linstead and Pullen 2006). While gender deconstruction has affected the category of "woman" and "man," these categories are still important in the study of music, for their essentialist definitions have not lost their power. In the following section I will draw upon *how* gender is constructed, and what this means for mariachi performance.

#### *a. Engendering gender representation*

As in the argument regarding authenticity in tradition presented in the previous chapter, we are faced with the tension between traditions transmitted for preservation and those that undergo accepted (and unavoidable) changes. Femininity and masculinity are concepts that, like the seemingly concrete concept of tradition, have repeatedly transformed throughout history and across many cultures. Yet what is considered feminine and masculine today has transformed over the centuries.

In "A (Short) Cultural History of Mexican Machos and Hombres," anthropologist Matthew Gutmann reflects on traditional gender identity in Mexican culture:

Similar to other poor areas of the Mexican Capital, men and women of all ages in Colonia Santo Domingo have experienced dramatic transformations in recent years in terms of what it means to be men and women, including with regard to parenting, participation in political movements, paid work, education, sexuality, and more.

(Gutmann 2000:160)

Gender identities are not static or fixed. In fact, their significance has transformed over time. As Gutmann attests, little consensus on the definition and meaning of gendered identifications persist, such as *macho*, *machismo*, and *mandilón* (opposite of a macho, a man who obeys his wife at the cost of being with his friends). He reiterates that one is not born knowing how to be female or male because performative acts of gender are "learned and relearned" (ibid.:169).

Femininity and masculinity are social constructs that may affect how people perceive themselves in their culture, and these are transmitted into ways in which gender is represented in musical performances. Referring to early dramatic characters constructed by seventeenth-century composers, musicologist Susan McClary sets the context for gender representation in music:

In staged "representations" of the social world, the identification of characters as either male or female is fundamental. The seventeenth-century composer writing dramatic music immediately confronted the problem of gender construction—that is, how to depict men and women in the medium of music. The concept of "construction" is important here, for while the sex of an individual is a biological given, gender and sexuality are socially organized: their forms (ranges of proper behaviors, appearances, duties) differ significantly in accordance with time, place, and class.

(McClary 1991:36)

That which occurs in social life is translated into music, and subsequently represented on a stage. In this context, gender is reconstructed on three fronts: first, as mentioned above, by a society that perpetuates gender ideologies; next, by the composer who creates gendered representations in his/her music; and finally, by the performer who ultimately brings to life that representation.

An excellent example in popular Mexican music is María Herrera-Sobek's *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*, in which she exposes five female archetypes found in the text of *corridos* (Mexican narrative ballads): the good mother, the bad mother, the mother goddess, the lover, and the female soldier. According to Herrera-Sobek, Mexican ballads were generally written by men who incorporated "mostly masculine-oriented themes and a strongly patriarchal ideology" (Herrera-Sobek 1990:xviii). For example, the 1970s *corrido* "Contrabando y Traición" (Contraband and Betrayal) tells the story of how drug-smuggling Camelia *La Tejana* murders her partner Emilio Varela, who wants to leave her for his true love. After seven bullet shots, Camelia *La Tejana* leaves the gun and takes the money. Yet the *corrido*'s author, Ángel González, considers himself a feminist:

I'm a feminist, five hundred percent. . . . A feminist is a man who knows what a woman is worth, who knows that woman is the greatest. Why is woman the greatest? Because woman is half of the world, and what's more she's the mother of the other half. In my songs I always have the woman come out ahead. 'Contrabando y Traición' was the first song like that. . .

(González cited in Wald 2001:19)

For González, a woman who "comes out ahead" can murder her partner over drug money and run from justice. In *corridos*, authors can represent women in their lyrics in the same way that dramatic composers construct their gendered characters.<sup>66</sup> While on the surface it may not be obvious that Camelia *La Tejana* is an essentialized female character (it is not socially ideal or lady-like to kill one's lover), it does represent a man's conception of a woman's extreme reaction to unrequited love. This is not feminism, but, rather, gender ideology.

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<sup>66</sup> Camelia *La Tejana* is also the theme of the recent Mexican opera *Únicamente La Verdad: La Auténtica Historia de Camelia "La Tejana,"* composed by Gabriela Ortiz, with a libretto by her brother, Rubén Ortiz. It is an excellent example of a *corrido* taking oral narratives and gender construction onto the dramatic music stage.

In this case, essentialism is embodying the idea that femininity and masculinity have a real or a true fixed essence. Not only are gender representations of characters essentialized, they are also controlled through ideologically gendered discourses:

The proceedings [of dramatic music] are controlled by a discourse organized in accordance with masculine interests — a discourse that offers up the female as spectacle while guaranteeing that she will not step out of line. Sometimes desire is articulated by the male character while the passive, domesticated female simply acquiesces. In such instances, the potential violence of male domination is not necessarily in evidence: the piece seems to unfold in accordance with the "natural" (read: patriarchal) sexual hierarchy.

(McClary 1991:152)

Staged representations controlled by a dominant gender ideology reveal society's administration and perpetuation of gender difference, even if staged representations do not always hold true in lived experiences.

The staged, stereotypical image of mariachi music is inevitably a man, but not just any man: a super macho Mexican man. This image is captured in historian Héctor Vega's article "La Música Tradicional Mexicana: Entre el Folclore, la Tradición y la *World Music*" (Traditional Mexican Music: Between Folklore, Tradition, and World Music):

. . . I remember that by the 1970s, *ranchera* music was suffering a radical change. The stereotypes of the *ranchera* music singers, the mariachis [sic] or *supermachos*, that since the 1950s imposed themselves as the national prototype, were being substituted for a more rentable model at the international level, the metrosexual or unisexual mariachi. This new prototype in the Mexican music reality imposed itself from above, from the large television chains, like a product, which invoked the most rancid values of nationalism of the new market, of neoliberalism. In this way the new mariachi, one day was dressed as a *charro* and the next as a rock star. Here it is interesting to see how these media mariachis are manipulated like a product, while at the same time place mariachi musicians who participate in festive events and give a traditional meaning to this music in a difficult predicament, because for these musicians this meant a new product format, a new presentation, because in order to be professional today one must be a metrosexual mariachi musician, and this means changing and crumbling the Mexican macho that for decades was also constructed from above, but with bottles of tequila and many gunshots. That is to say, a need for change is imposed upon, even in sexual identity, in order to continue being a tradition, and obviously many people do not buy this fraud.

. . . recuerdo que para los años novena, la música ranchera estaba sufriendo un cambio radical. Los estereotipos de cantantes de música ranchera, los mariachis [sic] o supermachos, que desde los años cincuenta se impusieron como el prototipo nacional, estaban siendo cambiados por un modelo más rentable a nivel internacional, el mariachi metrosexual o unisex. Este nuevo prototipo de la realidad musical mexicana se imponía nuevamente desde arriba, desde las grandes cadenas de televisión, como un producto, que conjuraba los valores del nacionalismo más rancio con los valores del nacionalismo del nuevo mercado, del neoliberalismo. Así el nuevo mariachi, un día salía vestido de charro y al siguiente de estrella de rock. Aquí lo interesante es ver como estos mariachis de los medios son manipulados como un producto, y al mismo tiempo ponen en aprietos a los mariachis que participan en los actos festivos que le dan sentido tradicional a esta música, pues para estos mariachis esto significaba un nuevo formato de producto, una nueva presentación, pues ahora para ser profesional también se tiene que ser un mariachi metrosexual, y esto significa cambiar y desmoronar la figura del macho mexicano que durante décadas se construyó también desde arriba pero con botellas de tequila y muchos balazos. Es decir, aquí se impone la necesidad de un cambio incluso de identidad sexual para seguir siendo una tradición, obvio que mucha gente no se fue con el engaño.

(H. Vega 2010:159)

Vega suggests, in a rather confusing manner, that a mariachi man's sexual identity was initially created by the media, as a *supermacho*, with "bottles of tequila and many gunshots," and, more recently, evolved into a metrosexual rock star. While the analogy to a rock star is a bit far-fetched, perhaps the author was referring not specifically to mariachi musicians who respect the *traje de charro*, but to men singers who battle to conquer the new popular audiences. Some of these include popular stars such as Alejandro Fernández and Luis Miguel, featured in figure 3.1 below.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The photographs are available on the following websites: <http://masrancherosmexicanos.blogspot.mx/p/alejandro-fernandez-el-potrillo.html>, [http://www.xhbg.tv/sipues/noticia\\_completa.php?nota=213](http://www.xhbg.tv/sipues/noticia_completa.php?nota=213), <http://lookandfashion.hola.com/pazsolisfashionandlife/tag/luis-miguel/>, and <http://www.luismiguelsite.com/viajero/mexicali.htm>.



Figure 3.1: Alejandro Fernández (top row) and Luis Miguel (bottom row).

*b. Freedom against judgment*

Social tradition has historically marginalized women. "In exchange for her liberty," philosopher Simone de Beauvoir suggests, "she has received the false treasures of femininity" (de Beauvoir 1953:677). Social pressures place barriers that inhibit women from acting and freeing themselves from essentialist agendas in order to accomplish their artistic desires. For philosopher Hannah Arendt, freedom lies with the capacity to take an initiative, such that "to *be*

free and to act are the same" (Arendt 1961:153). Political freedom, according to Arendt, is not a phenomenon of will, which she refers to as the "I-will" of freedom (ibid.:151), but rather a capability that she refers to as the "I-can":

The necessity which prevents me from doing what I know and will may arise from the world, or from my own body, or from an insufficiency of talents, gifts, and qualities which are bestowed upon [us] by birth and over which [we have] hardly more power than [we have] over other circumstances; all these factors, the psychological ones not excluded, condition the person from the outside as far as the I-will and the I-know, that is, the ego itself, are concerned; the power that meets these circumstances, that liberates, as it were, willing and knowing from their bondage to necessity is the I-can. Only where the I-will and the I-can coincide does freedom come to pass.

(Arendt 1961:160)

Having the desire to act is not the same as actually acting. The goal for women in mariachi music is to gain access to and accomplish what they *want* to accomplish. If a woman wants to play a mariachi instrument, sing repertory historically associated with men, change the traditional image, or create new pieces relevant to the mariachi tradition, first comes the I-will, then the social and individual power to feel the I-can.

In a conversation with guitarist Lupe Villa (biographical narrative shared below), a former member of the all-female Mariachi Las Coronelas, she discussed her father's reluctant approval to allow her to learn the guitar, on the condition she would only play it at home.<sup>68</sup> Once her father discovered she wanted to join an all-female mariachi ensemble, he strongly opposed her musical desires. Lupe Villa decided to go on without his permission and at all costs. Today she is 80+ years old, and years after her father's passing, she kindly remembers this situation, feeling grateful that he finally accepted her desire to sing and play her guitar. In a similar

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<sup>68</sup> Personal interview with Lupe Villa, December 11, 2011.



example, Juanita Lara Medina (biographical narrative shared below), former violinist of the all-female Mariachi Estrellas de México shared that

Personally, I never dreamt of being in music, but my father longed for one of his kids to learn to play the guitar. I began with the guitar. Precisely my first teacher [looking over at Isabel López Soto] taught me my first chord. . . but when I told him that I was going on tour, he responded: "oh no, I want you to learn, but so that you can be here at home." No, well, I left. . . and in my home was where I played least.

Yo en lo personal, no soñaba con estar en la música, pero mi papá anhelaba que uno de sus hijos aprendiera a tocar la guitarra. Yo empecé con la guitarra. Precisamente mi primer maestra [viendo hacia Isabel López Soto] me puso el primer tono. . . pero cuando le dije que me voy de gira, él me dice: "óyeme no, yo quiero que aprendas pero para que andes aquí en la casa." No, pues, yo que me voy. . . y en la casa es en donde menos toqué.

(Juanita Lara, personal interview, January 7, 2008)

Despite the challenges inhibiting them from learning the music, these women did not allow anything to stop them from acting on their artistic ambitions.

Throughout my research on women in mariachi music, I have interviewed and conversed with women and men of all ages. In general, many women commented on the obstacles they have had to face as mariachi musicians, such as the examples presented above. Similarly, I asked several young female students to reflect upon the all-female mariachi groups of the 1950s and to imagine what the challenges might have been for them half a century ago. Many agreed that it must have been a much more difficult situation for women in the past because of the "stricter" gender roles. I let them imagine and describe in detail what this situation would have been like. According to these young women, the musicians of the 1950s were more pressured by society to stay at home and care for their families, and if they wanted anything different (i.e., to perform mariachi music), they would face greater resistance and, worse yet, *machismo* from their fathers or other men in society. Most were not allowed to play music, and if they did, they did not perform with the most prominent mariachi groups.

I then asked them to return to the present and name their favorite mariachi ensembles. The majority provided one or a combination of the following renowned groups in Mexico and in the United States: Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán; Mariachi de América de Jesús Rodríguez de Híjar; Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán; Mariachi 2000 de Cutberto Pérez; Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano; and Mariachi Sol de México de José L. Hernández.<sup>69</sup> Upon asking which of these groups had women musicians, I observed their astonished expressions when they realized that, in the year 2013, *there were no women performing in the most renowned mariachi ensembles*. I returned to the discussion regarding women's challenges in the 1950s and asked the final question: so, has the situation changed? The answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the situation for women *has* changed, and the growing number of them performing mariachi music today serves as proof. Women today are gaining more access to music education and performance spaces, and achieving the liberty and education to create their own music.

Yet, it has not always been this way. For one, the ideological situation concerning women's legitimate place in the mariachi community as musicians and the authority they have in the tradition has not changed much. Seemingly, there continue to exist ideological forces that, in large part, separate women's musical activity from that of the men. Will women ever perform with any of the renowned groups mentioned above? What are women to do given the situation of limited access to knowledge, judgments based on gender stereotypes, and wage gaps between women and men for the same musical service? The true challenge is to overcome the ideological internalization of oppressive and essentialized gender rules that identify women as less capable of performing mariachi music.

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<sup>69</sup> Only Sandy Sanchez mentioned all-female mariachi groups as her all-time favorites.

In this regard, I would like to draw on a rumor that has circulated in the mariachi community: the director of an all-female mariachi ensemble asked the director of a renowned mariachi ensemble what he thought of their musical performance. The second director allegedly responded: "well, they *do* dance nice." Although the all-female mariachi group had minor choreography in their performance, they were not dancing—they were playing music. Instead of providing an assessment of the musical performance, this musician evaded both the question as well as his true experience as a spectator. Supposing he enjoyed the music, was he in a social position that prevented him from acknowledging this? Aesthetic judgments are not always merely about opinions of art. The judgment of women's musical capabilities becomes political when it is used to achieve a specific purpose. In this case, it becomes a political act to adversely judge an all-female mariachi group's musical capability. Political issues do not always allow for truth in aesthetic judgments.

*c. Privileging masculinity over femininity*

Ideas regarding and the social codes for— femininity and masculinity have been fundamental in establishing individual identity. Feminist efforts to make women visible across histories and disciplines have also made *gender* visible, inviting scholars to also understand that

to be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born; they are made. And men make themselves, actively constructing their masculinities within a social and historical context.

(Kimmel and Aronson 2004: xxiii)

Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir's "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," critics Kimmel and Aronson present the idea that the masculine man is also a social construction, revealing that this stereotype has its complexities. So long as we do not lose sight of the

hegemonic realities based on gender difference, masculinity, like femininity, is not equal across cultures, social strata, or histories.

But what of the realities of dominant ideas regarding gender difference? In the edited volume *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico* (2012), historians Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein suggest that men (and masculinity) play an important role in shaping Mexican history (Macías-González and Rubenstein 2012:16). National interests are manipulated by specific groups of individuals, namely influential men, such as presidents and creators of important institutions. This kind of macro-effect immediately affects the political, economic, and educational spaces that the rest of the country depends upon, which tend to privilege masculinity over femininity. Men get paid more, they have better professional positions, and they are often the creators of projects —as well as musical scores and/or arrangements.

Despite the effect of privileging masculinity in the formation of national interests, there have been historical accounts, or might I suggest, micro-effects that present a diversity of cases in which sex and gender have decoded, subverted, and openly challenged gender ideologies. For these examples, I will refer specifically to the cases presented by the Mexican mass media that have been influential in the ways viewers understand their bodies, genders, and desires as something "natural."

In 1936, Mexico's first *charro cantor* (singing cowboy), Federico Arturo "Tito" Guizar Tolentino (1908-1999) (figure 3.2), filled the big screen in *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (There on the Big Ranch) (1936), a film that was as popular in the United States as it was in Mexico.

Figure 3.2 provides a photograph of Tito Guizar accompanied by a mariachi ensemble.



Figure 3.2: Tito Guizar singing in the Mexican film *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936).

Tito Guizar began his career in Los Angeles, singing songs like "Cielito Lindo" and "La Cucaracha," and appearing as the Latin lover in several American films. Moreover, he studied voice with renowned singer Tito Schipa and later sang as a tenor in the zarzuela-based film *Marina* (1945). Yet Guizar was not the typical macho singer most people think of today. As the first *charro cantor*, he presented the Mexican as an honest man who controlled his drinking and was faithful to his hacienda boss. Some critics hold that Tito Guizar was not especially masculine in this early film, suggesting that the Mexican man portrayed by Tito Guizar was not the "true macho" (Macías-González and Rubenstein 2012). Then in the film, *¡Ay, Jalisco No Te Rajes!* (*Ay, Jalisco Don't Back Down*) (1941), we see violence and hypermasculinity, and the

*charro cantor* suddenly transforms into the Mexican macho man stereotype: inebriated, valiant, and a womanizer. Where does the masculine essentialist tradition lie?

Today, Vicente Fernández (b. 1940) represents the epitome of a masculine Mexican cultural icon still alive at the writing of this dissertation. His predecessors Pedro Infante, Javier Solís, and Antonio Aguilar set the norm for this image, which Fernández continues to perpetuate. This is the idea of masculinity that the Mexican mass media had in mind. Mariachi ensembles today embody that image when they perform, imitating gestures either for approval or for parody (Chapter Seven).

*d. The changing social landscape of gender*

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa examines the physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual borderlands. She looks at how these borders are present when two or more cultures meet and when people of different backgrounds occupy the same space (Anzaldúa 1987). I utilize Anzaldúa's theorizing not to examine two different cultures, but to look at how men and women occupy the same spaces in mariachi performance. Women are no longer relegated to the private sector and mariachi music is no longer singularly a man's space. In mariachi performance, women and men, female and masculine, are relational.

Feminist scholarship often presents gender in terms of ever-present social and cultural boundaries with inclusionary and exclusionary elements arranged in gendered dichotomies—for instance, public/domestic, nature/nurture, and productive/reproductive, which theorists have been deconstructing over the years (Anzaldúa 1987, Butler 1999, Mohanty 2003). Such binaries produce ideological perceptions of gender that become the grounds for political acts of validation, marginalization, or rejection.

Mexican popular singer and composer Juan Gabriel (b. 1950), born Alberto Aguilera Valadez (figure 3.3), has neither openly declared his homosexuality, nor has he ever denied it. Yet he represents mariachi music without the hyper-masculinity displayed by Alejandro Fernandez and Luis Miguel. In addition, he has also contributed to mariachi music as a well-known composer, and his original music for mariachi instruments has been recorded and performed by many. In figure 3.3, we can observe his heavy stage make-up, style of dress, and gestures, which would not be entirely associated with the macho Mexican mariachi stereotype.



Figure 3.3: Juan Gabriel accompanied by a mariachi ensemble and other musicians.

Juan Gabriel's popularity, like all-female and mixed-gender mariachi ensembles, has opened a space for mariachi ensembles to perform outside a gender normative pattern, and they do so through a parody of homosexuality (Olivares 2002). In fact, there are a number of heterosexual male mariachi musicians who will perform his songs, purposefully singing them to other men, as a part of a parody. Many of them claim that their enactment of the homosexual

Juan Gabriel is for entertainment purposes. Yet Vicente Fernández (3.4), for example, has never performed these songs with a homosexual enactment because, as it is well known, he maintains a hyper-masculine image. In figure 3.4, Vicente Fernández is wearing a *traje de charro* and his facial expression is more closely associated with the macho stereotype.

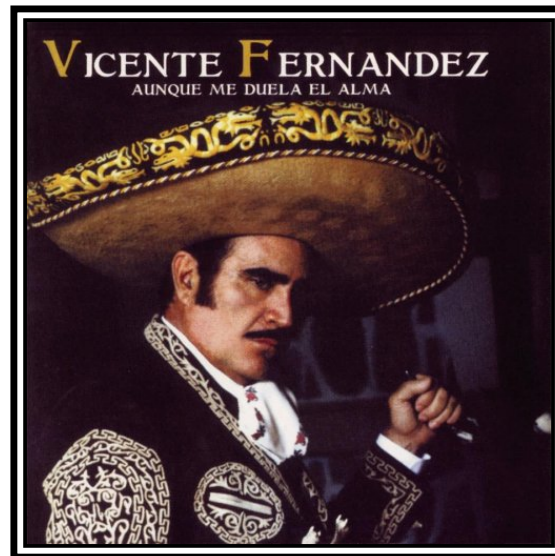


Figure 3.4: Vicente Fernández on the cover of his album "Aunque Me Duela el Alma" (1995).

In contrast, in Los Angeles, in 1996, mariachi violinist Carlos Samaniego aimed to create an LGBT mariachi ensemble called Mariachi Arcoiris (Mariachi Rainbow). As a novelty, the group gained local recognition, having secured performances at local gay clubs, among other venues. The idea was that, at gay clubs, men would sing to men and women would sing to women. This group lasted only a few months, which the director attributed perhaps to the fact that society was not ready for this kind of musical expression. Eighteen years later, in 2014, Carlos Samaniego refounded the group as Mariachi Arcoiris de Los Angeles (figure 3.5), and



received media attention as "the first LGBT Mariachi band in the world!"<sup>70</sup> This group aims to show that performing gender in mariachi music is not a fixed concept and is not limited to femininity and masculinity.



Figure 3.5: Mariachi Arcoiris de Los Angeles (2015).<sup>71</sup>

Times are changing and society is becoming increasingly conscious of gender issues. On social networking sites, people are often careful to use the "@" to denote both feminine or masculine genders, especially when writing in Spanish. For example, "hola a todos" literally translates to "hello to all the males." There are two ways to avoid this, however: by writing "hola a todas y todos," or in a more colloquial manner, to use the "@" or "X" to write "hola a tod@s" or "hola a todXs." During the summer of 2012, one mariachi musician posted on a social networking site on Facebook group called Charr@s! y bailarines: "i need a female *mariachero*

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<sup>70</sup> See Roterman, Natalie. <http://www.latintimes.com/worlds-first-all-gay-mariachi-band-mariachi-arcoiris-de-los-angeles-tell-their-story-281380>

<sup>71</sup> Image courtesy of Latino USA: <http://latinousa.org/2015/06/19/1-a-band-features-worlds-first-trans-mariachi/>

*que me ayude para este sabado 5-8 en riverside*" (I need a female *mariachero* who can help me this Saturday from 5-8 in Riverside).<sup>72</sup> This musician was specifically looking for a woman to perform with his group, but apparently made a mistake when referring to her as a *mariachero*. Although he edited the comment to confirm "female *mariachera*," it stirred up a few comments, and many suggested alternatives, such as simply referring to women merely "mariachis," or a "*mariachera*" (without the "female" preceding it), or even "charr@."

Returning to Anzaldúa's concept of "borderlands", examining the changing landscape of gender in mariachi performance problematizes certain stereotypes that we at once fixed, such as mariachi music being associated with a hypersexualized Mexican macho man who is always drinking tequila, acting valiantly, and is a womanizer. Although this changing landscape influences the relational character between women and men, female and masculine, the ideological perceptions of gender that become the grounds for political acts of validation, marginalization, or rejection continue.

## **2. Women singers of Mexican folklore and popular music**

As mentioned in Chapter One, the *canción bravía* is a sub genre of the *ranchera*, a bold and aggressive singing style expressed with the dramatic emotions and gestures. As opposed to the man's refined *bel canto* style, women are generally characterized by their throat-centered voice. Although there were some *ranchera* singers who sang in a thin head-like voice, such as Irma Vila, and Sofía Álvarez, many of them used their chest voice to interpret these songs.

According to historian Salvador E. Morales Pérez's judgment, Lucha Reyes (1906-1944), Irma Vila (1916-1993), and Matilde Sánchez *La Torcacita* (1927-1988) were the women who

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<sup>72</sup> *Mariachero* or *mariachera* is an alternative way of referring to an individual mariachi musician.

forged and sustained the rise of musical folklore in Mexico (Morales Pérez 1981:140). Yet they are not the only women who deserve to be included in this history. Many more women had an important impact as popular music soloists and actresses in Mexico during the Golden Era (1936-1969): Sofía Álvarez (1913-1985); Guadalupe *La Chinaca* (1914-1976); Irma Vila (1916-1993); Lydia Mendoza (1916-2007); Chavela Vargas (1919-2012); Manolita Arreola (1920-2004); Amalia Mendoza (1923-2001); Matilde Sánchez (1927-1988); Lola Beltrán (1932-1996); Lucha Villa (b. 1936); and Lucha Moreno (b. 1939). In addition to singing, most of these women were also impressive actresses in Mexican films that popularized mariachi music all over the world. While this section integrates a panoramic view of their biographies in the order of their birth, these women enjoyed the highlights of their success during different stages in their lives, some young and others at a later age.

An image I would like to begin with is a 1960s newspaper clipping of Mariachi Reyna, from Rio Verde in San Luis Potosí, directed by don Yrineo Reyna (figure 3.6). The image is testimony that mariachi ensembles not only accompanied the aforementioned *ranchera* singers promoted on radio by XEW *La Voz de América Latina Desde México*; they also accompanied women in local settings. The clipping in figure 3.6 reads: "El primer mariachi con que contó esta ciudad fue el 'Mariachi Reyna', formado por elementos de la familia del mismo apellido" (The first mariachi this city had was 'Mariachi Reyna,' formed by musician of the family with the same last name).

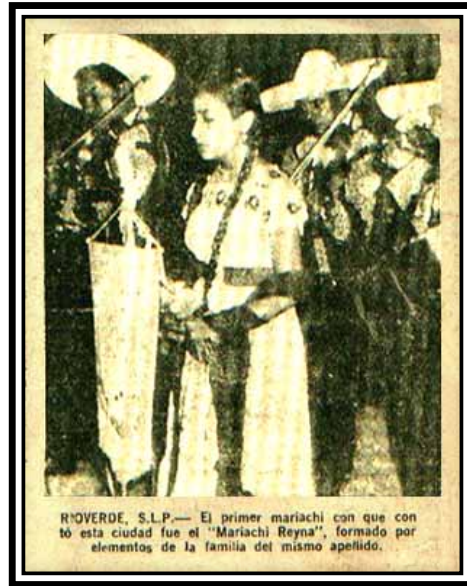


Figure 3.6: Mariachi Reyna of Rio Verde accompanying a woman singer (c. 1960s).<sup>73</sup>

Mariachi Reyna is considered the first mariachi ensemble in Rio Verde, San Luis Potosí, and Don Yrinieo has left a four-generation legacy of mariachi musicians. His grandson, Santiago Maldonado Reyna, is currently the director of Mariachi Rio Verde in Riverside, California, a group with which his children Karla, Italia and Israel also perform.

In *Chicana Traditions*, Broyles-González examines the "regendering" of the *ranchera* by describing a few of the women who created a voice through "male" songs (Broyles-González 2002:198). Yet *rancheras* are only one of the musical styles sung by these singers; they also sang *sones*, ballads, huapangos, and other genres.

The women *ranchera* singers in these films, on radio, and in popular theater underpinned the dynamic of the country nostalgia and memories, who made as if they interpreted and were accompanied by the nationalist zeal, representatives of a "Mexicanness" each time more synthesized and stereotypical, just like the *charro cantores* (singing cowboys), the *bravía* singers, and the mariachi [musicians].

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<sup>73</sup> Newspaper clipping courtesy of Santiago Maldonado Reyna, director of Mariachi Rio Verde in Riverside, California.

Las cantantes rancheras en estas películas, en la radio y en el teatro popular apuntalaban esa dinámica de nostalgias y recuerdos campiranos, que se hacían interpretar y acompañar por los afanes nacionalistas, representantes de una "mexicanidad" cada vez más sintetizada y estereotípica, como los mismos charros cantores, las cantantes bravías y los mariachis.

(Pérez Montfort 2007:106-107)

While Lucha Reyes is credited for being the creator of the *bravía ranchera* singing style (her first recording in this style was in the early 1930s), there were important women performers before her who were important in paving the road for those who followed. Josefina *La Chacha* Aguilar (1904-1968) was born in Morelia Michoacán and studied with Sara Moreno at the National Conservatory of Music. As a mezzosoprano, she debuted at the Abreu Theater in Mexico City singing Donizsetti's *La Favorita* in 1925. While she became famous singing operatic pieces, she had just as much success singing Mexican popular music. In 1929 she recorded Joaquín Pardavé's *Negra Consentida* (Cherished Black Woman) and appeared in XEW's inaugural program in 1930. Amparo Meza Cruz (1922-2002) was born in Tapachula, Chiapas. Although she began her career in 1939, her success was not immediate. She eventually became known for singing Agustín Lara's boleros. Other women who have gone into the oblivion of Mexican popular music history include Margarita Romero, Eva Garza, Chelo Flores, Esmeralda *La Versátil*, and María Luisa Landín. Sadly, I will not be able to include portraits of them in this dissertation.

The women presented in this section are not mariachi musicians, although a few of them learned to play the guitar in order to accompany themselves. I found it important to elaborate a brief biography of the *ranchera* singers in this section in order to help illustrate how they have influenced women's roles in mariachi music. The portraits included below attempt to capture the women singing with a mariachi ensemble.

a. *Lucha Reyes (1906-1944)*

Lucha Reyes's legacy is irrefutable. Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco as María de Luz Flores Aceves, Reyes (1906-1944) has been recognized by many commentators as a female pioneer in both the musical recording industry and in the Mexican Golden Era of Cinema (1936-1969). She had been a soprano, but after she lost her voice during a cold winter on a tour in Germany, she adopted the *bravío* singing style that changed her life (interview with Yolanda Sánchez Reyes, March 2013). Upon returning to Mexico, her burning desire to not give up singing led her to a career in popular music, performing *canciones rancheras* (read: *canciones bravías*).

Though not a mariachi musician, Lucha Reyes's singing and acting career defied the ideal woman's role in the *bravío* singing style due to the sentiment she poured into her performances and the life she lived (Monsivais 2002) (figure 3.7). The *bravío* style is considered bold, unapologetic, and sometimes aggressive, which were characteristics not entirely suitable for a lady of that time. In Figure 3.7, Lucha Reyes is photographed singing for an XEW live radio program in the late 1930s, accompanied by Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo.



Figure 3.7: Lucha Reyes singing live for XEW radio.<sup>74</sup>

Her grandniece Yolanda Sánchez Reyes shared, during an interview, that Lucha Reyes was merely a woman ahead of her time, *una mujer fuera de época* (ibid.). Lucha Reyes was criticized for acting masculine. In her films and live performances, she adopted the bold and aggressive gestures that contested traditional femininity. Moreover, her alleged homosexuality and alcoholism made her both a victim of society's oppression and a popular female novelty

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<sup>74</sup> I'd like to thank Alberto Moreno from Hermosillo, Sonora who kindly offered a better quality image than the one I had. He is the creator of an important blog dedicated entirely to Lucha Reyes: <http://lucha-reyes.blogspot.mx/>

(García-Orozco 2008).<sup>75</sup> Renowned Mexican composer Agustín Lara wanted his pieces sung by Lucha Reyes; Alfredo D'Orsay wrote "La Tequilera" (1941) especially for her; and Chicano songwriter Lalo Guerrero's "Canción Mexicana" (1941) would not have had the same reception without Lucha Reyes's *bravío* touch. In fact, these last two pieces, when performed by mariachi ensembles today, are generally sung by women.

A closer, more interpretative look at women's role in popular music is taken by Mexican musicologist Yolanda Moreno Rivas (1937-1994), who writes about why Lucha Reyes came to sing in her *bravío* style:

Lucha Reyes's appearance marked the making of a feminine performance of the *canción ranchera*. In 1927, after a tour with maestro Torreblanca's *típica* [orchestra], the singer had been left aphonic for over a year. After recuperating her voice, she could vocalize with contralto color and with a rough and husky shade of the emerging urban *canción ranchera*. The personality and neuroticism did the rest. She lavished her voice until tearing it, moaning, crying, laughing and cursing. Never before had people heard performances of that kind. By overcoming the critiques that did not accept her lack of refinement, Lucha Reyes soon symbolized and personified the brave and temperamental Mexican woman.

La aparición de Lucha Reyes marcó el surgimiento del estilo de interpretación femenina de la canción ranchera. En 1927, después de una gira en Europa con la típica del maestro Torreblanca, la cantante había quedado afónica durante más de un año. Al recuperar la voz pudo entonar con un color de contralto y un matiz enronquecido y bronco la naciente canción ranchera-citadina. La personalidad y la neurosis hicieron el resto. Prodigaba su voz hasta desgarrarla, gemía, lloraba, reía e imprecaba. Nunca antes se habían escuchado interpretaciones de ese estilo. Sobreponiéndose a las críticas que no aceptaban su falta de refinamiento, pronto Lucha Reyes simbolizaba y personificaba a la mujer bravía y temperamental a la mexicana.

(Moreno Rivas 1979:190)

The attribution of Lucha Reyes's success as a *bravía* singer to her loss of voice, her personality, and her *neurosis* reproduces prejudices concerning women, making a social claim about her

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<sup>75</sup> Lucha Reyes's grandniece, Yolanda Sánchez Reyes, alleges that newspapers proclaimed Lucha Reyes was lesbian. But according to Sánchez, this was a marketing gimmick because it was the only way to legitimize her masculine behaviors.



mental state. This comment coming from a woman musicologist seems rather peculiar, considering that Lucha Reyes symbolized empowerment for many women, singers and fans. I would suggest that Moreno Rivas's comments are not based on an open understanding of Lucha Reyes's recordings and social influence, but on prejudices clearly against the kind of popular music made by a woman who did not represent the higher classes of society. Although Lucha Reyes's *bravío* lifestyle ended with her suicide in 1944, she will always be remembered as the woman who paved the road for those all of those who followed.

*b. Sofía Álvarez (1913-1985)*

Colombian-born Carmen Sofía Álvarez Caicedo arrived in Mexico with her family at the age of 15 and began singing as a *triple* (soprano) in zarzuelas (Dueñas Herrera 1993:66). Her debut as an actress in Mexican film, albeit in a minor role (a prostitute), was in the first sound film *Santa* (1931).<sup>76</sup> While she did not sing in this role, she was invited to act and sing accompanied by a mariachi ensemble with her colleague Pedro Infante in later films: *Si Me Han de Matar Mañana* (1946); *La Barca de Oro* (1947); and *Soy Charro de Rancho Grande* (1947). In 1950, Sofía Álvarez left the film scene and dedicated herself to singing romantic boleros and *canciones mexicanas* for radio programs (J. Salazar 1993:164). In figure 3.4, Sofía Álvarez is singing *coplas* against Pedro Infante in the film *Si Me Han de Matar Mañana* (If They Are Going to Kill Me Tomorrow) (1946).

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<sup>76</sup> Filmed in 1931 but released in 1932, and directed by Antonio Moreno. *Santa* tells the story of a humble well-to-do girl named Santa (translates to female saint) who falls in love with a military man who disgraces her, leading her to make a living in a brothel to escape society's disdain.



Figure 3.8: Sofia Álvarez singing in the film *Si Me Han de Matar Mañana* (1946).

c. *Guadalupe La Chinaca* (1914-1976)

Not as well known to music or film critics was Lucha Reyes's dear friend, Blanca Mafalda Reducindo Moreto, from Torreón, Coahuila. She began her singing career in 1932 with romantic boleros and tangos for XEFO radio. Soon after, she began working for Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, owner of XEW (and later Televisa), who asked her to switch to folkloric music, giving her a new artistic name: Guadalupe *La Chinaca*, after Amado Nervo's homonymous poem. According to journalist Raquel Peguero, she is credited for being an "impulsora del mariachi" (advocate of mariachi music). Peguero interviewed the singer's daughter, who remembers: "Mi madre hizo la labor de otorgarles dignidad" (My mother's efforts gave them dignity):

She was the first artist who put mariachis on a stage, before that they were considered as almost nothing. That was Mariachi Marmolejo, who accompanied her throughout her life.

Ella fue la primera artista que puso sobre un escenario a los mariachis, entonces considerados poca cosa. Ése fue el Mariachi Marmolejo, que la acompañó de por vida.

(Peguero 2002:26-27).

Guadalupe *La Chinaca* appeared singing a minor role in a film with her partner Emilio Tuero<sup>77</sup> called *La India Bonita* (1938), directed by Antonio Helú. Although she participated in three other films, all in 1938, she is most famous for her live radio performances. Figure 3.9 shows Guadalupe *La Chinaca* singing with composer Pepe Guizar, accompanied by Mariachi Tapatío de José Marmolejo.



Figure 3.9: Guadalupe *La Chinaca* singing with Pepe Guizar.

Guadalupe *La Chinaca* recorded over a dozen albums with RCA Victor New York, but they are virtually unknown in Mexico. Her daughter claims that in Mexico she recorded five acetate disks that have not been digitized or reedited (ibid.). Guadalupe *La Chinaca* is recognized as the first to debut José "Pepe" Guizar's renowned *son jalisciense* "Guadalajara," which became her emblematic theme. XEW owner Emilio Azcárraga would come to say:

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<sup>77</sup> Emilio Tuero (1912-1971) and Guadalupe *La Chinaca* had two children but were never married; eventually, however, he left her.

I have with Lucha the torn and brave *ranchera* singer and, with Guadalupe, who will always be the romantic performer of Mexican music.

Ya tengo con Lucha a la cantante ranchera rasgada y bravía y, con Guadalupe, a quien será siempre la intérprete romántica de la canción mexicana.

(Azcárraga, cited in Peguero 2002:27).

While the memory of Guadalupe *La Chinaca* today may not do justice to her talent, she is an important female soloist who has inspired composers such as Pepe Guizar, who wrote songs especially for her voice.

*d. Irma Vila (1916-1993)*

Almost unknown in Mexico, Irma Vila (1916-1993) was extremely famous in Spain during Mexico's Golden Era (Morales 1952). Born Armida Rojo Gamboa in San Blas, Sinaloa, she was well known for her admirable and clean *falsete*, which awarded her the title *La Reina del Falsete* (The Queen of Falsetto), with her signature song being "Soldado de Levita."<sup>78</sup> In her two albums, all accompanied by mariachi music and with impressive arrangements, she included *rancheras*, ballads, and *huapangos*. Moreover, she had a vital role in the Mexican film *Canta y No Llores* (1949). In figure 3.10, Irma Vila is posing, dressed in traditional Mexican attire, and in the image is a photograph of the mariachi ensemble that accompanied her throughout her tours in Spain.

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<sup>78</sup> *Falsete* in this context is a singing technique that uses a vocal break when moving from a lower register to a higher register, similar to yodeling. She was a contemporary of Miguel Aceves Mejía, from Chihuahua, who known as *El Rey del Falsete* (The King of Falsetto), but I have not been able to come across any recordings or films of them performing together.



Figure 3.10: Irma Vila and her Mariachi, during one of her tours to Spain.

Figure 3.11 illustrates sheet music entitled, "La malagueña, huapango popular mejinaco" (*La malagueña*, popular Mexican huapango), Ediciones Hispania Madrid, adaptación T. Prieto. *La malagueña* translates to "woman from Málaga," a city in Spain. It is also the name of a very popular huapango that features *falsete*. That Irma Vila's photograph is featured on sheet music in Spain for this song in particular illustrates her level of success in Spain.



Figure 3.11: Irma Vila featured on sheet music in Spain.

Irma Vila's headliners always included her mariachi, which were "charros auténticos traídos de México" (authentic charros brought from México) (Gallegos, cited in Jáuregui 2007a:124).

*e. Lydia Mendoza (1916-2007)*

Lydia Mendoza (1916-2007) was born in Houston, Texas. From a very young age she was singing, and since she was constantly traveling between San Antonio and Monterrey, Mexico, she was dubbed "The Lark of the Border" (Broyles-González 2003). Concurrent with XEW's *La Voz de América Latina Desde México* were similar radio programs north of the border that also featured Mexican talent. One in particular was San Antonio's KXYZ radio, on which Felix Hessbrook Morales succeeded in airing a one-hour Spanish language program beginning in the early 1930s. Singing live during this program is what ultimately gave Lydia Mendoza such well-deserved fame within the U.S. and Mexican. She came from a musical family, dedicated to entertainment (making a living from playing songs for people in restaurants and plazas). After a

few years of live radio performances, she recorded her first single, "Mal Hombre" (Evil Man), with RCA in 1934, which became her signature song. This is an early example that denounces the "evil man" who betrays his honest woman. In figure 3.12, Lydia Mendoza is captured in a rare photograph with Mariachi Monumental Sahuayo, particularly since she generally accompanied herself singing.



Figure 3.12: Lydia Mendoza with Mariachi Monumental Sahuayo (1998).

Lydia Mendoza generally performed as a soloist, singing while playing her guitar. Yet she was also accompanied by a variety of ensembles, mostly *norteño* groups (popular Mexican music from the north that features an accordion), but also mariachi groups. Although she was born in Texas and her legacy is said to have influenced the rise of "tejano music," she is also an important marker for the use of women's repertoire in mariachi music



*f. Chavela Vargas (1919-2012)*

Also from abroad is Costa Rican-born Isabel Vargas Lizano, better known as Chavela Vargas (figure 3.13), who migrated to Mexico at the commencement of the Golden Era of Mexican Radio and Film. Although her singing career began in the 1930s, her first album, *Noche de Bohemia*, was not released until 1961; she subsequently recorded over 80 albums (Vargas 2002). In figure 3.13, a full mariachi ensemble does not accompany Chavela Vargas, as are the rest of the portraits presented in this section, yet she is wearing a uniquely designed *traje de charro* and is holding her guitar.



Figure 3.13: Chavela Vargas at the start of her career in Mexico in the 1930s.



Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar is a great fan of her singing style and has used her recordings in many of his works. Moreover, renowned Mexican popular songwriter José Alfredo Jiménez helped produce some of her albums, many of which included his world-famous *canciones rancheras* —emotive songs dealing with alcohol, *cantinas*, and women who have done him (the protagonist) wrong. Chavela Vargas became widely famous for her songs, not only because of their content, but also because of the raw sentiment in which she expressed herself.

At the ripe age of 81, she announced to the media she was lesbian. With a few intermissions in her long life, Chavela Vargas had a long and successful career. Her contribution to the *canción ranchera* and, by extension, women in mariachi music, is powerful. As with Lucha Reyes's *bravío* vocal tendencies, Chavela Vargas also redefined what it meant for a woman to sing these highly affective songs, which have historically privileged normative ideas of men and masculinity. Despite her vast repertory influenced by mariachi music, Chavela Vargas did not sing accompanied by mariachi ensembles.

*g. Manolita Arriola (1922-2004)*

From the northern state of Sinaloa, Manuela Arriola Rubio, known as Manolita Arriola (1922-2004) began singing at the age of 8 with her mother at Mazatlan's Angela Peralta Theater, with a zarzuela (operetta) company. As a child, Manolita Arriola and her mother traveled by train to the nation's capital. She quit school to sing for radio programs on XEFO and XEAL, and finally, by 1934, she joined the cast at XEW as "Magnolia" in the program *Tres Flores* (Three Flowers). Here she met Guadalupe *La Chinaca*, with whom she formed the duet *Las Soldaderas* (The woman soldiers). Manolita Arriola later formed another duet with María Luisa López, *Cantadoras del Bajío* (Singers of the Bajío Region).

By 1937, Manolita Arriola began a successful career as a soloist, performing various musical genres, such as *rancheras*, ballads, *sones*, tangos, and tropical music. The diversity in her singing style led her to be called Manolita Arriola *La Versátil* (The Versatile). Between 1937 and 1948, she appeared singing in at least eight films, and throughout her career she recorded at least 300 songs.<sup>79</sup> In figure 3.14, Manolita Arriola is singing "Guadalajara", a song by Ernesto Cortázar and Manuel Esperón, and accompanied by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, when Gaspar Vargas (guitarra de golpe) still lived. In fact, other members of the group include Miguel Martínez (trumpet), Silvestre Vargas (violin), Rubén Fuentes (violin), Mario de Santiago (violin), and Gonzalo Meza (guitarrón).



Figure 3.14: Manolita Arriola singing in *Se La Llevó el Remington* (1948).

She did not limit her singing to mariachi music and in fact left a recorded legacy for women of all singing styles. Surely, her experience singing in the zarzuela (operetta) company

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<sup>79</sup> An excellent website by Omar Martínez Benavides is dedicated entirely to Manolita Arriola: <http://manolitaarriola.org.mx/>

largely affected the way she was to understand and sing such a diverse range of popular Mexican musical genres.

*h. Amalia Mendoza (1923-2001)*

From Michoacán, Amalia Mendoza García (1923-2001), best known as *La Tariácuri*, also came from a very musical family. At the age of 6, she learned to play the guitar and sing *pirekuas* (Purhépecha songs) with her father. Her brothers had a trio named *Trío Tariácuri*, and she later teamed with her sister in the duo *Las Tariacuritas*.<sup>80</sup> Amalia Mendoza's first album, *Puñalada Trapera* (1954) (figure 3.15), included songs filled with anger and bitterness, such as "Puñalada Trapera" (Backstab), "Maldición Ranchera" (Damnified Ranchera), and "Amarga Navidad" (Bitter Christmas). The album cover, in fact, is a cartoon drawing of a hand holding a knife covered with dripping blood. Instead of showcasing an image of this talented artist, the record label Vintage Mexico preferred to focus on this newly expressed pain and suffering through her singing.

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<sup>80</sup> Tariácuri was an indigenous man who is said to have founded the Purhépecha empire in Mesoamerica.



Figure 3.15: Amalia Mendoza's first album, *Puñalada Trapera* (1954).

In figure 3.16, Amalia Mendoza is accompanied by a mariachi group, singing "Pa' Que Sientas lo Que Siento" (So You Know What It Feels Like), in the film *Fiesta en el Corazón* (Fiesta in the Heart) (1958).



Figure 3.16: Amalia Mendoza singing in the file *Fiesta en el Corazón* (1958).

Amalia Mendoza is well known for embodying a weeping sentiment in her singing (Chapter Seven). She introduced to the mariachi repertoire a new way of singing what one *feels*, and became known for announcing, *vivo lo que canto* (I live what I sing) (Interview by La Jornada cited in Jáuregui 2007a:415). She recorded over 35 albums and appeared in six Mexican films between 1957 and 1961, having an important acting and singing role in each.

*i. Matilde Sánchez (1927-1988)*

Matilde Sánchez Elías *La Torcacita* (1927-1988) was born in Tequila, Jalisco, and at three years old, she moved with her family to Tampico, Tamaulipas (Ángel 2012). By the early age of seven, she participated several times, without her parents' knowledge, in a youth competition for a local radio station affiliated with the famous XEW, sometimes as a soloist and sometimes with her sister Faustina. From this experience, their duet *Las Tapatías* was formed, initially against their parents' wishes, for they were very young and still in school. When the local radio program asked for their permission, they gained their parents' approval to perform occasionally on air. When Matilde was still nine years old (her sister was 12), they traveled to Mexico City to audition for a spot on one of the XEW programs. XEW owner Emilio Azcárraga was impressed with their performance and, in 1938, invited them to join the station's singing crew, asking them to change their name to *Las Torcacitas* (little picui ground doves). But the duet's career lasted only three short years; when Matilde's sister decided to get married at the early age of twelve, Matilda packed her bags and headed back home to Tampico.

Matilde's career as a soloist began when Lucha Reyes was contracted to perform in Tampico, but was unable to take the stage on this occasion. Crew director Paco Miller remembered that *Las Torcacitas* were in town and invited Matilde to sing Reyes's repertoire (in

her same key) for this performance. This opportunity finally put Matilde back on a stage and she became known as *La Torcacita* (singular). She later appeared in various films, such as *Cuando Habla el Corazón* (1943), *Por un Amor* (1946), *Juan Charrasqueado* (1948), and *México Nunca Duerme* (1959). In figure 3.17, Matilde Sánchez Elías *La Torcacita* is accompanied by a mariachi ensemble, singing "Pelea de Gallos" in the film *Cien Muchachas* (1957).



Figure 3.17: Matilde Sánchez *La Torcacita* singing in the film *Cien Muchachas* (1957).

In 1947, Mexico's prolific songwriter Ignacio Fernández Esperón, known as Tata Nacho, began hosting what was to become the most important radio program for Mexican popular music: *Así es mi Tierra*, named after one of his songs. *La Torcacita* was the official star of this legendary program and her signature song became "Aires del Mayab," a piece that now forms part of the mariachi canon for woman singers. *La Torcacita* began her career at a young age, and her legacy still remains to be investigated in depth, for what is left in the written memory of Mexican popular music does not do justice to the popularity she had in the 1940s and 1950s.

*j. Lola Beltrán (1932-1996)*

From Rosario, Sinaloa, María Lucila Beltrán Ruiz, better known as Lola Beltrán (1932-1996), loved to sing as a young girl. Achieving local fame, she traveled to Mexico City seeking entry in the XEW radio cast. Upon her arrival, she was initially employed as a secretary for Tata Nacho's program, *Así es mi Tierra*. *La Torcacita* later discovered her talent, and upon becoming very ill, Lucila was asked to substitute for her show.

After searching for a stage name, Lucila advocated for Lucha Beltrán, since Lucha is short for Lucila, except that Tata Nacho protested: "Lucha es demasiado nombre, todavía pesa mucho" (Lucha is too much name, it still weights heavily) (Sinagawa Montoya 2002:261). Although written sources do not reveal what year this debut occurred, it was certainly within a decade of Lucha Reyes's death in 1944. Lola Beltrán was the name eventually chosen for Lucila, and from that moment on, she joined the ranks of all the woman considered *Reinas de la Canción Ranchera*. In figure 3.18 Lola Beltrán is singing José Alfredo Jiménez's "La Noche de Mi Mal", accompanied by a mariachi ensemble, in the film *Soy un Golfo* (1955).



Figure 3.18: Lola Beltrán singing in *Soy un Golfo* (1955).

She appeared in over 35 Mexican films, the first of which, *Espaldas Mojadas* (Wet Backs), was filmed in 1953. Her first album, *Mejor que Nunca* (Better than Never), was not released until 1969, and she subsequently recorded over 15 records. Her signature songs were "Cucurrucucú Paloma" and "Paloma Negra." Lola Beltrán had a prolific career, and her singing style and repertoire have become a major referent for women in mariachi today.

*k. Lucha Villa (b. 1936)*

Although Lucha Villa is not the last singer I want to introduce, her career rose to prominence towards the end of the Golden Era of Mexican Radio and Film (1936-1969). Luz Elena Ruíz Bejarano, better known as Lucha Villa (b. 1936), was born in Camargo, Chihuahua. She debuted with *El Terror de la Frontera* (Border Terror) (1962), portraying a woman with a firm personality (Rosado 2002a:5). Amid the strong competition for women singers in *ranchera* music, Lucha Villa won the public's appeal due to, in the words of Jesús Flores y Escalante and



Pablo Dueñas, "her deep and profound voice, linked with an erotic style, unusual for her time" (Flores and Dueñas 2002:35).<sup>81</sup>



Figure 3.19: Lucha Villa singing with Mariachi México de Pepe Villa.

While her vocal timbre may sound deeper than most female voices, most of the keys in which she sang were of similar or higher registers than her singing colleagues. She has been differentiated from other women by eroticizing her songs, as reviewed in Chapter Seven.

#### *1. Lucha Moreno (b. 1939)*

The last woman singer of the Golden Era of Mexican Radio and Film I would like to present is Lucha Moreno, born Irma Gloria Ochoa de Hernández in Villa de Guadalupe, Nuevo León in 1939. Little is known about her early life, except that in 1955, she participated and won the "Reina del Carnaval" (Carnival Queen) pageant hosted by the "Asociación de Juventud

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<sup>81</sup> The text in Spanish reads: "Ante la fuerte competencia en el género ranchero, Lucha Villa tuvo muchos puntos a su favor; entre otros, su voz grave y profunda, ligada a un estilo erótico e inusual para su tiempo."

Cultural" (Youth Culture Association) Club, in her home town (Arredondo Cano 1997:147). While she had originally wished to pursue a career in law, this pageant opened the doors for her career as an actress and singer. Her first contact with the popular music scene was through Orfeon Records' radio program called "Así es mi Tierra" (This is My Land). At the same time she entered the program, so did her future husband José Juan Hernández, also a singer and actor. They married in 1961 and had three children: Mimí (former singer for the famous Mexican group called Flans), José Juan, and Iliana Patricia.<sup>82</sup>

Lucha Moreno's career also rose to prominence towards the end of the Golden Era of Mexican Radio and Film (1936-1969), and has appeared as an actress and singer in many Mexican films, such as: *No soy monedita de oro* (1959), *El gato* (1961), *Tirando a matar* (1961), *Las hijas del Amapolo* (1962), *Aquí está tu enamorado* (1963), *El ciclón de Jalisco* (1964), *Lupe Balazos* (1964), *Escuelas para solteras* (1965) with the Hermanas Águila, *Que te vaya bonito* (1978), and *Los dos apóstoles* (1966). Throughout her career, which is still active today?, she has also formed in a well-known duo with her husband, presenting themselves as Lucha Moreno y José Juan.

In figure 3.20, Lucha Moreno appears in the film *Paloma Consentida* (1964), singing "Con Fecha de Mañana", which unlike the other women presented above, wore *charro* pants instead of the typical regional dressed custom-made for these women singers.

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<sup>82</sup> Information from the 1989 interview with Paco Stanly, on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX3Hav6IJ1c>.



Figure 3.20: Lucha Moreno singing in the film *Paloma Consentida* (1964).

In addition to her success in the Mexican recording and film industry, Lucha Moreno also achieved international recognition, having been reviewed by the U.S. *Billboard* in 1961:

"Señorita Lucha Moreno is one of the celebrated thrushes of the day in Mexico and here, on this important disk, she offers what are described as representative tunes from that country's Top 10 listings. There's a lot of deep contralto in her voice and she gets stand-out mariachi type backings from various ensembles. General appeal limited but the set is good quality for the border areas and the more southerly West Coast sectors" (figure 3.21).

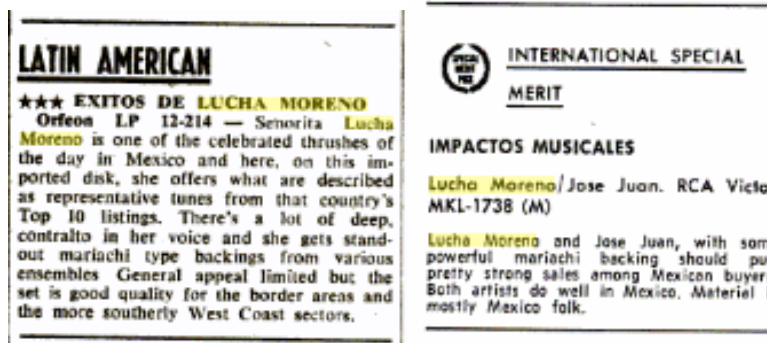


Figure 3.21: *Billboard* magazine reviewing Lucha Moreno's music (03/20/1961 and 09/23/1967)

Lucha Moreno became one of the contemporary legends of the *canción ranchera*, along with Amalia Mendoza, "La Tariácuri," and Lola Beltrán.

### 3. Woman duos and trios

Whereas in the previous section the main protagonists were women soloists, this section focuses on small groups of two or more women who sometimes performed their own accompaniment on the guitar. The women who participated in duos or trios offer a contribution to a women's role in mariachi music in the repertory they sang as well as the use of the female voice in two- or three-part harmony. While some of these women played the guitar, and at times accompanied themselves, it is their singing that has left a lasting impression on the women mariachi musicians to come.

A *trío ranchero*, or *trío romántico*, is comprised of three to five members and is a musical style that combines a *requinto* guitar with generally three-part vocal harmony. These groups originated in central Mexico after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).<sup>83</sup> In 1923, Mario Talavera, Ignacio Fernández Esperón, Alfonso Esparza Oteo, and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada formed the ensemble *Los Cuatro Ases de la Canción*, which changed their name to *Trío Veneno* in 1928. Their instrumentation marked the standard for the trios that followed, which included various combinations between a *requinto* (smaller version of a guitar for plucked melody), *guitarra sexta* (plucked or strummed 12-stringed guitar), and a *jarana* (a small guitar-like strummed instrument, generally for music of the huasteca region). Of the most well known *tríos*

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<sup>83</sup> Both trios and mariachi ensembles became symbols of Mexican national identity. In many films, both were featured equally in many films of the Golden Age (1936-1969). By the 1970s, however, mariachi ensembles dominated the airwaves and the film spaces, having caused a kind of disdain from trios towards mariachi ensembles. For some film directors, it was more effective to feature a singer accompanied by a full 8-12 mariachi ensemble wearing a *traje de charro*, than a 3-piece trio.

*románticos* are Los Panchos, Los Tres Ases, Los Tres Diamantes, Los Dandys, Los Tres Caballeros, Los Tecolines, Los Nicolases and Los Tres Calavera (Pareyon 2007:1049).

Trios rancheros include Los Trovadores Tamaulipecos, formed in 1926 by Alberto Caballero, Antonio García Planes, José Agustín Ramírez, Lorenzo Barcelata and Ernesto Cortázar, recorded many of their own compositions. The group disbanded in 1930, when Lorenzo Barcelata and Ernesto Cortázar became acclaimed songwriters and participated in the creation of the numerous songs showcased on national radio and the Golden Era of Mexican Film (1936-1969). In 1931, the Trío Tariácuri was formed in Huetamo, Michoacán, by the siblings Juan "El Tariácuri," Norberto, and Jerónimo Mendoza. Juan Mendoza "El Tariácuri," Amalia Mendoza's oldest brother (mentioned in the section above), left the group in 1959 to become a soloist singer. Other tríos rancheros include Trío Calaveras, Trío Tamaulipeco de los Hermanos Samperio, Trío Las Aguilillas, Los Pastores, Los Tres Huastecos, and Los Mexicanos, amongst others.<sup>84</sup>

While these small ensembles formed by men are the most well known, women also formed duos and trios. Some of these ensembles with women include Trío Reyes Ascencio, which later became Trío Garnica Ascencio, Las Tres Conchitas, Las Hermanas Huerta, Las Hermana Padilla, Las Jilguerillas, Dueto Río Bravo (1936-1969), Dueto Las Palomas, Dueto América, Dueto Las Soldaderas, and Dueto Las Cantadoras del Bajío, all of which have also earned their place in the history of Mexican popular music. In this section, only a select few will be commented on, which draw upon their influence on women mariachi musicians.

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<sup>84</sup> In some cases, there are trios that may have more than three musicians, and they are still called a trio. Although they may at times have similar repertory, trios are differentiated by a mariachi group in how the melody is performed. Trios pluck the melody on a guitar whereas in mariachi groups, the melody is played by two violins. There are always exceptions to the rule, since at times a mariachi ensemble may have only one violin, but the general aesthetic is to have two.

a. *Trío Reyes Ascencio (1926-1927) and Trío Garnica Ascencio (1927-1932)*

In 1926, when Lucha Reyes (mentioned in the section above) returned to Mexico from a tour in the United States, she formed with Blanca and Ofelia Ascencio the Trío Reyes Ascencio. The group participated in the cast run by the entrepreneur Pepe Campillo for the famous Teatro Iris in Mexico City. In 1927, Lucha Reyes left the trio for her tour as a soloist in Germany with the composer Juan N. Torreblanca. At this time, Julia Garnica substituted her and the group's name changed to Trío Garnica Ascencio (figure 3.22). This vocal group did not perform their own accompaniment.



Figure 3.22: Trío Garnica Ascencio.

Unlike most of the solo *ranchera* singers referenced in the section above, who included Lucha Reyes, Irma Vila, Matilde Sánchez, Lola Beltrán, Lucha Villa, and others, the singers of Trío Garnica Ascencio comprised soprano, mezzo, and contralto registers, singing in three voices. Their operatic trained voices sang the same register and style for zarzuela pieces as for rural-evoked traditional songs. When the trio performed, they generally wore the "china poblana"



dress, as well as other Mexican regional dresses rather than the "manta" dress, as described in Chapter Seven.

They became very popular on the radio and recorded a series of albums. In 1989, the Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Fonográficos (Mexican Association for Phonographic Studies) released a compilation album of their songs recorded from 1928-1930, which included songs such as the fox trot "Cielo Mexicano" (Mexican Sky), by Teodoro Markmann, the *son abajeño* "El Coco," by Alfonso Esparza Oteo, the bolero "Ojos Negros" (Black Eyes), and the huapango "El Coconcito," by Lorenzo Barcelata, as shown in figure 3.23.

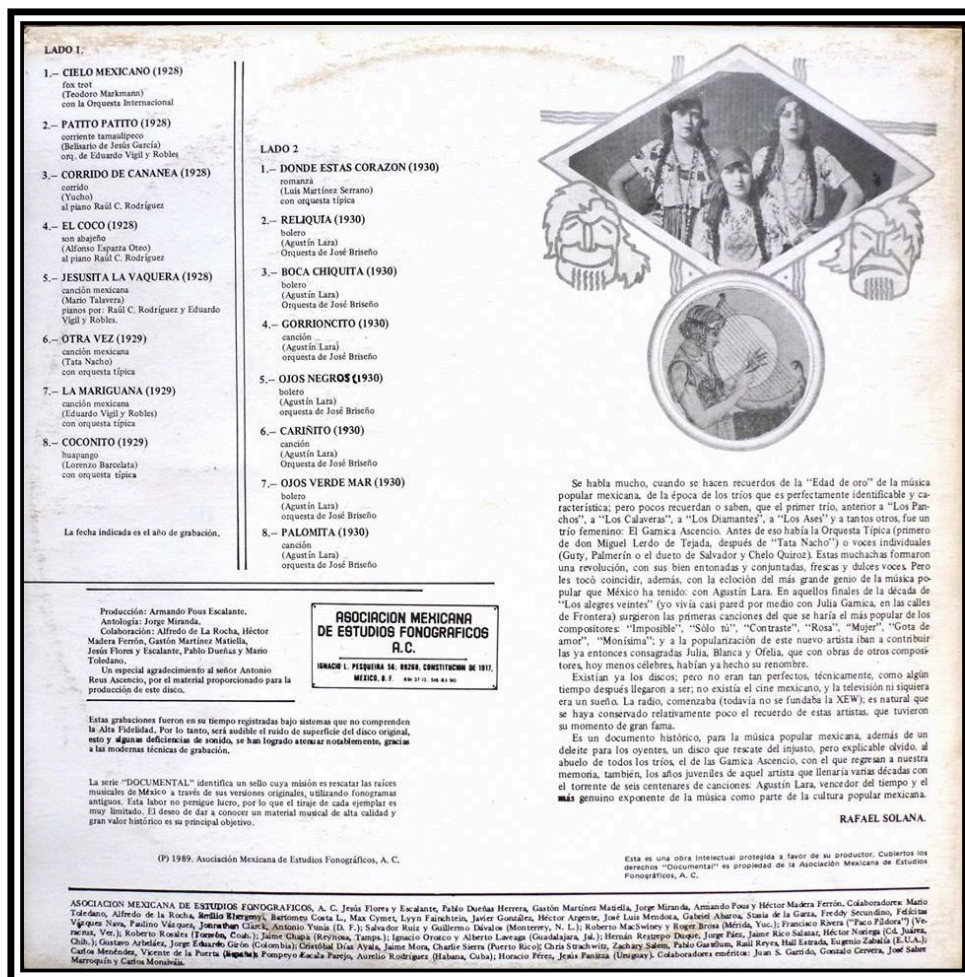


Figure 3.23: Trio Garnica Ascencio's album "Las Canciones del Alma Nacional" (1989).

*b. Las Hermanas Padilla (1937-1945)*

The Padilla sisters, Margarita and María, were born in Tanhuato, Michoacán. Although their singing career began in Los Angeles, California, their fame grew on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. This duo included in their repertory, in addition to Mexican popular music interpreted by many of the soloist women referenced in the section above, were corridos, which were not as commonly sung by women.

*c. Las Tres Conchitas (1946-1984)*

The trio Las Tres Conchitas was founded in 1946 by Refugio (Cuca) Hernández and Gudelia and Laura Rodriguez, and performed together for 38 years (figure 2.24). Similar to the Trío Garnica Ascencio but unlike Las Hermanas Padilla, Las Tres Conchitas performed with a similar range, and became known for recording childrens' songs by Mexican composer Francisco Gabilondo Soler "Cri-Cri." The trio was disbanded when Gudelia passed away in 1984.



Figure 3.24: Las Tres Conchitas.



*d. Las Hermanas Huerta (1952-19??)*

From Tampico, Tamaulipas, Luz María and Aurora Huerta began their singing career at the ages of 12 and 13. Their mother passed away when they were very young and were raised by their father, who played the bajo sexto (12-stringed guitar) and liked to sing. In an interview with Radio Bilingüe, based in San Francisco, California, they share that without ever having had any musical or vocal training, they would sing in harmony at home during their chores. When they learned of a singing competition hosted by Tampico's XEFW radio station, they entered as a duet and won first place. The next day, they were signing a contract with this radio station for a daily performance.

Las Hermanas Huerta (figure 3.25) later moved to Mexico City, where they formed part of the cast for the XEW radio program Noches Tapatías. Throughout most of their singing career, Fernando Maldonado was their arranger and musical advisor. They had signed contracts with both Columbia and Sony Records.



Figure 3.25: Las Hermanas Huerta wearing a traditional dress.

#### 4. The divas, duos, and trios in retrospect

There are many more duos and trios formed by women that unfortunately cannot all be mentioned here. The songs these women sang were the latest popular hits of the time, which was music that entered the mariachi repertory, since many of these duos and trios of women were sometimes accompanied by mariachi ensembles as well. The challenge these women faced as singers were distinct from those faced by the women mariachi musicians described in the rest of this study. The solo, duo and trio singers described here generally had a manager and an arranger, or arrangers, that would make their recording a valuable commercial product. In the following chapters, the musicians presented faced the double challenge of both singing and performing a mariachi instrument, and being judged for both.

As a review of these women's profiles makes clear, music provided an important space for women to express their freedom and creativity, *as women*, in this ever-transforming and newly-globalized world. This does not imply that women did not suffer oppression —such as the amount they were paid or the possibly adverse conditions under which they had to perform— but rather that they subverted gender essentialisms in Mexican popular music. Lucha Reyes opposed conforming to the Mexican female ideal in performing songs like "La Tequilera," which [tell us what it is about], and ultimately defined and embodied the *bravío* performance style for women; Sofía Álvarez sang *coplas* featuring women's independence from men in the film *Si Me Han de Matar Mañana*; Guadalupe *La Chinaca* gave Mariachi Marmolejo the place they deserved on her stage; Irma Vila gave fame to the song "Cielito Lindo," which traveled the world in her celebrated film *Canta y No Llores*; Lydia Mendoza denounced her evil man in "Mal Hombre"; Chavela Vargas added a new layer of meaning in "Pónme la Mano Aquí Macorina" (Put Your Hand On Me Here Macorina); Manolita Arriola questioned a man's valor in her song "El

Valiente"; Amalia Mendoza created weeping singing techniques to express agony and grief; Matilde Sánchez *La Torcacita* defended her musicality by singing diverse musical genres; Lola Beltrán became the first female popular music singer to perform at the renowned Palacio de Bellas Artes and in Paris; and Lucha Villa defied the essentialist view that female vocal timbre must necessarily be high-pitched.

The duos and trios offered a different kind of repertory for mariachi groups with two or more women. For example, in describing his first performance in Guadalajara, ethnomusicologist Russell Rodríguez recalls that the group had two women trumpet players, sisters, who also sang: "two sisters also sang and had certain songs well developed as duets, which signaled an influence of the duets such as Las Hermanas Huerta or Las Hermanas Padilla" (Rodríguez 2006:138).

#### *a. Contemporary singers*

Other women of this era cannot be dismissed, for they too deserve their biographies to enter a more profound study on women singers of this era. María de Los Ángeles Loya *La Consentida*, Rosita Arenas, Flor Silvestre, Enriqueta Jiménez as *La Prieta Linda*, Chayito Valdez, Rosita Quintana, Irma Serrano, and María de Lourdes were all talented singers and actresses of the Golden Era (1936-1969).<sup>85</sup> A more in-depth musical study of these singer-actresses that could adequately capture and analyze their life and works is needed. In addition to these soloists, certain duets and trios beyond the ones I listed above are also worth mentioning.

In 1987, American pop star Linda Ronstadt recorded *Canciones de Mi Padre* (My Father's Songs) with Asylum/WEA records. The album is influenced by a homonymous booklet

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<sup>85</sup> Their biographies were not presented in this section because the information I was able to obtain is incomplete and would require archival and ethnographic research for each person, which is not the main focus of this dissertation.

published by Linda Ronstadt's aunt in 1946. The title draws upon the idea that, although a father's songs are not really one's own, they continue to have a special signification. Under the production and musical direction by Rubén Fuentes, the musical pieces were carefully selected, transposed to the best key for her, with original arrangements, and recorded with the best musicians. Although a mariachi ensemble accompanies Linda Ronstadt in this album, additional instruments were added, which include a flute, harmonica, tuba, and percussion. Not only did this album contribute to her career as an American pop star, it bestowed on mariachi music the prestige it had gained and later lost. Many of her songs now form part of the canon of pieces that women in mariachi music sing. In addition to Linda Ronstadt, other recent singers who have influenced women mariachi musicians are Rocío Dúrcal (1970-2006), Estella Nuñez (b. 1949), Aida Cuevas (b. 1963), and Eugenia León.

Trío Ellas are three talented women who, having had an important experience as mariachi musicians in both mixed gender and all-female groups, later decided to form this trio, both out of necessity (it was easier to get work during the recession) and out of their own creativity. The trio is formed by Suemy González on the violin, Nelly Cortez on the guitarrón, and Stephanie Amaro de Abad on the guitar. Their music is greatly influenced by their promising experiences as musicians in diverse musical ensembles and in 2012, the trio was nominate for a Latin Grammy.

#### *b. Women creators*

Women associated with the mariachi tradition have not only been talented singers; many are also composers and songwriters. Those who formally studied music at conservatories and left lasting pieces performed by mariachi ensembles are María Grever (1894-1951), Consuelo Velázquez (1916-2005), and Marcela Galván Gortés (b. 1934). At the age of 18, María Grever composed her first song, "A Una Ola" (For One Wave), which sold over three million copies

(Telgen and Kamp 1993:184-185). She is most famous for *Júrame* (1926), a piece that requires extraordinary vocal technique and has become popular in the mariachi repertoire. Grever left us with a legacy of over 800 songs, most of them boleros. Consuelo Velázquez, better known as Consuelito Velázquez, created the internationally renowned *Bésame Mucho* (1940s), which has been adapted to many different musical styles and genres, and in some cases, translated to various languages. Marcela Galván Cortés, in addition to love ballads, also wrote songs that contest men's infidelity and express woman's suffering, such as *Filosofía Barata* (Cheap Philosophy), *No Perdono* (I Don't Forgive), and *Voy Bebiéndome Mi Llanto* (I'm Drinking My Pain). A singing tradition for women mariachi musicians

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*Ranchera* music scholars like to focus on the husky aggressive aspects of some of these female singers. Interestingly, those women who have received the most fame are said to have "masculinized" their singing styles through the *bravío* singing style. The women who had a higher-pitched vocal timbre and perhaps a thinner "feminine" voice did not achieve much more than having a few phrases written about them in some books. While many scholars tend to focus on particular musical categories, such the *canCIÓN ranchera* or *bravía* singers, these categories are fluid, and most singers never limit themselves to one of these. Most of these *ranchera* singers also sang *huapangos*, *sones*, and ballads because many singers of and after the Golden Era did not limit their performances to specific musical genres.

The women of the first decades in the twentieth century have left lasting cultural and musical influences —conscious and unconscious— in mariachi music. The biographies

presented in this chapter are intended to emphasize the dimension of their contributions to singing styles and techniques, which paved the road for future woman mariachi musicians in Mexico and abroad. These women singers not only introduced a female *ranchera* identity to mariachi music,<sup>86</sup> they also popularized and made available musical arrangements for the female voice in the mariachi repertoire.

The solo, duo and trio singers were supported by the commercialized recording and film industry. In many ways, they were protected by their musical agents and arrangers because the objective, in the end, was to sell a product. It cannot be argued that these women singers were written out of history, for more research would reveal their influence on the recording industry based on their sales. Many of their commercial recordings may not be for sale in local music stores on online anymore, but they may be available in archives. The difference between these women singers and women mariachi musicians is that the latter did not have the opportunity to become as immortalized in commercial recordings, as did the soloists, and it is in this way that I suggest they were occluded from history.

The women presented in this chapter have indeed earned a significant place as singers in Mexican popular music history and have been important in the making of mariachi music. Many composers of the time wrote pieces specifically for these female popular artists to sing as they defined and struggled against repertoire, singing styles, and keys, thus laying the foundation for the changing attitudes regarding their place in public spaces, such as national radio programs and films that were disseminated to the most remote parts of the world. Furthermore, these singers

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<sup>86</sup> A *ranchero* identity is the popularization of the Mexican horseman by Mexican films. During the Golden Era of Mexican film, while men dressed in their *charro* jacket, fitted pants with silver lining, and a large brimmed hat, women were portrayed as mothers, wives, or lovers.

were accompanied, for the most part, by important mariachi ensembles. Their extraordinary musical legacies illustrate why these women left an important mark on the generation of female singers who followed and why they became important musical and cultural icons.

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## Chapter Four: The emergence of all-female mariachi ensembles in Mexico

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*While a full study on female mariachi [musicians] is yet to be done, their participation may be evidence of a new perspective which focuses on musical ability, rather than gender, as the criterion for becoming a mariachi musician.*

Olga Nájera-Ramírez, "Engendering Nationalism" (1994)

The previous chapter illustrated how gender is constructed, judged, and performed. It focused on woman *ranchera* singers who have been influential in mariachi music performance, whether they have received the recognition they deserve or not. This chapter examines existing conceptions of early woman mariachi musicians, the known and unknown legacy they have left, and presents profiles of some of the most prominent contemporary all-female ensembles. It illustrates how, in telling their stories, women have overcome conventions concerning the manner in which they are perceived and how they perceive themselves.

As I interviewed women performers from previous generations, they opened up to me by sharing their memories and narrating their truths, which in some ways produced in them a kind of catharsis. Towards the end of our first interview in 2007, I remember Hilda López Soto sighing, asking me whether I enjoyed the experiences and photographs she shared with me. I was in awe of her story. She added that she had hoped her pictures and stories were what I had anticipated for my project. As I told her six years ago, and what I would like readers to know, is that neither two nor 200 mini DVs could adequately capture the lives of these women.

Throughout the past six years, as I have pieced together their individual careers, I have found that the same event can be remembered differently by different participants, and I have done my best to represent all viewpoints, although my efforts will never be sufficient. All the dates presented below are based on newspaper clippings and each woman's memories. Some are



determined from when certain women got married or when their children were born, and these do not always coincide with others who also performed in the same group. Therefore, the dates that follow cannot be absolute. Memory is not always faithful; in fact, it can often be unreliable. But while oral histories cannot unveil absolute truth, neither can written histories. The following is no exception.

### **1. The social context**

Considering that in Mexico it has been less than sixty years since women first had the right to vote in national elections and stand in local elections, women still have a large task ahead. Gender inequality and discrimination are very real social facts that, for the most part, go unnoticed or are purposefully ignored. Gender difference is physiological, ideological, and psychological, and it has led to social definitions of femaleness and maleness. The issue of gender arises not only when we ask whether women have the capability to perform mariachi music at a given level. It also involves the *idea* of a woman among a group of men, about performing one's gender both on and off the stage, about negotiating or obliterating gender stereotypes, and about the roles musicians play in the private and public sector. Why then has women's mariachi performance been treated as less legitimate and less authoritative? What happens when legitimacy and authority is associated exclusively with masculinity? If audiences associate authentic mariachi music with the legitimating narrative that privileges male voices, male keys, and a masculine image, what then happens with women who try to assert their place in this tradition?

*a. Claims about the "inclusion" of women*

The idea of women mariachi musicians has been presented by the media as a kind of novelty that occurred towards the end of the twentieth century. With the recent discoveries of all-female ensembles and women mariachi musicians that predate some of the "firsts," questions arise concerning how women gained access to this male-centered tradition. What were the social contexts that "allowed" women to enter this tradition? Are these social contexts different in Mexico and the United States, or even other parts of the world? Does the growing presence of women mariachi musicians impact ideologies that conform a sense of authenticity in this tradition?

In attempting to answer some of these questions, scholars and women mariachi musicians themselves have delved into oral histories, providing some answers that move us closer each time to an understanding of the obvious facts and not-so-obvious ideological condition in the transmission of this musical tradition. Until now, three claims have been proposed concerning women's access to performing mariachi music: (1) that women are taught a mariachi instrument by their father, or a father figure, (2) that they learn this music when they join an all-female ensemble, and (3) that new discoveries of women mariachi musicians change idea of the "first" as a pioneer.

The first claim suggests that women learn a mariachi instrument from their father, or from a father figure. Furthermore, it suggests that the social context in Mexico and in the United States differs in such a way that in the former, they learn to play their instrument(s) from their fathers, whereas in the latter, the "inclusion of women in this traditionally male-dominated genre [is] an unexpected outcome of the mariachi curriculum in the [American] school system" (Pérez 2002:145). Pérez's claim that women in the United States were introduced to the mariachi

tradition through the education system is valid, as this was the experience for her and many of her mariachi colleagues. In the United States, additional contexts have emerged that have also provided access to more women: mariachi festivals and workshops (L. Salazar 2011).

In an alternative viewpoint, concerning the inclusion of women in mariachi music in Mexico is presented by Canadian anthropologist Mary-Lee Mulholland, who argues that:

Unlike their male counterparts, female mariachis [musicians] generally do not start playing mariachi music until they are in their teens, learning how to play instruments and mariachi music at school from their teachers. Conversely, male mariachis generally learn to play an instrument as children, five or six years old, from a male relative. . . . Even if a woman comes from a mariachi family, they do not learn from their fathers, uncles or brothers as part of the tradition, but "choose to become musicians when they are older.

(Mulholland 2007a:244-245)

Her observations during her field research in Mexico included age differences between young women and men, also suggesting that schools are an important place to gain access to mariachi music transmission. Moreover, she makes a distinction about whether young women learn within the family or not, noting that most of the young women she observed did not learn from their fathers. She then presents the "exception": Susana (pseudonym), a vihuela player who learned and played in her father's group, along with most of her siblings (ibid.:245).

In various conversations with violinist and mariachi educator Laura Sobrino, she suggested that a "women's mariachi movement" has existed in both the United States and Mexico, but that it has been different on each side of the border. According to Laura, the first women in Mexico were initiated into mariachi performance through their fathers, who were also musicians. In the United States, while most women have emerged from academic mariachi programs created the 1990s, we cannot ignore the women of the 1970s who never stepped inside an academic institution to learn mariachi music (Chapter Five).

While numerous women in Mexico learned from their fathers, some from the moment they could hold an instrument, others learned in non-formal schools, through private and group instruction. This leads us to the second claim: that, in Mexico, the first women mariachi performers entered the tradition upon joining all-female ensembles. On her website concerning the history of women in mariachi music, Laura Sobrino suggests that:

female participation in this traditionally male genre began in Mexico City with three all-female touring ensembles: Mariachi Las Coronelas, Mariachi Las Adelitas and Mariachi Michoacano (which later became Mariachi Estrellas de México). In the United States, the female mariachi movement began in the opposite way: individual female musicians joined traditionally all-male groups. The earliest known female mariachi musician was documented to have been performing by March of 1971.

(Sobrino 2003)

When Laura suggests that access to mariachi transmission for these women began with these early all-female ensembles, she is correct. The majority of the women who learned to play a mariachi instrument in these groups did so in order to perform with them. Many of them did not have family members who were mariachi musicians and who could transmit the music to them, as was generally the case with mariachi musicians. It is somewhat dangerous, however, to claim that women's participation in mariachi music in general began with these early all-female groups, for this would assume that no other women prior to them ever learned to play mariachi music. Yet, as this chapter hopes to illustrate, there were individual women who played this music since the late nineteenth century. While I cannot claim these were the only ones, or the first in Mexico, they do represent women who gained access to a tradition that only later became male-dominated, when it gained international recognition as a musical symbol of Mexico. These women include (but are surely not limited to) Doña Rosa Quirino from Nayarit (figure 4.1), an anonymous woman from Zacatecas (figure 4.2), and Carmen Moreno from Los Angeles (figure 4.3). In contrast to what the aforementioned authors have written, this chapter hopes to shed light

on the idea that women mariachi musicians in Mexico did not only begin learning with all-female groups. Furthermore, that 1971 is not the actual start date for individual woman mariachi musicians in the United States.

A third claim concerns the concept of the woman mariachi "pioneer." In 1994, when Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles first appeared on the United States mariachi scene, they were presented as America's First All-Female Mariachi. When they gained international recognition, Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías, from Guadalajara Jalisco, were quick to announce that *they* were the "Primer Mariachi Femenil en el Mundo" (First All-Female Mariachi Group in the World), having been founded in 1989. Despite evidence that has shown there were all-female mariachi ensembles in Mexico since at least the 1950s and in the United States since the 1970s, their websites continue to make this claim.<sup>87</sup>

In 1998, when vihuela player Raquel Juárez López (b. 1965), daughter of Isabel López (featured below), traveled to Guadalajara with her mariachi group to participate in the *Encuentro Internacional de Mariachi y Charrería* (International Encounter of Mariachi and Horsemanship), she was shocked that members of Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías continued to claim their group as the world's first all-female mariachi ensemble. Raquel questioned how they could continue to make this claim given that she joined the all-female Mariachi Las Alazanas in 1978 when she was 13 years old. Moreover, her mother Isabel had performed in all-female mariachi ensembles established during the 1950s.

Understanding women's participation in mariachi music, however, cannot be based solely on how women *learned* to perform their instrument, but on how they *made* this tradition their

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<sup>87</sup> The official website for Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles is <http://www.reynadelosangeles.com/index.html> and the one for Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías is <http://movil.lasperlitas.com.mx/quienes-somos.html> (both accessed on April 22, 2013).

own, despite ideological forces denying them a visible performing space. Women, too, have earned their place within this powerful medium of cultural expression. In summary, having access to the mariachi tradition may or may not always be a woman's choice. Those who have the option and opportunity to learn mariachi instruments and perform in mariachi ensembles have various reasons for choosing so. I have come across certain women who perform the music because of its cultural significance, others who are passionate about its sentiment, those who are drawn by audience's applause, others who cannot live without the social environment, and others yet who perform out of economic obligation. Regardless of their rationale, dominant gender ideologies are steeped in the dissemination of a stereotype, and women continually find themselves engaged in a struggle for recognition.

Women who have neither the option nor the opportunity to become mariachi music tradition bearers, but do have the desire and impetus to learn the music, face a serious challenge. In general, an educational program in local communities opens the transmission opportunity to many students who would otherwise not have that option; this includes women who do not have fathers or husbands to teach them. Another opportunity to transmit the knowledge has been presented by the growing all-female mariachi groups sprouting up all over Mexico, the United States, and other parts of the world.

*b. The memory of women in mariachi music*

Mariachi music, due to its exploitation in radio and film in the 1930s, quickly became an emblem of both Mexican nationalism and manliness. Scholars of mariachi music have implemented diverse strategies of legitimation based on historical documents, presented later in this chapter, which have been used to promote and defend ideologies. The influence of ideology

in the pursuit of mariachi's origins has adversely affected perceptions regarding women's contributions as historical actors within this musical tradition.

The historical accounts of women mariachi musicians are scarce, yet there have been some important efforts in Mexico to document women's participation in various genres of music. Some of the women known to have performed music since the late nineteenth century include: Doña Rosa Quirino, a woman mariachi from Nayarit (Jáuregui 2007a:18-19); Doña Mercedes Nava, a violinist from Pénjamo, Guanajuato, who performed with her husband José Sandoval, both Vicente T. Mendoza's informants (Anaya Monroy 1971); and Doña María de la Luz Ocampo, a composer and author of *corridos* from Nuevo Valle de Moreno, Guanajuato, (Razo Oliva 2010). While these women may not all be considered to have performed mariachi music, these are the few whose experiences have been registered in academic books. But what about those who never encountered a scholar or were simply ignored as a statistical anomaly?

*c. Early women mariachi musicians*

Let us begin with three important women who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had the desire to play mariachi music: (1) Rosa Quirino (Nayarit); (2) an anonymous woman (Zacatecas); and (3) Carmen Moreno (Los Angeles). According to her daughter, Refugio Gómez, Doña Rosa Quirino (1891-1969), from La Escondida, Nayarit, learned to play violin around 1903, when she was 12 or 13 years old (Gómez, cited in Jáuregui 1987a:115). In addition to the violin, she also played the guitar, the vihuela, and the bajo sexto. When she was about 16 or 17 years old she gave birth to her daughter, but never married, and by 1920, she began playing with

a mariachi group led by Miguel Zanabria.<sup>88</sup> When Doña Rosa was not playing mariachi music, she worked as a carpenter and knew how to build wooden beds, shelves, tables, picture frames, and boxes.

In an interview conducted by Jesús Jáuregui, during his fieldwork in Nayarit, from 1982-1983, a man by the name of Sabás Alonso recalls Rosa Quirino:

I got to play with Rosa in La Escondida, she knew [how to play] *minuetes* and dance music; she was a *mariachera* and played first violin. There haven't been any other women besides her who have played in a mariachi. . . She was about ten years older than me, and she had her own group, and directed it. She was everywhere, she was a *mariachera* by right: it was her destiny.

Me tocó tocar con Rosa en La Escondida, sabía minuetes y música de baile; era mariachera, tocaba violín primero. No ha habido más mujeres, nomás ella, que toquen en mariachi. . . Era como diez años mayor que yo, tenía su mariachi y ella lo dirigía. Ella andaba pa' donde quiera, era mariachera por derecho: ese era su destino.

(Alonso, cited in *ibid.* 1987a:115)

In his comments about Doña Rosa, he presents no negative judgments concerning her profession or her musical ability. In fact, he points out that she played first violin and directed her own group.

Another man who performed with her, Refugio Orozco, recalls that, she wasn't the only woman who played mariachi music in that area:

She was from La Escondida, and was the first woman mariachi musician. Then there was another, Simona Real, she was from Tepic and then went to Ahualulco. She hung around with men and carried a pistol. If they ever tried to come on to her, she would say: "Boys, we are working, and if one of you wants to get it, just stand up . . ." and she would pull out her pistol . . . She was well-respected . . . I don't remember if she was married or not. I liked her . . . but no one could approach her.

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<sup>88</sup> During this time, it was customary to refer to the rural mariachi groups by the name of their director. They did not have commercial names to go by.



Ella era de La Escondida, fue la primera mariachera, después salió otra, Simona Real, ésa era de por Tepic y se fue a Ahualulco. Andaba con los hombres y usaba pistola. Con ella no se podían pasar de listos, ella decía: "Muchachos, andamos trabajando y si alguno quiere, nada más párese. . ." y sacaba su pistola. . . La respetaban mucho. . . Yo no recuerdo si era casada o no. Ella me gustaba. . . pero no se le arrimaba nadie.

(Orozco, cited in Jáuregui 2007a:18).

Doña Rosa Quirino was considered a well-respected woman, despite the social stigma of never having been married. She chose to work as a mariachi musician, a profession that consisted in working many hours among men, and even engaged in social activities that were not lady-like.

I met her at a gig in Navarrete. She was a respectful woman: she dared to kill or be killed. She would get drunk; on that occasion in Navarrete, she got drunk and couldn't fulfill her commitment to play the *minuetes*, so they asked me to do it. I told them: "No, what if doña Rosa gets upset?" – "How can she get upset when she's that drunk?" When she reformed, I was playing and we became friends. Afterward, she would invite me to play with her. She's dead now.

Yo la conocí en una velada en Navarrete. Era una mujer respetuosa: se animaba a matar o a que la mataran. Se emborrachaba; en aquella ocasión en Navarrete, se emborrachó y ya no pudo cumplir su compromiso de tocar los minuetes. Entonces me pidieron a mí que tocara. Yo les dije: "No, y luego si se enoja doña Rosa". – "Qué se va a enojar, si está bien borracha." Ya cuando ella se reformó, yo estaba tocando y nos amistamos. Después me convidaba a que tocáramos juntos. Ella ya murió.

(Orozco, cited in Jáuregui 1987a:115).

Those who knew her respected her, and those that did not would suffer the consequences. On one occasion, a man named Juan Solís Mariles vividly recalled how, in 1944, when he was about six years old, Doña Rosa was performing in his hometown, Lo de Lamedo, in the state of Nayarit. He would never forget when one man named Filiberto Aguayo, known for being brave, *macho*, and abusive, tried to embrace her by force, so she took out a dagger to defend herself. When she finally got him on the floor, she yelled:

Look, son of a —, just because you see that I'm a woman . . . I'll crawl on my knees before a man I desire, but he will never take me by force!

Mira, hijo de la —, no porque veas que soy mujer. . . yo con el que quiero, hasta me le arrastro, ¡pero a güevo [sic] no!

(Solís, cited in Jáuregui 2007a:19-20)

In figure 4.1, Doña Rosa Quirino is photographed at the age of 77, rehearsing for the *Danza de Arco*, around 1968 (Jáuregui: 2007:19). According to a musician named Daniel Pulido, it is possible Doña Rosa herself constructed the violin she is playing (Pulido, cited in Jáuregui 1987a:115). As the photograph depicts, she generally wore sandals, a crossed shawl, a long skirt or dress, and braided hair.



Figure 4.1: Doña Rosa Quirino towards the end of her life in Puga, Tepic, Nayarit (c. 1968).

Although Doña Rosa did not leave behind any testimony, the images and the interviews with her daughter and other people who knew her provide us with a vivid representation of her experiences performing this music.

We learn about the second woman in this list from an account in 1926, written by Mexican journalist Manuel Horta, about a mariachi group in Jerez, Zacatecas, in which this woman sang the second voice and played the triangle (figure 4.2). This Zacatecan woman, whose name we may never know, is described by Horta:

The woman with the triangle would close her eyes to sing. A wide *sombrero* with a blue ribbon darkened her ashen face. She had been a soldier in the toughest battles and she suffered in silence, wondering aimlessly over thorny paths . . . She wouldn't protest, speak, or question. She'd sing the second voice part, and with metronomic perfection, tap out on a triangle the monotone of a popular tune. When she'd hear the people's shouts and applause, she'd slowly opens her opaque eyes and light a hand-rolled cigarette. To hide her embarrassment, she'd stick her chin to her boney chest and pull tightly on her chinstrap.

La mujer del triángulo cierra los ojos para cantar. El sombrero amplio con listón azul le ensombrece el rostro ceniciento. Ha sido soldadera en los combates más rudos, ha sufrido en silencio largas noches de duelo y pasa por los caminos espinosos como una pena errante . . . No protesta, no habla, no consulta. Canta en segunda y como un metrónomo perfecto va marcando en el triángulo la monotonía del aire popular. Cuando escucha los aplausos y los gritos del gentío, abre poco a poco los ojos opacos y prende también su cigarrillo de hoja. Para ocultar la vergüenza, clava la barbilla en el pecho huesudo y se amarra con fuerza el barboquejo.

(Horta 1926)

Horta revealed the following historical facts: the mariachi ensemble in question is from Zacatecas, the woman performed on triangle with this group, she did not sing the lead vocals in that song, and she is implicitly considered a member of this group. That this writer did not comment on this as a novelty changes the way we should reflect upon the history of women

mariachi musicians. Figure 4.2 is the illustration that was published in Horta's original article, "La Tristeza del Mariachi" (The Sadness of the Mariachi).



Figure 4.2: Image that accompanied Manuel Horta's article "La Tristeza del Mariachi" (1926).

The description offered by Manuel Horta at the turn of the twentieth century demonstrates that this woman was not the only a singer, but that she sang the second voice, and played an instrument. This means she was considered a performing member of the ensemble, at the same level as her fellow musicians. When a woman is the solo singer, she is treated differently because the mariachi ensemble is there to accompany her in the key she needs in order to be the vocal soloist. That this woman was singing the second voice, and playing an instrument, and that the writer did not comment on this as a novelty, changes the way we should reflect upon the role of women mariachi musicians.

The next item of concern is the instrument she played: the triangle. Writers of the day were careful to describe the instruments used when these mariachi groups came to the nation's

capital to perform. Thus it is known that during this time the triangle was not an instrument common to those ensembles that performed in Mexico City. Yet in the Western region of Mexico, which includes Colima, Guerrero, Jalisco, Nayarit, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and other states, mariachi groups performed with a variety of instruments that included the triangle, tortoise shells, and other percussive instruments. These were not included, however, in the mariachi instrumentation that became standardized after the 1930s.

The third woman, Carmen Moreno (1910-1996), was born in Socorro, a suburb of El Paso, Texas, four years after her family had left the state of Chihuahua (interview with Carmencristina Moreno, 2013). Her two brothers, who formed the duo Los Hermanos Alvarado, performed locally and recorded for OKEH records in 1926. Carmen also had a musical inclination and was always around music, but she was only allowed to sing with the local church choir. They were migrant farm workers who followed the sugar beet harvest from Colorado to Montana. In 1936, after the family had resettled back in El Paso, she and her sister moved to Los Angeles, California, in search of work. It was in Hermosa Beach where she met Luis Moreno singing on a stage.<sup>89</sup> According to her daughter, Carmencristina Moreno, Carmen's family insisted that she sing on stage, and, from that moment, Luis fell in love with Carmen and her voice. They were married a year later in 1937. Since Luis was performing on radio shows, he invited her as a guest singer. "She was an amazing singer," recalled Carmencristina, adding, "with a beautiful pure voice!" On one occasion, two guitarists did not show up to perform on the

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<sup>89</sup> In Daniel Sheehy's *Mariachi Music in America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, he references a mariachi group directed by Luis M. Moreno, Carmen Moreno's husband, that accompanied Lucha Reyes at the Mason Theatre in Los Angeles that year (Sheehy 2006:48). Luis M. Moreno (1899-1974) was born in Rancho de los Ureña, South West of Guadalajara, Jalisco. His father passed away a few months before he was born, followed by his mother when he was 8 years old. Out of necessity, by the age of 13, he learned to play violin in a mariachi group. After fighting in the Mexican Revolution, he migrated to the United States in 1919.

live radio show. The show had to continue, so they fulfilled that morning's contract with Luis on guitar and Carmen singing. This ultimately made Carmen nervous, so she asked Luis to teach her play the guitar so that they would never find themselves in that situation again. He did. "She was *de pocas pulgas* (did not have patience to support petty nonsense)," says Carmencristina about her mother. Don Luis taught her the basics, she rehearsed them, and the next morning, Carmen was following her husband's lead on the radio show playing the guitar. Thus was born the famed Duetto Los Moreno, a professional and well-known singing duo. "And that's how she learned how to play guitar," Carmencristina affirms proudly.<sup>90</sup>

They were popular in the South West, although they never sang in Mexico. On many occasions, theater owner and film distributor Francisco Fouce Sr. (1899-1962) asked Don Luis to organize mariachi groups to accompany stars who would perform at his local theaters. One of these was Lucha Reyes.<sup>91</sup> In addition to organizing his own groups for these tours, Luis also performed with other mariachis groups. Carmen Moreno played guitar in the groups that her husband organized, but she would not play with other ensembles. "It was often," recalled Carmencristina, that "whenever there was a need to take a guitarist, my father would hire her, if he was in charge." In figure 4.3, Carmen Moreno is playing the guitar with Mariachi Moreno, a group formed by her husband to accompany Lucha Reyes in Los Angeles, California. Carmen

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<sup>90</sup> Carmencristina followed her parents' footsteps and is also a performer and songwriter. She is the third recipient of the NEA award and the 2003 Bess Lomax Hawes award recipient. She has published a book, *My Father and the Mexican Revolution*, which comes with a compact disk entitled "Canciones de la Revolución Mexicana Que Mi Papá Me Enseñó."

<sup>91</sup> Their relationship with Lucha Reyes was so close that she became a *madrina* when they got married. She was married to Gabriel Navarro at that time.

Moreno is in the center, playing guitar, and Luis Moreno is standing to her left, playing the vihuela.<sup>92</sup>



Figure 4.3: Mariachi Moreno accompanying Lucha Reyes in 1941.

As a woman musician who also played mariachi music since at least 1941, Carmen Moreno, too, deserves credit as an early woman pioneer of mariachi. Carmencristina fondly recalls that her father would often say, "If it was not for my wife, I would not have achieved the success I did." In fact, he did not begin composing songs until they began working together as a duo. "Although my mother was not a 'modern mariachera for hire,' as some women are today," added Carmencristina, "my mother was a truly musical woman, exercising her craft within the safe confines of a respectable marriage. That's how it was done in those days." Carmen Moreno never appeared officially as a co-author in her husband's recordings, but she contributed greatly to his

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<sup>92</sup> Used with permission from the archive of El Dueto Los Moreno and Carmencristina Moreno.

compositions, becoming unofficially a co-writer in all of these songs (interview with Carmencristina Moreno).

As the aforementioned cases illustrate, due to the flow of individuals like Luis Moreno over the U.S.-Mexican border, and prior to the differing histories of its institutionalization, the mariachi tradition in the U.S. and Mexico has shared many features during these early years. Doña Rosa Quirino, the anonymous Zacatecan woman, and Carmen Moreno are three documented cases that demonstrate women have performed mariachi music during the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, mariachi historian Jonathan Clark recalls that Don José Sosa, former member of Mariachi Chapala (a precursor to Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano), recounted how a young woman performed with the mariachi group he and his brothers had in the 1930s at Lake Chapala. He claimed that she cut her hair short and performed in men's trousers to conceal her gender. These women performed alongside men at about the same time as this music was becoming a national musical symbol through the film industry, but before it was pronounced a male-dominated tradition and before any all-female mariachi ensemble was founded. How many more cases like these might be lost in unrecorded history in either country?

## **2. Traveling caravans and the emergence of all-female mariachi ensembles**

In Mexico City, three all-female mariachi ensembles emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, at a time when traveling theaters were gaining popularity. These caravans offered a traveling revue theater throughout Mexico that served as an important medium for promotion of live popular music. Had it not been for these caravans, audiences throughout the nation would never have had the opportunity to enjoy their favorite artists performing live at such low costs. A number of beer and cigarette companies sponsored these revue theaters in order to sell their products in every nook and cranny of the nation. Many caravans since the 1920s were sponsored



by the tobacco companies El Águila and El Buen Tono (which officially sponsored the first commercial radio station XEB) and the beer companies Corona and Moctezuma.

In her chapter, "Del Micrófono al Aire, Trayectoria de Quimeras: Lupita García (1930-1950)," feminist anthropologist Elsa Muñiz describes the life of singer Lupita García, noting that by 1939 the caravans became an important place for women to obtain artistic work:

Lupita was a 16-year old beautiful girl with Francisco [her older brother] became ill. They say his resentful girlfriend had poisoned him, and in his condition, he could not contribute to the household; therefore the women had to work as well. Josefina and Guadalupe were contracted to make radio commercials and also formed a duet that would take them on tour in the northern part of the country, the *Bajío* (lowlands), and the Pacific coast in the artistic caravans organized by the cigarette company El Águila, S.A. . . . It was 1939. . . These caravans reached many corners of the territory in the states of the Pacific coast and in the north all the way up to the U.S. border. Lupe and Josefina participated as the Hermanas Cornejo in programs in which they shared the stage with the caravan's stars, orchestras, dancers, and comics.

Lupita era una bella muchacha de 16 años cuando Francisco [su hermano mayor] enfermó. Decían que una novia resentida lo había envenado, y en su estado, no podía aportar a la casa; así que las mujeres tuvieron que trabajar también. A Josefina y a Guadalupe las contrataron entonces para hacer comerciales en la radio y al mismo tiempo formaron un dueto que las llevaría a realizar giras por el norte del país, el Bajío y la costa del Pacífico en las caravanas artísticas organizadas por la Compañía Cigarrera El Águila, S.A. . . . Corría el año de 1939. . . Las caravanas organizadas por la compañía cigarrera llegaban a muchos rincones de la provincia en los estados de la costa del Pacífico y en los norteros hasta la frontera con Estados Unidos. Lupe y Josefina participaban como las Hermanas Cornejo en programas en los que compartían créditos con las estrellas de la caravana, orquestas, bailarina y cómicos.

(Muñiz 2008:223)

The Corona Caravan was important because, as Guillermo Chao Ebergényi indicates in the title of his book *La Caravana Corona, Cuna del Espectáculo en México* (The Corona Caravan, the Cradle of Entertainment in Mexico), it became the true catalyst of popular

entertainment in Mexico (Chao Ebergenyi 1995).<sup>93</sup> The Corona Caravan, conceived by entertainment entrepreneur Guillermo Vallejo and his wife Martha Badager, operated for 26 years, from 1956 to 1982. With the crew of traveling artists, which included mariachi ensembles, trios, rock bands, *ranchera* and ballad singers, tropical groups, showgirls, magicians, and comedians, the caravan also included advertisers, designers, props, cooks, casinos, and bars—all with the aim, of course, to promote and sell Corona beer.

In this context, the earliest known all-female mariachi ensembles were born: Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Las Coronelas, and Mariachi Estrellas de México. Let us recall that mariachi music is an oral tradition historically transmitted from generation to generation, and typically from father to son. The original purpose for having mariachi ensembles in the various regions mariachi music originates was to continue, through its musicians, a centuries-long musical tradition. With the caravans, the creation of these all-female mariachi groups modified and even interrupted this transmission process in the sense that, with entertainment spectacles in the form of traveling theaters, all-female ensembles were created for the purpose of offering popular entertainment all over Mexico in order to sell tobacco and/or beer.

While some of the musicians who formed part of the all-female mariachi ensembles presented below did come from families that performed mariachi music, and therefore consciously continued the tradition, most of these young women were introduced to mariachi music for the first time in their lives. In this sense, the caravans gave rise to these all-female groups, and consequently, when the caravans ended, so did the *raison d'être* for these groups' existence, so they disbanded. Some of the women married and left the entertainment scene for

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<sup>93</sup> See Guillermo Chao Ebergenyi, *La Caravana Corona, Cuna del Espectáculo en México* (México D.F.: Corona, Edición Limitada, 1995).

good; others, however, remained mariachi musicians and entered the male-dominated mariachi performance scene to continue the tradition, independent of the caravans.

This was entertainment without precedent in Mexico. Artists performing in the caravans of that period had national exposure that today's artists can attain only through the media. These caravans offered audiences the opportunity to enjoy the presence of Mexico's finest popular artists, among them Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, but also Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Las Coronelas, and Mariachi Estrellas de México.

The original design of its advertising posters became emblematic of the traveling artistic caravan. The poster in figure 4.4 features the all-female Mariachi Las Alteñitas and their director Isabel López, "La Rancherita Hidalguense," as a soloist singer and violinist (group and individual biographies presented below). The publicity title reads: Corona Extra presenta la imponente caravana de estrellas mundiales!!" (Corona Extra presents the grand caravan of world-class stars!!).



Figure 4.4: Corona Caravan publicity, featuring Isabel López's Mariachi Las Alteñitas in the mid 1970s.

Individual entrepreneurs also promoted many of the Mexican artists of these traveling caravans abroad. Arnulfo "El Gordo" Delgado, for one, facilitated performances in high-profile venues.<sup>94</sup> He became an important catalyst for these artists' careers, gaining them access to some of the best theaters abroad, such as the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles, and other high-profile venues. He promoted a wide range of popular artists, such as José José, Vicente Fernández, Banda El Recodo, Juan Gabriel, Los Tres Ases, Los Hermanos Záizar, Luis Aguilar, Las Hermanas Huerta, Rosenda Bernal, Lucha Villa, Julio Jaramillo, and so on.

These caravans ceased to operate in the very early 1980s, in part due to the success of television entertainment, in which contemporary mass media provided an alternate way for people to enjoy their favorite artists from the comfort of their home, whether by watching televised live concerts, artists featured on a popular music shows, or in popular musical videos.<sup>95</sup> Today, we no longer have the demand for the live concerts of the type once offered by the traveling caravans, and thus it is virtually impossible to have one's favorite artist visit a small town in, say, the outskirts of Puruándiro, Michoacán, at an affordable price. In fact, watching one's favorite artists live in concert today is more expensive than going to watch an opera or a concert by a symphony orchestra.

While the majority of the women in Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Estrellas de México, and Mariachi Las Coronelas did not have fathers who also performed mariachi music, there were some who had long successful careers because their fathers did teach them, including Isabel and Hilda López; Malena Berrones; and Lupe Villa. This was not the case of daughters wanting to

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<sup>94</sup> Arnulfo Delgado was the name he used on his Green Card when he lived in California. His real name is José Isabel Valdivia.

<sup>95</sup> The irony, however, is that most of this "live performance" is now playback.

break away from tradition in order to express their musical voices, but rather young girls who wanted to play mariachi music so that they could perform it all over Mexico and beyond. These all-female mariachi ensembles provided a protected space for these young women to perform this music, for they were always under direct supervision, whether rehearsing or performing. They were always chaperoned by the musical director who acted as a father-figure, always protecting their honor. It was an important moment for popular artists and for these young women as well, because it offered them a space to perform live on television shows, radio programs, and in regional festivals throughout the nation. The parents of these young women might not have otherwise allowed them to perform mariachi music, for most of their parents had no clue what it was like to play in a mariachi group at, say, Plaza Garibaldi.<sup>96</sup>

These all-female mariachi ensembles were professionally organized groups, with fixed rehearsals and clear goals: to play mariachi music live all throughout Mexico. In various personal interviews with the women who survive, many shared how they traveled by plane, train, bus, boat, bicycle, carriage, and even by burro. The majority of these women's parents, even if they objected at first, were finally pleased that their daughters were obtaining such a high level of recognition in Mexico and abroad. This income also helped them support their families. It was not their fathers who forced them to stop performing, but the men whom these young women would later marry. Interestingly, all three of these groups had male musical directors who unconditionally supported the idea of women performing mariachi music.

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<sup>96</sup> Plaza Garibaldi is an emblematic venue for mariachi musicians. The first restaurant to have mariachi musicians perform for its clients, Salón Tenampa, was founded in this plaza. What gives the plaza fame, however, is that it is the meeting place for a large number of mariachi musicians in search for an evening's work. Over the years, it has earned a bad reputation for being unsafe place of illicit dealings. The city has recently renovated the plaza in an attempt to overcome and correct these negative stereotypes.

Figure 4.5 illustrates an image of an unidentified all-female mariachi group featured in the *Cancionero del Recuerdo* (Ayala 1958), from the Carmencristina Moreno Collection. The sub-header reads:

*Ranchera* music's influence has come to captivate our women, who have also formed their own groups and have traveled abroad carrying the banner of the national folklore.

La influencia de la música ranchera ha llegado a cautivar a nuestras mujeres, quienes también han formado sus grupos y han recorrido el extranjero portando del estandarte del folklore nacional.

(Ayala 1958)



Figure 4.5: Image of an all-female mariachi ensemble from the *Cancionero del Recuerdo* (1958).

The all-female groups of the caravans promoted the idea that women could also play mariachi music, and since then, they also appeared in films during the Golden Era of Mexican film and radio (c. 1936-1969), although not as often. In these films, some of the women were actresses dressed as woman mariachi musicians doing playback with a mariachi instrument, with a few

real musicians in the following films: *Escuela de Música* (1955); *Aquí están los Aguilares* (1956); *Las Señoritas Vivanco* (1959); and *El Mariachi Canta* (1963). Figure 4.6 contains four different posters from the film *Escuela de Música* (1955), which feature an all-female mariachi ensemble, from the Jonathan Clark Collection. Some of the women in these groups were actors and others were musicians who participated in the early all-female mariachi groups of the 1950s (described below).



Figure 4.6: Poster from the film *Escuela de Música* (1955)

Below I will introduce women who deserve honor as forerunners in the field. Their life stories are an essential foundation for this dissertation. Unlike the social realities of the present,

their past is fixed, and their testimonies are what have offered a new meaning to their present. Their own interpretation of their past, coupled with my intention to represent it as they wish, is foundational to this chapter. I will begin by introducing notable women who became directors of their own all-female mariachi ensembles.

*a. Mariachi Las Adelitas (c. 1948 - ? ) de Adela Chávez*

In the early 1950s, Adela Chávez and her husband Víctor Angulo, who was also a musician in Agustín Lara's orchestra. Together formed the group that came to be known as Adelita y su Mariachi Femenil (sometimes without the "Femenil"), Adelita y su Mariachi de Muchachas, and Mariachi Las Adelitas. Don Víctor had previous experience working an all-female ensemble as the director of La Sonora Femenil, a group of women who performed tropical music. He approached his brother and asked if his nieces if they could join the all-female mariachi group. One of his nieces was Yolanda Guadalupe Dávila, a former bass player for the all-female rock band Las 4YT.

Figure 4.7 is are posters promoting Adelita y Su Mariachi de Muchachas in California, in approximately 1948. The first is social event in Watsonville, and the second is for Mexican Independence Day festivities in Oakland, from the Jonathan Clark Collection. Adela Chávez is the trumpet player photographed alone in the upper right hand corner, as well as with her group.





Figure 4.7: Promotional posters featuring Adelita y su Mariachi de Muchachas (c. 1948).

The photograph that appears in figure 4.8 is Mariachi Las Adelitas, with Adela standing in the center. Identified in the photograph are Margarita Angulo Pallota, standing in the second row, second from the left with the trumpet, and Francis Angulo, same row, standing on the right with the vihuela. They are wearing feminine regional dresses as opposed to the standard *traje de charro* used by mariachi groups.



Figure 4.8: Mariachi Las Adelitas de Adela Chávez, wearing regional dresses.

In figure 4.9, Mariachi Las Adelitas is wearing the standard A-line *traje de charro* for women, as opposed for the regional dresses.



Figure 4.9: Mariachi Las Adelitas de Adela Chávez, with a *traje de charro*.

When mariachi historian Jonathan Clark met Víctor Angulo in the early 1980s, he had restarted his sonora femenil after Mariachi Las Adelitas disbanded in the early 1970s. They performed in a nightclub around the corner from Plaza Garibaldi, on Calle República de Ecuador, near the Callejón de San Camilito. Don Víctor said he had lost touch with Adela Chávez years back, but he thought she lived in northern Mexico with her husband.

*b. Mariachi Estrellas de México (c. 1951-197?) de Lupita Morales (1936-2005)*

Guadalupe "Lupita" Morales Ayala was born in Michoacán on December 12, 1936, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She founded the all-female Mariachi Michoacano (c. 1951) and a few years later, renamed it Mariachi Estrellas de México.<sup>97</sup> As the musical director, Lupita Morales played all the mariachi instruments and played a major role in deciding what repertoire they were going to play and how they were going to play it. Her father, Jesús Morales, was in charge of the contracts, the logistics, and protecting each woman's honor.

Figure 4.10 is a photograph of Mariachi Michoacano in 1954, from Hilda López's personal collection. The back of the photo reads: "Recuerdo del día 17 de mayo de 1954, el día del maestro" (Memory of May 17, 1954, Teacher's Day). In the top row are: Estela, Lupita Morales, Raquel, (unidentified woman), Lupe Contreras, and Felisa González (biographical narrative shared below). Bottom row: Yolanda Villareal, (unidentified woman), and Isabel López (biographical narrative shared below).

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<sup>97</sup> I will refer to this group as Mariachi Estrellas de México for the rest of this dissertation.



Figure 4.10: Mariachi Michoacano de Lupita Morales (1954).

The members of Mariachi Estrellas de México learned their music by ear, listening to recordings by groups like Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán and Mariachi México de Pepe Villa. From these recordings they learned to perform many *sones*, *pasodobles*, *rancheras*, and *sones huastecos*. They also received important tutelage from the members of Mariachi México de Pepe Villa, although Lupita modified those arrangements so they would not be mere copies. In 1953, they made their first and only commercial recording: "El Tirador," a traditional *son*, available on the album *Que Viva El Mariachi, Vol. 3*, released by what is now Sony Music Entertainment Mexico, S.A. de C.V. (1953).<sup>98</sup> Figure 4.11 is a photograph of Mariachi Estrellas de México from Felisa González's personal collection. Lupita Morales is standing third from the left, holding the trumpet.

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<sup>98</sup> This piece later reappeared on the album *Mexicanísimo: Mariachis*, re-released as a compilation by Sony BMG Music Entertainment (México) S.A. de C.V. (1992).





Figure 4.11: Mariachi Estrellas de México.

Mariachi Estrellas de México toured throughout most of the United States. In South America, they traveled to Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and Uruguay. They traveled to Spain and toured Europe twice, in 1943 or 1944 and again in 1955. One of their longest Latin American tours started in 1961 and ended in 1963, because Mexican singer and actor Roberto G. Rivera wanted Mariachi Estrellas de México to accompany him throughout this tour, to promote his movies. Figure 4.12 is a studio photograph of Rivera with Mariachi Estrellas, in approximately 1961, from Felisa González's personal collection.



Figure 4.12: Mariachi Estrellas de México with actor-singer Roberto G. Rivera.

The tour began in Oaxaca, Belize, Guatemala, other parts of Central America, finally arriving in Ecuador. On the boat to Cuenca, a musician named María suffered health problems. When they arrived, her condition deteriorated until she passed away. According to interview accounts by Malena Berrones and Felisa González, María is buried in Cuenca, Ecuador. After an auspicious start to their tour, the passing of their *compañera* caused them much grief and sadness. By the time the group arrived in Argentina, most of their parents had begun worrying about their daughters and the majority returned to Mexico, Lupita Morales among them. Three of the women decided to stay in South America: Malena Berrones (violin); Josefina Correa (guitarrón); and Felisa González (vihuela). They continued their tour with Roberto G. Rivera and some Paraguayan musicians, heading straight to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where they stayed until their return to Mexico in 1965.

Apparently, upon their return, Don Jesús did not allow these three women to come back to the group, because he felt accountable that Malena had given birth to her first daughter during the trio's stay in Uruguay. He was so overprotective, recalled Felisa González during the conversations and interviews we engaged in, that he never let his own daughter Lupita get married, although she did decide to have two daughters during the time she was still directing Mariachi Estrellas de México. After a few years, Don Jesús got ill and did not want to continue representing the group. At this point, Mariachi Estrellas de México disbanded and Lupita Morales moved to Tijuana with her daughters. She passed away on April 17, 2005.

*c. Mariachi Las Coronelas (1955-1972) de Carlota Noriega (193?-1973)*

Actress and musician Carlota Noriega Márquez (193?-1973) founded Mariachi Las Coronelas with her husband, musical arranger and pianist Luis Martínez Cardona. Carlota was

born in Orizaba, Veracruz, and was raised in an artistic environment. With her sister, Josefina Noriega, Carlota formed a singing and acting duo known as Las Hermanas Noriega, and participated in local plays and various traveling theaters (de María y Campos 1941:172). In conversation and personal interviews with violinist Hilda López (biographical narrative shared below), she recalls that Carlota would tell of times with musician and arranger Luis Martínez Cardona rehearsed them during their short breaks from their many tours.

Upon the death of her sister, circa 1965, Carlota's acting career also ended. At this point, she decided to form an all-female mariachi group, naming it after the polka "Las Coronelas" (1952), by the well-known composer Bonifacio Collazo (1911-2006). After their theater debut, a performance sponsored by the comedy duet Las Kúkaras, they appeared on television shows and radio programs, in theaters and nightclubs, and toured throughout the nation.<sup>99</sup>

Figure 4.13 is a studio portrait of Mariachi Las Coronelas, from Hilda López Soto's personal collection. Sponsor Max Factor's *Las Estrellas y Usted* was a music talk show series created in 1957, hosted by Carlos Amador, Amalia Mendoza "La Tariácuri," and tenor Pedro Vargas. In this 1967 photograph, Lupe Villa (biographical narrative shared below) is singing to the camera and Carlota Noriega is third from the left, on the guitarrón.

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<sup>99</sup> Las Kúkaras were a comedy duet of Hortencia Clavijo and Josefina Holguín. When Holguín passed away, Lucha Palacios took her place. They played minor roles in a variety of Mexican films from the 1950s onward.



Figure 4.13: Mariachi Las Coronelas on Max Factor's *Las Estrellas y Usted* television series (1967).

Figure 4.14 is a photograph, also from Hilda López's personal collection, during a tour through Acapulco, Guerrero, posing with Mexican songwriter Cuco Sánchez. In the photograph are María de Jesús "Chuy" Lara, Hilda López, San Juana "Juanita" Lara, (unidentified man), Carlota Noriega, Cuco Sánchez, María de los Ángeles (Esquivel), Lola Contreras, Lupe Villa, and Cecilia Moya. Sitting in the front is La Paloma Tapatía.



Figure 4.14: Mariachi Las Coronelas with songwriter Cuco Sánchez in Acapulco, Guerrero.



Luis Martínez Cardona supported Carlota's innovative project and also rehearsed this newly established all-female mariachi ensemble. Hilda López remembers how Luis Martínez would play each of the violin parts on the piano and each of them would have to imitate those notes on their violin. Mariachi Las Coronelas was solicited for performances both within México, and abroad. Early in their career, they were contracted to perform their first international tour to Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru, which lasted one year. Mariachi Las Coronelas were also highly regarded in the United States, and traveled often to Illinois, New York, California, and Texas. In addition to performing their own sets, they also accompanied a variety of singers, such as María de la Luz Barrón, Verónica Loyo, and José "El Bronco" Venegas at the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles. Figure 4.15 is a poster featuring Mariachi Las Coronelas in Illinois.



Figure 4.15: Mariachi Las Coronelas at Ship's Wheel, Campbell's Island, Illinois (year unknown).

Mariachi Las Coronelas' original members were: Carlota Noriega on the guitarrón; María de Los Ángeles Reyes on the vihuela; Cecilia Moya, trumpet player from Mexico City; Lupe Villa, guitarist and lead singer specializing in sentimental *bravío* singing; María Dolores Contreras, a guitarist from Tequila, Jalisco and lead singer specializing in festive pieces; and Juanita Lara, first violinist, from Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, both lead singer and second voice in a variety of songs. Later Hilda López Soto and Martha Juárez Clemen joined, playing second and third violin, respectively.

Towards the end of their career, Mariachi Las Coronelas was contracted to accompany singer María de la Luz Barrón at the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles, California, as illustrated in the newspaper clipping featured in figure 4.16.



Figure 4.16: Mariachi Las Coronelas, accompanying María de la Luz Barrón at the Million Dollar Theater.

On April 26, 1973, Doña Carlota Noriega passed away. She is buried in Mexico City's Panteón Jardín, a cemetery for artists, along with other members of Mariachi Las Coronelas.

### 3. The traveling caravans' impact on all-female mariachi ensembles that followed

By the late 1970s, Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Estrellas de México, and Mariachi Las Coronelas had disbanded. Although these all-female mariachi ensembles celebrated much success while they were active, they soon faded into obscurity. Some of the women who played with these groups either stopped performing shortly after being married, or got married because the groups fell apart. According to Jáuregui:

A decade had passed since the first modern-style all-female mariachi groups had been active in Mexico City: Estrellas de México, led by Guadalupe Morales Ayala, from Mexico City but of Michoacán ancestry; Las Coronelas, led by Veracruz native Carlota Noriega Vázquez, and Las Adelitas, led by Adela Chávez. Despite having appeared in some films, the impact of these all-female mariachi groups had not yet reached a level in this profession to where women could consider it their own.

Hacia una década que ya operaban, en la ciudad de México, los primeros mariachis femeniles, del estilo moderno: Estrellas de México, de la defeña –de ascendencia michoacana– Guadalupe Morales Ayala; Las Coronelas, de la veracruzana Carlota Noriega Vázquez, y Las Adelitas, de la Adela Chávez. Sin embargo, a pesar de haber aparecido en algunas películas, el impacto de estos conjuntos de mariachis femeninos todavía no trascendía al nivel de que se llegara a considerar que el oficio de mariachi también podía ser propio de las mujeres.

(Jáuregui 2008:62)

Some continued performing with other mariachi groups as single women while others struggled as single mothers. A few of them attempted to start their own all-female mariachi ensembles. From the moment they left their respective groups in the 1970s, they briefly gave up their careers upon marrying, but later took up their passion for mariachi music again.

*a. Mariachi Las Alteñitas (1974-1980) de Isabel López Soto (1941-2011)*<sup>100</sup>

One of the earliest and most important post-caravan all-female ensembles was created by Isabel López Soto (1941-2011), who had been a member of Mariachi Estrellas de México (formerly Mariachi Michoacano), and later with Mariachi Las Coronelas de Carlota Noriega. She was the second daughter of Victoria Soto (1915-1998?) and Porfirio López Pasarán (1910-1991), born in Real del Monte, Hidalgo. Her younger sister, Hilda López Soto, also played mariachi music and will be presented below. Don Porfirio López was a guitarist and violinist who dedicated his life to making, arranging, and writing music. As a composer, he was given the privilege of becoming a member of the Sociedad de Autores y Compositores de Música (Society for Music Authors and Composers). In his free time, he was also a luthier who fixed violins, made rosin, and re-haired bows. Isabel's father was her first teacher. When she was eight years old, he taught her how to play the guitar and violin, and brought her and her sister Hilda along with him as he sang at restaurants, on buses, and in plazas.

Isabel López joined Mariachi Michoacano at the age of nine. The group later changed their name to Mariachi Estrellas de México de Lupita Morales. Still a young girl, Isabel toured with them all over Mexico and the Americas, and this did not pose a problem for her parents because they felt reassured that Don Jesús Morales, Lupita Morales's father and director of the group, would provide strict attention to these ladies as if they were all his own daughters. Figure

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<sup>100</sup> Isabel's biography took many interviews to piece together. I met her in 2008 at Plaza Garibaldi when I interviewed the members of Mariachi Las Pioneras as a group. She appeared very briefly in that first video interview with them. When I interviewed them again in 2009, they were rehearsing at Malena Berrones's house and Isabel was unfortunately not present. Then, for professional reasons, I had not been able to follow up on the ethnographic portion of my research until the summer of 2011. I contacted Hilda López, Isabel's younger sister, so that I could revisit her oral history facts. My heart fell to the ground and filled with much sorrow upon learning that Isabel had passed away just a few months prior. Without the efforts of her sister, husband, and children—especially Raquel Juárez López—Isabel's story would have been impossible to tell. Perhaps this biography may not be what Isabel would have wanted, but it does represent her family's idea of the life she lived, and how they wish for her to be remembered.

4.16 is a photograph of Isabel López (left), with Lupita Morales (right), wearing their Mariachi Estrellas de México dresses. The photographs in figures 4.17 to 4.24 are part of Raquel Juárez López's personal collection. Raquel is one of Isabel's daughters.



Figure 4.17: Isabel López with Lupita Morales, wearing their Mariachi Estrellas de México dresses.

Isabel was about 16 years old when she met her biggest fan, Manuel Juárez (b. 1937), around 1957, during one of the festivals in Tehuacán, Puebla that was organized by the Corona Caravans. Since he had previously worked in casinos, he saw the opportunity to obtain work with these traveling shows that year just to be closer to Isabel.<sup>101</sup> "La estuve siguiendo más de tres años" (I followed her for over three years), reminisced Don Manuel. For him, it was a

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<sup>101</sup> I interviewed Don Manuel Juárez on April 22, 2013. Raquel Juárez, Isabel's daughter, surprised me by bringing her father along to share the memories of his late wife.

challenge to court Isabel because Don Jesús Morales was extremely protective of these young women:

Isabel was my star, and seeing her on that stage, I saw her even higher. They would put up tarps like the circuses, and they had cockfights, roulette tables, among other things. From there, I moved over to the bar so that I could be closer to her. I loved everything about her, especially her magical eyes. And her voice I will never forget.

Isabel era mi estrella, y en el templete todavía la veía más arriba. Se hacía una carpa como circo y tenían peleas de gallo, ruletas, entre otras cosas. Después de allí me pasé a la cantina para estar más cerca de ella. Todo me gustaba de ella, principalmente sus ojos mágicos. Y su voz jamás se me va olvidar.

(Manuel Juárez, personal interview, April 22, 2013)

He recalled that since the musical director was so overprotective, on one occasion he hired a trio at the bar to play "Tres Regalos" (Three Gifts) for Isabel during a time he knew she would hear it, as a kind of "serenata secreta" (secret serenade). "No podía hacerlo abiertamente, pero me sentía correspondido, y cuando podíamos platicar, platicábamos" (I could not do this openly, but I felt it was reciprocated, and when we could talk, we would), Don Manuel said. With much nostalgia, he confessed that the music Mariachi Estrellas de México played was beautiful, and because he was in love, it sounded even better. Since young Manuel was part of the cast in this traveling caravan, Don Jesús never suspected their secret relationship—at least not until they had to perform at the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles. Manuel flew to Los Angeles and made secret plans to meet with Isabel in her free time. Don Jesús must have followed her because he discovered them. "¿Qué busca aquí?" (What are you doing here?), asked Don Jesús, to which Manuel responded, "Me la había encontrado de casualidad, yo acá andaba paseando" (We just ran into each other, I happened to be in the area). Isabel returned with Don Jesús to the hotel, not too far from Whittier and Soto, but they had already made plans to see each other again the following day.

Isabel and Manuel got married in 1960 and moved to Puebla. This also happened to be the same year she left Mariachi Estrellas de México. I asked why, but he did not want to say it: "Cuando nos casamos, la retiré del mariachi" (When we got married, I retired her from the mariachi). Since he was able to support the family, he did not see a reason for her to continue working. When I insisted on knowing why, he responded:

I was a Mexican macho. First me, then me, and always me —that is a macho. In retrospect, I think I should have been different. If I had been more mature, I would have become her agent. She could not make more money than I. I never knew what a diamond mine I had. I did not appreciate her value.

Fui un macho mexicano. Primero yo, después yo, y siempre yo —eso es un macho. Reflexionando, pienso que debería de haber sido diferente. Si hubiera tenido mas madurez, hubiera sido su representante. No podía ganar mas que yo. Nunca supe la mina de diamantes que tenía yo. No la supe valorar.

(Manuel Juárez, personal interview, April 22, 2013)

Their first child, Jaime Juárez López, was born in 1962 in Mexico City. In 1963, the family moved to Acapulco Hotel Villa Vera, with Teddy Stofer, also known as Mr. Acapulco. He was Swiss and brought much fame to this tourist beach town. In 1964, their daughter Aurora Juárez López was born there. Manuel worked half of the year in Acapulco and the other half in Puebla. Then in 1965, when Raquel Juárez López was born in Puebla, Manuel found permanent work at the Hilfer Hotel and he stopped working in Acapulco. A musician named Nelo López, who sang with a *danzonera* group in Puebla, knew Isabel had played with an all-female mariachi group and put her in contact with the newly formed Mariachi Las Valentinas from Santo Toribio, Tlaxcala. At that time, they were headed by an orchestra director known as Tapia Rocha.<sup>102</sup> In

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<sup>102</sup> Tapia Rocha directed the Orquesta Danzonera.

1966, the members of this group asked Isabel if she would direct them, because they did not see much future under Rocha's direction. Isabel agreed, and according to her husband, "Ella levantó el nivel del grupo" (She raised the group's level). She directed Mariachi Las Valentinas for about a year.

Isabel and Manuel's family kept growing. Lucía Juárez López was born in 1967 and Aida Juárez López in 1968. But in 1971, Isabel left her husband and returned to Mexico City with her children to continue her musical career. "La verdad, casi no la dejaba yo" (In truth, I did not really let her [perform]), confessed Manuel. He kept repeating, "Nunca supe la vida de diamantes que tuve en las manos" (I never knew the life of diamonds I had in my hands). He understood why Isabel wanted to continue performing and why the all-female mariachi ensembles kept asking her to work with them: "Era muy buen elemento, tocaba y cantaba muy bien" (She was a very good musician, she played and sang well). In addition to playing with Mariachi Estrellas de México and Mariachi Las Coronelas, Isabel also began performing with other mariachi groups composed of men and as a soloist with *huasteco* groups. Her stage name became "La Rancherita Hidalguense" (The Little *Ranchera* from Hidalgo).

It was around this time that Isabel met her partner, Epigmenio "La Culebra" Díaz González, who played trumpet and violin. This new couple decided to form a new all-female group that came to be called Mariachi Las Alteñitas (Women of the Highlands) in 1974. Because *alteñitas* can also refer to tall women, people would joke by calling them "Las Chaparritas" (The Short Women). In figure 4.18, Mariachi Las Alteñitas also wear the regional Mexican dresses that the early all-female ensembles wore during the caravan tours. Isabel is standing in the center of the second row.





Figure 4.18: Mariachi Las Alteñitas in folkloric dresses.

Figure 4.19 is a newspaper clipping of Mariachi Las Alteñitas, with Isabel kneeling left in the first row. In this image, taken in the mid- to late 1970s, their dresses got shorter, well above the knee. This is more prevalent in figure 4.20, where Isabel is standing in the center. While their dresses or skirts were still in a regional style, Isabel and her musicians adapted the dressing trends of the 1970s into their performance attire.



Figure 4.19: Newspaper clipping of Mariachi Las Alteñitas de Isabel López Soto.



Figure 4.20: Mariachi Las Alteñitas in mini skirts.

When her daughters from her first marriage, Aurora and Raquel, turned 13 years old, in 1977 and 1978, respectively, they too joined the ranks of Mariachi Las Alteñitas, having been trained by Isabel and her partner to play their instruments. Her relationship with Epigmenio Díaz brought them three children, all musicians: Sara, Marta, and Héctor Díaz López. Of her eight children, only Lucía Juárez López chose a non-musical career, becoming an accountant. Sara Díaz became

a percussionist for the all-female *norteño* group called Las Potranquitas del Norte and the rest of her children, four daughters and two sons, continued in her artistic path, playing mariachi music.

Mariachi Las Alteñitas thus became a performance group that Isabel shared with her daughters. They were well received in Mexico City and also toured the nation during the final years of the traveling caravans (see figure 4.5 above). Within their ranks were Adela Chávez, trumpeter and former director of Mariachi Las Adelitas, and Ramona Madera, trumpeter and current director of Mariachi Xóchitl.

Figure 4.21 is a local newspaper clipping that features Mariachi Las Alteñitas, from Raquel López Juárez's personal collection). Isabel is standing to the far left, playing her violin.

The article reads:

Successful Leader of Las Alteñitas, Isabel López "La Rancherita Hidalguense," with a long artistic career and widely known for her great success in the folk realm, has become today the undisputable director of Mariachi Femenino Las Alteñitas. Isabel plays her violin with singular mastery. This photograph was taken during a performance before a large audience in the capital city.

Eficaz conductora de Las Alteñitas. Isabel López, 'La Rancherita Hidalguense' de larga trayectoria artística y ampliamente conocida en el ambiente folclórico por sus múltiples triunfos, se ha convertido ahora en eficaz e insustituible conductora del Mariachi Femenino Las Alteñitas. Isabel López ejecuta con singular maestría el violín. En la foto durante una actuación ante numeroso público capitalino.



Figure 4.21: Newspaper clipping of Mariachi Las Alteñitas de Isabel López Soto.

In addition to directing and performing with Mariachi Las Alteñitas, Isabel also performed, using her stage name "La Rancherita Hidalguense," as a lead singer with the group Los Caporales, and as a solo violinist and vocalist in Epigmenio Díaz's Mariachi Zapotlanejo (figures 4.22 and 4.23).



Figure 4.22: Isabel López Soto with her trio Los Caporales.



Figure 4.23: Isabel López Soto playing violin as a soloist with Los Caporales.

In the 1980s, Isabel also worked at the restaurant Amanecer Tapatío in Mexico City's Colonia Narvarte, with a mariachi group led Epigmenio Díaz. In 1986, she appeared on XEW radio. Figure 4.24 is a photograph of Isabel López Soto with the XEW crew. She standing in the back row, fifth person from the left, dressed in an orange outfit.





Figure 4.24: Isabel López Soto with the XEW crew (1986).

"Fue la que más alto llegó" (She is the one who succeeded the most), recalled Manuel. Isabel played violin in several mariachi groups, both all-female and with men. She was also a soloist (violin and voice) in mariachi and huasteco groups and recorded two 45 rpm records. In addition, she directed two all-female groups, and taught her children (and other women) how to play music. With tears in her eyes, Isabel's daughter Raquel recalled when her mother's passing:

It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of May in 2011. They brought her [in her casket] to Plaza Garibaldi and many mariachi musicians came to play for her. They played songs she liked to sing, such as "Las Isabeles," "La Tequilera," "El Querreque," and others. It was an homage to her. The leader [of the Mexican Mariachis Union] known as *El Camello* also played; he counted off for us. During her burial, Mariachi Estrellas de Jalisco de José Luis Bernardo, the mixed gender group I perform with, played for her.

Era un 15 de mayo de 2011, entre las 7 y las 8 de la noche. La trajeron a la Plaza Garibaldi y se juntaron muchos mariachis para tocarle. Tocaron canciones que ella cantaba, como "Las Isabeles", "La Tequilera", "El Querreque", y otras. Era un homenaje que le hicieron. El Secretario General [de la Unión Mexicana de Mariachis] conocido como *El Camello* también tocó; él marcaba los tiempos. Ya cuando la estaban sepultando, el grupo mixto donde yo trabajo, Mariachi Estrellas de Jalisco de José Luis Bernardo, le tocamos.

(Raquel Juárez López, personal interview, April 2013)

Isabel López was well known in Plaza Garibaldi. Despite her passing, she has left a legacy in mariachi music that cannot be ignored. In fact, many women I interviewed have been grateful to Isabel for having been a great role model and teacher. May she rest in peace.

*b. Mariachi Monumental Femenil (1983-1987) de Hilda López Soto (b.1946)*

Isabel's younger sister, Hilda López Soto, also lived a musical life and was taught by her father. While Don Porfirio López Pasarán was responsible for teaching her how to play the vihuela and the violin, it was Isabel who first took Hilda to a rehearsal of Mariachi Las Coronelas, a group she later performed with for seven years. Figure 4.25 is a photograph of young Hilda, taken during the Corona Caravan tour of Oaxaca in 1965.



Figure 4.25: Hilda López Soto playing her violin with Mariachi Las Coronelas.

Hilda and I first met in 2007, and have been in contact ever since. She has shared stories with me over the years about their tours and concerts, explaining that they would leave Mexico City in the 1960s, at least once a month, to perform on the humble stages of small towns and in important theaters of the large cities. In fact, she recalled with a smile "Estábamos en la Ciudad

de México sólo una semana al mes!" (we were in Mexico City for only one week out of the month)! She reminisced about a time when they ran in their dresses to catch a ride:

I traveled up high, on an airplane, and down low, on trains, boats, sometimes on a bicycle, on carriages, on horseback and sometimes on old rural buses [that also transported chickens] and other times sleeping on buses. The important thing was to arrive. One time we traveled by airplane to Tuxla Gutiérrez and from there they took us on those rural chicken buses to a small town called El Triunfo (The Triumph). Imagine all of us well groomed, with high heels, and dressed like that they took us along with the chickens!

Viajé en muy elevado, en avión y en bajo, lo que es en tren, lancha, a veces en bicicleta, carretas, burros, a veces en el camión de pollero y a veces en pulman. Pero la cosa era llegar. Una vez nos fuimos en avión a Tuxla Gutiérrez y de allí nos llevan en pollero hasta un pueblito que se llama El Triunfo. Se imagina todas bien perfolladas, con tacón, ¡y así ir hasta con las gallinas!

(Hilda López Soto, personal interview, September 2007)

She jokingly added that it felt like they themselves were hens in a world of roosters! She also shared a happier memory of fancy hotels in Chicago, when on one occasion they met the Beatles.

Mariachi Las Coronelas disbanded after Carlota Noriega's death, but Hilda's desire to keep playing never waned. She organized her own all-female ensemble called Mariachi Monumental Femenil in 1983. By 1984, they had traveled to the United States and also had a planned performance in Japan, although these plans fell through. In Mexico City, they performed at a restaurant called Las Espuelas (The Spurs), at 21 Morelos Street, on the corner of Bucarelli Street, in Mexico City. The original members of this group were the Madera Gálvez sisters (Ramona and Concepción), Hilda's nieces (Raquel and Aurora Juárez López), Rosa María Flores Silva, Felisa Gómez Frago and Reyna Segura Navarro. Adela Chávez, former director of Mariachi Las Adelitas, occasionally played trumpet with the group.

The ensemble lasted only a few years, until some women left to start their own group. Based on her own experience, Hilda finds that it is not difficult to start an all-female mariachi



group, but to sustain one is another story, because a leader needs to handle many tasks and organize their musical studies. She stressed the importance of having a musical director to rehearse the group and, if possible, create appropriate musical arrangements. A good group needs to dedicate much time to rehearse, learn to read music well, and perform mariachi music within certain stylistic parameters. Their director must be willing to make business connections and produce promotional material to market the group.

Figure 4.26 is a newspaper clipping that features Mariachi Monumental Femenil accompanying tenor Alberto Arzaba at the Casa del Actor (House of the Actor) of the Asociación Nacional de Actores (ANDA).



Figure 4.26: Mariachi Monumental Femenil accompanying tenor Alberto Arzaba.

When Mariachi Monumental Femenil broke apart, Hilda was hired as the only woman in Mariachi Cihualteco, directed by Serafín Ruiz. The group had previously hired a woman singer to accompany them in their performances because some of their male musicians did not sing. Inviting Hilda to join the group was a win-win situation for the director because she served both as a vocalist and second violinist. They worked at Plaza Garibaldi's Tlaquepaque restaurant

several days during the week.<sup>103</sup> On other days, she waited in the van parked by Plaza Garibaldi while the men in this group searched for someone to hire them. At the time, it was uncommon for women to wait for work in open places, as men do. She performed with Mariachi Cihualteco for 20 years.

In 2000, an article was written in a local Mexico City newspaper: "Los mariachis hablan. Trabajar entre los machos" (Mariachis Speak: Working among the *machos*) (figure 4.27). It featured two women who performed at Plaza Garibaldi, Hilda and her colleague Gabriela Gómez. Under Hilda's picture, the note reads: "Hilda López: por la mañanas, ama de casa; en las noches toca sones" (Hilda López: during the mornings, housekeeper; in the evenings she plays *sones*).



Figure 4.27: Hilda López Soto featured in an article on women performing at Plaza Garibaldi.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Tlaquepaque restaurant was an important venue on Plaza Garibaldi. It had several banquet rooms, and each one featured a mariachi group. When the owner passed away, the restaurant was closed down and it has been abandoned ever since.

<sup>104</sup> Hilda López Soto Collection.

The all-female mariachi groups created for the caravans predominantly performed in revue theaters, and not many local musicians knew they existed. In comparing her mariachi experiences today with those she had with Mariachi Las Coronelas, Hilda recounted that Mariachi Coronelas was always on tour, performing in theaters and for important festivals. These were not the spaces she performed in with Mariachi Cihualteco, which were local restaurants, weddings, baptisms, birthday parties, and local festivities. In comparing her experience as one of the musicians in the all-female ensembles of the caravans, Hilda pointed out major differences in performance schedules. With Mariachi Las Coronelas, they would perform their sets on a stage, usually during the day, and rarely for more than a couple of hours. This did not compare to the seven hours nightly that she had to endure at Tlaquepaque restaurant on Plaza Garibaldi with Mariachi Cihualteco. Yet she managed this schedule by taking care of her daughters during the day and performing in the evenings, either leaving her children with a caretaker or bringing them to her performances. In some ways, the all-female mariachi groups of the traveling caravans gave women the opportunity to learn mariachi music, but it exposed them to a different kind of reality, since most local mariachi groups do not perform in those kinds of spaces.

Upon reflecting whether the situation has changed for women, she said she was confident that women have demonstrated they can work long hours without being "una borracha" (a drunk woman) like many of the men. On the other hand, she lamented that today it is a different world; it is not the same thing to be working with the artistic caravans of the past and working in the social scene of Plaza Garibaldi. "Es un cambio muy drástico" (It is a drastic change), she said, adding that it was not easy adjusting to life at Plaza Garibaldi. When her nieces, daughters of her sister Isabel, began playing in Plaza Garibaldi, they complained to Hilda about the difficulties of dealing with the men. Hilda told them it was like everything else: "La mujer se tiene que dar a

respetar; tiene que saber poner su límite, y ellos la tendrán que respetar" (A woman has to impose respect; she has to know how to set limits, and they have to respect her). "Do not be afraid of them," Hilda advised. "And if you are afraid," she said jokingly, "just call me!"

Another important difference had to do with the music: Mariachi Las Coronelas had their own musical arrangements for everything, and all the pieces were adapted to the female voice. With Mariachi Cihualteco, Hilda had to learn the vast repertoire and in keys that generally favored the male voice. She joked that most groups now only play the introduction and the ending, and sometimes a few notes in between, meaning that the particular arrangement of the song was not always considered as important, so long as the introduction and ending were secure.

I asked Hilda whether she would consider resurrecting her all-female mariachi, especially since there are many more women performing this music. She said it was too difficult today because women's attitudes toward musicianship have changed. When Mariachi Las Coronelas existed, the members had the motivation to sound good throughout every tour. They set rehearsals and had a musical director to help them along the way. "Siempre estábamos estudiando" (We were always rehearsing), Hilda said. Mariachi Las Coronelas would return from a tour and rest only a day or two. "Estudiábamos toda la semana con el maestro, para poner nuevas canciones y hacer que se escuchen bien" (All week we would be rehearsing with the *maestro*, to add new songs and to make them sound right), she stressed. But today, according to Hilda, young girls do not want to practice, and many of them place more value on standing on a stage with a nice *traje de charro*. She reiterated that an all-female group can be organized, but sustaining it is a different story, as is the case with any kind of musical group.

We talked about the reality that the most prominent mariachi groups consist of all men. She said jokingly, "No tienen mujeres porque los músicos del Mariachi Vargas son muy enamorados; se van a pelear por ellas!" (Mariachi Vargas' musicians are all lovers; they cannot have a woman in the group because they would all fight over her!). But then she added that they were also afraid of their wives, who would not be pleased that their husbands were performing and touring with a woman in their group. Hilda has much respect for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, and merely used this as an example to illustrate gender differences.

Returning to the conversation regarding the difficulty of sustaining an all-female mariachi ensemble in Mexico, Hilda stated that the pressure lies with the directors because they would have to teach these young girls how to play; back then, there were no schools for this. She was surprised to learn that in the United States there are schools to teach young kids how to play mariachi music. "Cuando se abra una escuela así aquí" (When a school like that opens up here), she stated, "las cosas serán diferente" (then things will be different). Hilda is a unique case because, like her sister, she performed with the early all-female groups, she was then the director of her own group, and she later worked as the only female in a mariachi group of all men. In figure 4.28, Hilda is waiting for work at the mariachi plaza Cabeza de Juárez, Iztapalapa, in 2012.



Figure 4.28: Hilda López Soto, waiting for work at the mariachi plaza Cabeza de Juárez.<sup>105</sup>

The advice Hilda gives to women who are beginning to learn mariachi is to be professional, to study the music, and to demonstrate that women *can* play this music. Mariachi music brings many great adventures and wonderful satisfactions. It is important, she says, for these people to prove to the world that not only are women mariachi musicians physically beautiful, but they are also musically talented. She herself experienced many setbacks along the road, but she overcame them and believes other women can do the same.

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<sup>105</sup> Photo by Martha Irene Delgado Parra, 2012.

*c. Mariachi Xóchitl (1982-present) de Ramona Madera (b. 1959)*

Ramona Madera Gálvez is the administrative and musical director of the longest performing all-female mariachi group still active in Mexico, Mariachi Xóchitl, formed in 1982.<sup>106</sup> She was born in Jalisco, but shortly thereafter moved with her family to Nogales, Sonora. At the age of 13 and 11, respectively, Ramona and her sister Concepción, "Concha," were urged by their stepfather, a mariachi musician, to learn to play a mariachi instrument so they could help financially support their family of eight. Ramona's first instrument was the guitarrón, but she later learned to play the trumpet and the accordion. Not long after Ramona and her sisters began performing mariachi music, they heard about the all-female mariachi ensembles that traveled throughout Mexico in the popular caravans, which inspired them to participate in and create an all-female mariachi ensemble. The sisters soon formed a small group called Las Hermanitas Gálvez (The Gálvez Sisters, taken from their maternal last name) and performed in the traveling shows on the Ferrocarriles (trains).

During one of their performances on Ferrocarriles, in the late 1970s, Ramona met Lupe Villa, a former member of Mariachi Las Coronelas (featured below), who invited her to join the all-female Mariachi Las Coronelas in Mexico City. At the age of 15, Ramona convinced her mother to give her and her three sisters permission to move to the capital in order to form part of this group. When they finally arrived, however, they were informed that Mariachi Las Coronelas no longer existed, and Ramona with her sisters were left without a group to perform with. Some of the sisters then began to work with Hilda López's group, Mariachi Monumental Femenil.

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<sup>106</sup> Xóchitl is Náhuatl for "flower."

With the help of her sisters, Ramona soon decided to form an all-female group of her own, which initially consisted of five women. She recalls warmly that her first contract came from a woman who was in charge of organizing concerts to parts of Veracruz, and their first performance was at the Plaza de Toros in Perote, Veracruz. But the group did not last long; it disbanded when Ramona left the group upon getting married at the age of 18, in 1977, and had her first child. Five years later, after being away from performing the music that had so much meaning to her personally, she decided to separate from her husband because, recalled Ramona, he did not share the same love for the music. In 1982 she founded Mariachi Xóchitl and had a debut concert at a restaurant on Calle Independencia. Years later, due to the growing popularity of banda music, she also directed Banda Xóchitl, usually with the same women who also played in the mariachi ensemble. Her mariachi group became known for wearing mariachi mini skirts and the banda group wore other provocative attire of that time period.

In addition to directing Mariachi and Banda Xóchitl, Ramona is also a songwriter. One of her best known pieces is a *cumbia* called "Osito Polar" (1977), which became so popular that other groups, mariachi and non-mariachi alike, have performed and recorded it, most without knowing who composed it. Banda Xóchitl recorded "Osito Polar" on their CD *Si Tu Boquita Fuera* (If Your Mouth Was), with Discos Columbia in 1995.

Figure 4.29 is the CD cover for this album, in which the group wore shorts and open tops, with Ramona sitting in the center. As the 1990s was a time in which many women reflected upon their rights and personal independence, the women of this group deemed it appropriate to wear this kind of performance attire.





Figure 4.29: The cover of Banda Xóchitl's CD *Si Tu Boquita Fuera* (1995).

Ramona did not initially receive royalties, despite the growing number of groups that performed her composition during their live shows. With a smile on her face, she confessed to me that she felt immense satisfaction knowing many people greatly enjoyed her song. At the turn of the millennium, however, with the growing popularity of "Osito Polar" on CD recordings, Ramona changed her mind about the royalty situation. She went through the process of registering the song and was appalled that, despite its success and appearance on various CDs, she only received a total of \$1,200 Mexican pesos (about \$100 USD). By this time, a series of groups had recorded the piece and many others feature it on YouTube today.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to this *cumbia*, she has written about 200 songs, approximately 30 of which are known among her followers. Moreover, Ramona has also composed *sones*, including both the

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<sup>107</sup> The song sometimes appears as "Oso Polar." Some groups that present videos of themselves performing "Osito Polar" on youtube include: Santiago Show (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1qwK8DxO48>); Mariachi Viajero (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09lzG605q4I>); Mariachi Reinas de México (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2KFUFgi0rc>); Unknown mariachi performing it for a private gathering ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTV\\_rmy4yQs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTV_rmy4yQs)); Mariachi Monterrey on a televisión show (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF8l6gxRMak>); Mariachi Los Caporales (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meq1SV7-C00>).

text and the musical accompaniment. I do not know of any other woman who has written *sones*. Her growing list of compositions includes "El Toro Bravo" (The Brave Bull), "Pajarito Enamorado" (Little Bird in Love), "Un Caballo y un Toro" (A Horse and a Bull), and "Se Avecina una Tormenta" (A Storm is Coming).

In 2000, when Mexico City's Hipódromo de las Américas (Race Track of the Americas) kicked off its first season, of the 12 trumpeters who auditioned to play the bugle call for the horse races, Ramona was selected. This was the first time they had ever hired a woman to perform for such an important function. Ramona recalls that when people saw that she was a woman, they had reservations about whether she would be able to perform well:

I'm in an area that men have occupied for many years. When they got the idea of hiring a woman, many liked it ,while others thought the job wasn't going to be done right, because that's the first thing they think about women. But we need to show them that we can do things just as well as the men, or better if we want to. For this reason, I support women who open doors in this manner.

Estoy en un área que la ocupó un hombre durante muchos años y cuando les dieron la idea de que fuera una mujer, a muchos les gustó pero otros pensaban que no se iban a hacer bien las cosas, porque es lo primero que piensan de la mujer. Pero debemos demostrarles que podemos hacer las cosas como los hombres o mejor si nos lo proponemos. Por eso yo también apoyo mucho a la mujer para que se abra paso.

(Ramona Madera, cited in Aguirre 2002:6)

But the best compliments she heard regarding her trumpet call came from people who did not know she was a woman, Ramona shared with me in an interview. She played the trumpet call for four years. When she could not be present to perform it live, they played a recording of her, and called it "La Ramona." Figure 4.30 is a photograph of Ramona playing "La Ramona", trumpet call for the Mexico City horseraces.



Figure 4.30: Ramona Madera Gálvez, performing the trumpet call for the Mexico City horseraces.

Ramona's childhood dream was to perform on stage and appear on television —a dream that has slowly been coming true. She recalls that when she started in clubs and bars with mixed gender groups, she did not enjoy working in that environment. She was not afraid of the drunken men; what concerned her most was the embarrassment of being seen by her friends in these places. Ramona's desire was to aim for Mariachi Xóchitl to appear on more dignified stages and television programs. In September of 2011, she succeeded in having her group perform and be interviewed on the show *Conversando con Cristina Pacheco*, hosted by Cristina Pacheco, a renowned journalist, on Once TV México. While I did not interview other members of Mariachi Xóchitl, the televised interview shows the degree to which Ramona's *compañeras* respect her and are grateful to her for having taught them how to play.

Figure 4.31 are recent photographs of Mariachi Xóchitl, wearing a modified version of the *traje de charro*. Instead of the long A-line skirt, they use a mini skirt and long boots. In the first image, Ramona is standing to the far right; in the second image, she is second from the left.



Figure 4.31: Recent photographs of Mariachi Xóchitl de Ramona Madera.<sup>108</sup>

Ramona is a person who aims to foster a space in which women can express themselves musically, and has done so by teaching them performance. Before there was an institution to sponsor mariachi music education, she opened her home as a place where women could learn to play mariachi music. Some of them were cleaning ladies who had never dreamt of playing an instrument prior to meeting Ramona. Had it not been for her, they might never have had another opportunity.

Figure 4.32 is a newspaper clipping, from Ramona's personal collection, of Mariachi Xóchitl in El Sombrero restaurant, in Acapulco, Guerrero. The text reads: "Xóchitl", es el

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<sup>108</sup> Digital photographs courtesy of Ramona Madera, 2012.

nombre del único mariachi femenino en la República Mexicana, se despide esta semana de su numerosos [sic] public en el restaurant bar "El Sombrero" (Xóchitl, is the name of the only all-female mariachi group in the nation, they bid farewell this week to their numerous audience at the restaurant-bar El Sombrero).



Figure 4.32: Mariachi Femenil Xóchitl in Acapulco, Guerrero.

Over the past 30 years, Mariachi Xóchitl has recorded four albums and one single. In 1986, they performed shows at the Sheraton Hotel in Mexico City, where they sold many LPs. Ramona believes that their performances at this elite restaurant subsequently gave Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías the idea to create their all-female mariachi group in Guadalajara. Among Mariachi Xóchitl's many accomplishments, they accompanied the renowned songwriter Cuco Sánchez on several occasions, most of them in *palenques* (cockfight arenas). At different moments in their career, they became members of various unions that support mariachi musicians. Yet because of the music they played and how they dressed, Ramona eventually

decided they were better off being independent, and took on her own independent contracts. Although Mariachi Xóchitl was not the first all-female mariachi ensemble to perform with short skirts (Mariachi Las Alteñitas had worn a different version of short skirts in the late 1970s), they were criticized by a number of local mariachi musicians for revealing too much of their bodies. More on women's dress choices will be addressed in Chapter Seven. Figure 4.33 is a still video image of Ramona singing for a banquet at the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Música (SUTM) in 2011.



Figure 4.33: Ramona Madera playing trumpet and singing with Mariachi Xóchitl.

Ramona is a firm believer that if musicians maintain a positive image, negative stereotypes will go away. "Los drogados y los alcohólicos son las personas, no los oficios" (The drug addicts and alcoholics are the people, not the trade), explains Ramona. What this means is that one should not let the stereotypes associated with mariachi music mislead them. Those stereotypes are not the trade, they are individual people, and the two should not be confused. For

women, it is the same situation. As a recommendation for young women who want to learn mariachi music, she suggests, "No se dejen jalar por el medio. Hay que saber andar en el fuego y no quemarse, decentemente" (Do not let the scene drag you down., It's important to know how to walk respectably in the fire without getting burned).

*d. Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías (1989-present) de Alma Rocío Corona Ortiz*

In 1989, Alma Rocío Corona Ortiz held auditions to form Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías (The Little Pearls from Guadalajara) in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Her intention was to create something innovative, and according to Alma Rocío, "It's a very anti-traditional idea. . . We began in the cradle of mariachi, in Guadalajara. Now maybe it's the cradle for a new kind of mariachi" (Alma Rocío Corona cited in Epstein 1993). When the group first began, the women's ages were from 17 to 26, all from the state of Jalisco. Their United States debut was in 1991, and since then, Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías has been invited to perform at many U.S. mariachi festivals. They participated at the Mariachi USA Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in 1993 and, later that year, at a Mariachi Fest in Anaheim, sharing the stage with Mariachi Vargas, Mariachi Sol de México and Mariachi Nochistlán.

Figure 4.34 is a professional photograph featured on Mariachi Perlitas' website, where they wear the standard A-line *traje de charro*, but in a bright green color. Interestingly, they pose next to a statue that stereotypes the overweight male mariachi musician with a large mustache, illustrating how they are not a representation of this stereotype at all.





Figure 4.34: Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías de Alma Rocío Corona Ortiz.

Due to their national and international performances, Mariachi Las Perlitas were often attributed to being the first all-female mariachi ensemble in Mexico—and they tended to promote themselves as such. A mariachi musician from San José, CA, thought it was important to include her opinion about this kind of self-promotion. Juana L., pseudonym, shared with me:

Once I visited Radio Bilingüe’s old Fulton Mall studios in Fresno, during their 1996 ¡Viva el Mariachi! festival. When I arrived, Alma Rocío Corona, leader of Las Perlitas Tapatías, one of the groups performing that year, was being interviewed live on the air. From the waiting area where I was sitting outside the tiny control booth, I could hear everything she said. She basically told the interviewer that Las Perlitas was the very first all-female mariachi in the world, and that she had personally invented the *mariachi femenino* concept. When the interview ended and Alma Rocío came out of the booth, I asked her why she hadn't mentioned any of the famous all-female mariachis like Las Coronelas, Mariachi Estrella, Las Adelitas, etc. Her jaw dropped and she turned pale. "How did you know about those groups?" she asked me. She then went on to qualify her assertion, insisting that none of those ensembles had been professional or had toured



internationally, which was why they weren't worthy of mention. Her rationalization was curious, since all those early *mariachis femeninos* were expressly conceived as show groups designed to tour internationally. Of course she knew this, but she felt confident that no one in the audience would be aware of that history.

(Juana L., pseudonym, personal interview, August 2015)

While Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías was not the first all-female group, they have inspired many groups that followed, such as Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles in the United States and Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán in Guadalajara.

*e. Mariachi Las Alazanas (1996-2003) de Aurora Juárez López (b. 1964)*

Aurora Juárez López is Isabel Lopez's first-born daughter, and she began performing mariachi music at the age of 13 in her mother's all-female Mariachi Las Alteñitas. Although Aurora Juárez first learned to play the trumpet, she also took it upon herself to learn the other mariachi instruments as well. In 1995, she and renowned mariachi trumpeter Francisco Xavier "Pancho el Loco" Serrano founded Mariachi Las Alazanas, an all-female group in which sometimes Xavier played trumpet as well. A year after the group's formation, they were ready to perform during the important Santa Cecilia's Day events celebrated in Plaza Garibaldi to commemorate the day of the patron saint of music.

Aurora's younger sister Raquel was also an important member of this group. Raquel learned to play mariachi music at a young age. "Me enseñó mi abuelito y me llevaba. Íbamos a las panaderías a tocar para el día de la Virgen de Guadalupe" (My grandfather taught me how to play, he would take me to the bakeries to play on the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe), recalls Raquel. She made her debut with Mariachi Las Alazanas accompanying her family on a tour in Tuxtepec, Oaxaca. When the car broke down, and some of the women returned to Mexico City They were short several musicians, and had to find a way to make some money. Aurora found a

gig for them in a small town, and Raquel recalls that she did not feel ready to perform with the group, but nevertheless was honored that she debuted in a concert that featured the famous tropical music vocalist Rigo Tovar.

Figure 4.35 is a photograph of Mariachi Las Alazanas, with Aurora standing on the far left with the trumpet. From left to right, after Aurora, we have Isabel Aguilar (violin), Reyna (no last name available) (violin), Marisol Vázquez (violin), Beatriz Flores (guitar), Raquel Juárez (vihuela), Marta Díaz López (guitarrón), Maribel Domínguez and Blanca Flores.



Figure 4.35: Mariachi Las Alazanas de Aurora Juárez.

#### **4. Contemporary all-female mariachi ensembles**

In my research for this dissertation, I have identified over 60 all-female mariachi groups in Mexico that have existed, or continue to exist, since the 1950s. All are or were located either in Mexico City or one of the following 14 states: Coahuila, Federal District, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Mexico State, Michoacán, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas,

Tlaxcala, Yucatán, and Zacatecas. For this study, I will only profile some of the all-female mariachi groups that could be viewed as representative of the city and/or state they hail from.

*a. Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán (2006), from Guadalajara, Jalisco*

Former director of the prominent Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán, Carlos Martínez, founded Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in 2006.<sup>109</sup> Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán is an all-male group that performs regularly for the *Encuentro Internacional de Mariachi y Charrería* (International Encounter of Mariachi and Horsemanship), hosted by the Guadalajara Chamber of Commerce.

When this all-female mariachi group was formed, Carlos' younger sister, Adriana Martínez, joined as a vocalist and violinist. Formed with the intention of eventually attaining the same musical quality as Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán, Mariachi Femenil Tecalitlán has become one of the most renowned all-female mariachi groups in Mexico. They produced their first album, "Lo Bonito de Jalisco" (The Beauty of Jalisco), in 2007; and their second, "Ay Mi Jalisco" (Oh My Jalisco) in 2009. Figure 4.36 is a photograph of Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán wearing a two-colored standard A-line *traje de charro*, with a blue sash and matching bow, each member wearing their ponytail to the side.

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<sup>109</sup> As of 2014, Carlos Martínez was named musical director of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán in place of his uncle Pepe Martínez, who retired from the world-renowned group due to illness.



Figure 4.36: Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán.

*b. Mariachi Continental Femenil (2006) from Jerez, Zacatecas*

Violinist Carla Bibiano founded Mariachi Continental Femenil in 2006, about six years after she had already played violin in her father's group, Mariachi Continental. Her father, also a violinist, had no sons and decided to teach his music to his daughters, he instilled in Carla a respect for mariachi music. During an interview with four of the women of this group, in June of 2012, Carla claimed that in Jerez, there were no women mariachi musicians prior to her and her sisters. Her father taught her the basics; she clarified, and she quickly began searching for new doors to open, at schools and with private instructors. One of her sisters plays the trumpet and another plays the guitarrón.

With the knowledge Carla gained as a musician in her father's group, and learning about the success of all-female mariachi groups in the United States, she was motivated to start an all-

female group of her own. With her and her sisters, Carla could count on one violin, one trumpet, and one guitarrón, and envisioned the potential of filling this basic instrumentation with more violins, a vihuela, and a guitar. Mariachi Continental Femenil was the first all-female group of its type in the state of Zacatecas. Since there were few women in the area who played mariachi instruments, Carla set out to recruit those who already played, such as daughters of mariachi musicians, and to teach those who did not. One woman, who initially played vihuela in her group, had her father's permission to learn to play the guitar with Mariachi Continental. Later, Carla suggested she learn vihuela so that she could join envisioned all-female mariachi group. Another woman, whose father is known to be one of the best mariachi trumpeters in Zacatecas, studied trumpet with him but had never performed in any group. She joined Carla's group, which consequently started with ten members.

The other women present during the interview were Diana García (violin), Eva Galván (guitar) and Suzet Acuña (violin). Diana García first began playing guitar at a local music school but later studied violin with a musician by the name of Mauro Estrada. One day, while she and her sister Beatriz, a guitarist, were performing outside a church, Carla approached them to ask if they would be interested in her proposed mariachi. Eva Galván began singing in social events and local contests when she was eight years old. Her father taught her the basics on the guitar and motivated her to sing and accompany herself. Her brothers had joined local mariachi groups, but she did not have that opportunity. On one occasion, Carla, with Mariachi Continental, performed for a family festivity in her home. After listening to Eva sing, Carla asked her if she would be interested in forming part of her all-female ensemble. Eva remains extremely appreciative that Carla gave her this opportunity. Suzet Acuña (violin) learned to play guitar as a member of her elementary school's *rondalla* (Spanish style traditional string ensemble). Years

later, in high school, Carla's sister told Suzet that she would teach her how to play the violin, with the idea that she would join Carla's all-female mariachi group.

After Mariachi Continental Femenil was received favorably, some of the women in the group decided to leave and form their own ensemble. Carla contends that it is difficult to find women who are interested in practicing and performing mariachi music, especially what she calls "los instrumentos pesados" (the tough instruments), which are the trumpet and the guitarrón. Due to this, some of the groups formed by the women who left Carla's group are not all-female; some of these use male trumpet and/or guitarrón players.

In addition to performing traditional music and innovative arrangements, Mariachi Continental Femenil also plays original music by Eva Galván. One of Eva's songs is called "Tu Cruel Mentira" (Your Cruel Lie), which was later recorded in one of their albums. During one performance on a ranch, the public requested Eva's song. To Carla Bibiano's surprise, "Es una canción inédita. Para algún artista que va saliendo y que canta canciones inéditas, hasta que el artista las hace famosas es cuando la gente las empieza a pedir. Al tocar esta canción, la gente cantaba con nosotros y la gente ¡se la sabía! Es algo muy extraño y muy bonito" (It is an unreleased song. An artist who is starting out may sing unreleased songs, but the public isn't going to ask for these until the artist makes them famous [through recordings and the media]. But we played this particular song; the people already knew the words and sang it along with us! This is something unusual and beautiful). Upon asking Eva what motivated her to compose this song, she replied: "Es mi tema favorito" (It's about my favorite topic), and laughed sarcastically. When she composed this song, Eva was undergoing a tough moment in her life, and was living what the song expressed: his cruel lie. But in the same way she has been motivated to create songs about cruel love affairs, she has also written songs about true love and happiness.

Figure 4.37 features Mariachi Continental Femenil in Jerez, Zacatecas, wearing a modified version of a *traje de charro*, which can more adequately be called a *charro* dress. Notice the fitted cut, with botonadura, but with a flared bottom to highlight the curves of a woman's body.



Figure 4.37: Mariachi Continental Femenil from Jerez, Zacatecas.

*c. Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano (2010) from Querétaro, Querétaro*

I interviewed the women of Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano in December of 2011, a year after the group was created, and became intrigued upon learning about their academic backgrounds and reasons for having formed the group.<sup>110</sup> Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano was

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<sup>110</sup> Rosa Mexicano is the name of a vivid pink color.



formed in April of 2010 by talented women musicians, most of them students at Querétaro's "José Guadalupe Velázquez" Music Conservatory, with the aim of becoming better mariachi musicians while studying at this conservatory. While Querétaro is not historically known to be one of the originating spaces for mariachi music, the women of this group are proud of their culture, and performing mariachi music is one way of expressing their national pride. Although most of the musicians studied at this conservatory, the school does not offer mariachi music, so their study of this music was an extracurricular activity.

María de León Ugalde (guitar), Karina Gómez (vihuela/guitar), Rosario Paredón (guitarrón/alto sax), Carla Reséndiz Rodríguez (violin) and Miriam Rodríguez Díaz (violin) are all students at the "José Guadalupe Velázquez" Music Conservatory. Karina studies classical guitar but plays the vihuela in the group and Rosario studies alto saxophone but plays the guitarrón. Dulce Samantha Uribe Barrera began as a trumpeter for popular brass bands, and was later invited to form part of this group. Alejandra de Santiago Mendoza is the lead singer. While she did not formally study music, she brings to the group a vast oral musical knowledge that she acquired singing independently. Interestingly, this group does not have a director; they are the first egalitarian mariachi group I know of. They purchased a group cell phone and rotate it weekly or bi-weekly, so that each member will have the responsibility of receiving and making calls regarding performances. They have a busy schedule, as they are frequently asked to perform for municipal events, as well as many private family and social gatherings.

In order to get the word out that Querétaro has an all-female group, Mariachi Rosa Mexicano sent out letters to the local government offering their musical services. The municipal government hired them on several occasions to participate in the national independence celebrations in Santiago de Querétaro. At the time of my interview, they had the opportunity to



perform in Irapuato, Guanajuato, which is their guitar player's birthplace. In addition to Irapuato, they have also performed in Tequisquiapan, San Miguel de Allende, and the Sierra Gorda.

The first year they celebrated Mother's Day, the group decided to serenade all of their mothers, who were satisfied to see that their daughters were learning and performing this music. "No se me va a olvidar la expresión de mi mamá," (I will never forget the expression on my mother's face) said Miriam, with a look that I will never forget. Dulce added that her father was initially wary of her performing in a mariachi ensemble because of the negative stereotypes associated with many of these groups. Similarly, Karina said that since her father, a chemical engineer, did not initially support her decision to formally study classical guitar in the conservatory, or to join Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano. "Pero creo que se ha dado cuenta que es algo que a mí me gusta, y que a mí me llena, y al final de cuenta mis padres disfrutaban que me veo contenta" (I think he has noticed this is something I like, that is fulfilling to me, and in the end my parents are contented that it makes me happy), she added. Because Mariachi Rosa Mexicano is an all-female group, some of their parents have learned to trust their fellow *compañeras* (female companions), so long as they always advise them of where they are.

During the interview, Miriam recalled that on one occasion, at a restaurant where they were performing, a man asked "A poco si tocan, si son mujeres, y a poco si tienen trabajo?" (If you play, and you are women, do you actually have work?). Carla added that in addition to these kinds of negative comments, they also receive positive ones. Some audiences will confess that they like to have an all-female mariachi ensemble at their fiestas. In addition, mariachi musicians who are men will encourage them to not give up and sometimes even offer musical assistance. These comments, according to Carla, make them want to "echarle más ganas porque al final de cuentas podamos demostrar que lo podemos hacer igual o mejor que cualquier otro mariachi"

(strive harder, so that in the end we can demonstrate that we can do this the same or better than any other mariachi group).

Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano (figure 4.38) is an example of an all-female group that is conscious of their being as women in this tradition. They negotiate performance spaces (see Chapter Eight) and attempt to have equality on many levels within their group. It is a young group, and through time, their perseverance should take them many places.



Figure 4.38: Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano from Querétaro.

*d. Mariachi Femenil de América (2011), from Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala*

Founded by María de Jesús Xolocotzi Mata "Chuyita" and her husband Armando Muñoz Vazquez in 2011, Mariachi Femenil de América is the first all-female mariachi ensemble from Tlaxcala. Their daughter Alinne Muñoz Xolocotzi, violinist and vocalist, is also a founding member of this group. To comment on Mariachi Femenil de América is to refer to a family

tradition that begins with Pedro Xolocotzi Ramírez, founder of the family group Mariachi Tlaxcallán in 1987 (figure 4.39).



Figure 4.39: Mariachi Tlaxcallán, a family group from Tlaxcala.

All of his children (seven daughters and two sons) formed the violin and rhythm section of this group. The two trumpeters are invited musicians. One of these trumpeters was precisely Armando Muñoz, which is where he met Chuyita. Both later separated from this group to form the all-female Mariachi Femenil de América.

María de Jesús "Chuy" Xolocotzi Mata is the first trumpeter, vocalist, and director of this group. In figure 4.40, a photograph of Mariachi Femenil de América, Chuy is standing fourth from the right, and her daughter, Alinne, on the far right.



Figure 4.40: Mariachi Femenil de América from Tlaxcala.

*e. Mariachi Femenil Alma Nochistlense (2012), from Nochistlán, Zacatecas*

On October 20, 2012, Mariachi Femenil Alma Nochistlense debuted as an all-female mariachi ensemble, founded by Nicolás Puentes Macías, also director of the traditional folkloric group Jaraberos de Nochistlán. In fact, his daughters, Alma and Ana Lidia Puentes Vargas, are members of this group. These young women are all students of diverse careers that include medicine, industrial engineering, business administration, and others. They understood very early on that many men had denied women a place within the mariachi tradition, partially because of the perception that this music was best sustained by men.

With the aim of locating their place within the mariachi tradition, each found it important to study mariachi music alongside their respective careers, and before taking on the challenge of



learning a mariachi instrument. First, they learned music theory informally from Josafat Puentes Vargas, son of Nicolás Puentes and also a member of Jaraberos de Nochistlán. Then, when these young women had the musical foundation, Josafat taught the rhythm section and Nicolás the melody instruments. After this, they began to perform songs and arrangements at their level of ability.

Since then, they have performed at the Las Cruces International Mariachi Conference in New Mexico (2013), the Nochistlán Mariachi Festival in Nochistlán, Zacatecas (2013), and the Paulino Scholarship Ceremony at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, in Mexico City (2014). Figure 4.41 is a photograph of Mariachi Alma Nochistlense performing at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi in February of 2013.



Figure 4.41: Mariachi Femenil Alma Nochistlense (2013).

These young women hope to complete their studies for their respective careers, while performing mariachi music at the same time. Mariachi Alma Nochistlense takes a conservative approach in negotiating their role as women performers of mariachi music, for they select traditional repertoire and select conservative attire.

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## Chapter Five: All-female mariachi ensembles in the United States

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*When the main guy was off (when he had a day off), and I was really secure in my parts, they would say "follow Laura," and this guy would turn and give me his back...just enough to let me know he was refusing to follow me. And he went and had a conversation with Pedro [Rey] and told him that there was no way he was going to follow a woman, that he had been playing mariachi for 50 years and had never had to follow a woman and wasn't about to. So Pedro said "well it's that or you lose your job" and he said "I'd rather los by job" and he left. And a couple of months later he came back into the group.... So I took that opportunity to start relating to him at a different level... asking him about family, history, where he was from.... And in fact when I left the Galleros he was the one that turned to me ... and said "no te vayas, don't leave, this is your destiny."*

Laura Sobrino, cited in Rodriguez (2006)

Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing number of all-female mariachi groups both in Mexico and the United States. While at first glance this increase in the number of groups comprised by women would seem to reflect the acceptance and support for women performers of this tradition, certain attitudes and consequences suggest this is merely an ideology—an inverted image of reality. These secluded musical spheres called "all-female mariachi ensembles" have, in part, been a kind of strategy for accepting women's participation as mariachi musicians in this male-centered tradition, yet in many ways set apart from the true bearers of the tradition: the renowned all-male mariachi ensembles. In the United States, for many years now, women once had the opportunity to perform alongside men in high-profile ensembles such as Mariachi Los Camperos, Mariachi Sol de México, Mariachi Cobre, and Mariachi Los Galleros.

In Mexico, this opportunity has not yet to been offered to women. Up until this this moment, I have not come across any examples of women ever performing with renowned ensembles in Mexico, such as Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Mariachi México, Mariachi de América, Mariachi 2000 or Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán. While arguments concerning tradition

and mariachi ensembles composed of all men might hold true for most people, it would be unjust for any woman with the right qualifications be rejected from forming part of one of these renowned groups just for being a woman. Many might simply argue that women musicians with those qualifications do not exist. Though times are changing, women are becoming more musically prepared, and soon it will be incontestable that a woman with as much talent and training should be able to perform alongside the men. In the following narratives, I present those women who in many ways broke the gender barrier and worked in the same ranks as men in high-profile ensembles, even if only temporarily.

### **1. Women in renowned mariachi ensembles**

In the United States, several women were given the opportunity to perform with renowned groups in Los Angeles. This chapter focuses on women who were musically capable of performing in these ensembles and who left a lasting impression of their legacy on women who followed: Rebecca Gonzales, Maribel Islas, Laura Sobrino, Roxana Córdova, Cathy Baeza and Mónica Treviño. When the last of these women left their respective groups, the directors did not replace them with other women, and, as a result, the most recognized mariachi ensembles today are all comprised of all men. The women presented in this section exemplify the "groups with one woman" category, as described in Chapter One.

#### *a. Rebecca Gonzales*

Rebecca Gonzales is recognized as the first woman to join a renowned mariachi ensemble in the United States. She was born and raised in San José, California, and learned to play classical violin since the age of ten. She graduated high school in 1972, and during that summer she met Mark Fogelquist, who invited her to attend a class in mariachi music that he taught at



San José City College. Rebecca enrolled in San José State University as a Music Major right out of high school, and remained a student there until the fall of 1974. She was later invited to perform with Mariachi Los Abajeños de Isidro Rivera, where she began learning the mariachi repertory, on the violin as well as singing.

Her interest in mariachi music led her to Los Angeles where, with another invitation by Mark Fogelquist, she joined Mariachi Uclatlán, UCLA's student mariachi ensemble. By January of 1975, she was already a member of Mariachi Uclatlán. In 1976, Rebecca joined Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano (figure 5.1) and performed with them for eight years, until 1983. Figure 5.1 is a late 1970's photograph of Rebecca Gonzales with Mariachi Los Camperos as the only female musician, from her personal collection. She is wearing the standard matching A-line *traje de charro*, stretching down to the floor, traditional earrings and a loose hairstyle.



Figure 5.1: Rebecca Gonzales with Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano.

During those eight years with Mariachi Los Camperos, Rebecca had the pleasure of having performed for United States President Ronald Reagan. During this time, Los Camperos was concurrently performing at La Fonda restaurant five nights a week and on the Princess Cruise Lines' excursions to Mexico. In order to fulfill both commitments, Nati Cano divided the group so that six of his musicians would alternate with those who performed on the Princess Cruises (figure 5.2). They did this for about two years. Figure 5.2 is a photograph of Rebecca with the sextet Cano put together for cruise ship performances.<sup>111</sup>



Figure 5.2: Rebecca Gonzales with Mariachi Los Camperos at the Princess Mexican Cruise.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Gonzales Collection.

<sup>112</sup> Rebecca Gonzales Collection.

"It was a great experience!" recalls Rebecca, reminiscing on the great ambience and the perfect setting La Fonda offered for a high-profile mariachi show. "To this day, I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to perform with them for so many years!" she added.

A year after having left Mariachi Los Camperos, Rebecca joined the ranks with Mariachi Cobre in 1984, and moved to Orlando, Florida, to perform with them at Disney World's EPCOT Center for one year (figure 5.3). As shown in figure 5.3, Rebecca is kneeling second from the bottom right in this 1984 photograph with Mariachi Cobre.



Figure 5.3: Rebecca Gonzales with Mariachi Cobre at the EPCOT Center, Orlando, Florida.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rebecca Gonzales Collection.

When Rebecca returned to Los Angeles after one year, she continued performed locally, and joined Mariachi Los Gavilanes de Juan Manuel Cortez. In 1995 and 1999, Rodri Rodríguez invited Rebecca to sing as a soloist for the Mariachi USA festivals at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. In 2004, Rebecca Gonzales and Laura Sobrino were inducted into the Tucson International Mariachi Conference Hall of Fame, a distinction given to musicians who have made great contributions to the mariachi tradition.

Rebecca currently directs Mariachi Tesoro in Los Angeles, a multicultural, mixed gender group that performs a variety of genres, from traditional mariachi music to pop, Latin jazz, and Tex-Mex styles. When I asked her if she had any recordings during her stint with Mariachi Los Camperos, Rebecca recalled that the group did in fact begin a professional recording, but that the recording project director left, leaving the project shelved and unfinished. She has recently produced an album with Mariachi Tesoro, however, that includes a nice variety of Latin favorites.

*b. Laura Sobrino (1954-2015)*

From Watsonville, California, classically trained violinist Laura Sobrino (1954-2015) earned her B.A. in 1982 from the Independent Major program at University of California, at Santa Cruz, where she specialized in Performance Practices in Traditional Musics.<sup>114</sup> Prior to this, after having participated with local mariachi groups in Santa Cruz and with Mariachi Uclatlán in Los Angeles for several years, she was invited by Pedro Rey to join the prominent

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<sup>114</sup> <sup>114</sup> Laura Sobrino's provided the information for her profile through emails. At some point, I asked her to clarify a few dates, but she did not reply, probably because she was terminally ill with *scleroderma*. This is as accurate as the emails would allow for.

Mariachi Los Galleros in 1979, where she worked until about 1983.<sup>115</sup> It was a busy time for Laura. In addition to rehearsals, recordings, *charreadas*, and national performances, Mariachi Los Galleros were featured at their own restaurant, El Rey, located in in Montebello, California. In an interview cited in anthropologist Russell Rodríguez's dissertation, Laura Sobrino comments:

When the main guy was off (when he had a day off), and I was really secure in my parts, they would say "follow Laura," and this guy would turn and give me his back. . . just enough to let me know he as refusing to follow me. And he went and had a conversation with Pedro and told him that there was no way he was going to follow a woman, that he had been playing mariachi for 50 years and had never had to had to follow a woman and wasn't about to. So Pedro said "well it's that or you lose your job" and he said "I'd rather lose my job" and he left. . . So when he came back. . . we became friends. And in fact when I left the Galleros he was the one that turned to me. . . and said *no te vayas*, don't leave, this is your destiny"

(Laura Sobrino, cited in Rodríguez 2006:181-182)

She had the support of Pedro Rey, who defended her against this musician's initial negativity.

When she left this group, she got married and moved to Santa Cruz with her husband, David Kilpatrick, who was teaching mariachi classes at the University of California Santa Cruz, where she assisted him.

In 1986, Laura Sobrino was recruited by José L. Hernández to join the ranks of Mariachi Sol de México (figure 5.4), at which point she returned to Los Angeles. The group performed regularly at Cielito Lindo Restaurant in South El Monte, California As illustrated in figure 5.4, Laura also wore a standard A-line matching *traje de charro*, but opted for a ponytail with a hair-bow hairstyle. She is the violinist on the far right.

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<sup>115</sup> Laura began performing mariachi music in Santa Cruz in 1975 with Mariachi Santa Cruz and subsequently moved to Los Angeles when she was invited to perform with Mariachi Uclatlán in 1978.





Figure 5.4: Laura Sobrino with Mariachi Sol de México de José Hernández.<sup>116</sup>

During the time she worked with Mariachi Sol de México, Laura also offered violin lessons to a variety of students, privately and at local institutions. She worked with that group for about four years, until the director invited her to participate in the creation of an all-female mariachi ensemble. Laura Sobrino assisted José Hernández in preparing the auditions for this new all-female group, and in 1994 Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles was born. Laura Sobrino was the lead violinist and co-director of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles until 1996. Figure 5.5 illustrates a newspaper article featuring Laura Sobrino rehearsing this new group in Los Angeles

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<sup>116</sup> Laura Sobrino Collection.

(Molina 1995). While performing with Mariachi Sol de México, Laura participated as the only woman in an all-male group.



Figure 5.5: Laura Sobrino rehearsing Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles in 1995.

In addition to performing mariachi music, she Laura Sobrino was also a mariachi music educator. She elaborated transcriptions, gathered documentation on the history of women in mariachi music, and promoted her online Mariachi Publishing Company. In 2004, she was inducted into the Tucson International Mariachi Conference Hall of Fame, along with Rebecca Gonzales. She was also selected as a Hispanic woman honoree by First Lady of California Maria Shriver for the exhibit "Latinas: The Spirit of California" at the California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts in 2005, and was honored as an NEA Master Teacher by the state of Kansas. Moreover, she has been a mariachi educator for many mariachi workshops in the United States and, since 2006, has been a music lecturer at University of California, Riverside.

c. Catherine Marín Baeza (b. 1965)

Originally from Tucson, Arizona, Catherine "Cathy" Marín Baeza (b. 1965) joined the orchestra at Pueblo Gardens Elementary School, as a violinist at 12 years of age. Her first participation in mariachi music was at the age of 14, when her neighbor invited her to perform with a mariachi group at a local church's Sunday Mass. After a year, she was invited to perform the Sunday Mass at Tucson's St. Augustine Cathedral with Steve and Randy Carrillo, directors of the renowned Mariachi Cobre.<sup>117</sup> The mariachi Mass she played with these musicians was incredible, she recalls, and since then she has not performed another like it. She later performed with other local mariachi ensembles, such as Mariachi Nuevo, where she was the only woman musician. That group was comprised of students, and one of their goals was to save their mariachi earnings in order pay for their education once they graduated from high school.

When Cathy visited Los Angeles in 1981, at the age of 17, her perception of mariachi music changed forever. During this visit, she was able to watch Mariachi Los Camperos perform at La Fonda and Mariachi Los Galleros de Pedro Rey at El Rey restaurant. At this time, she recalls there were no women performing with these groups. Maribel Islas had left Mariachi Los Camperos and Roxana Córdova had already left Mariachi Los Galleros. She was in awe with the musical arrangements with Mariachi Los Galleros, and recalls telling Chenco Hernández, one of the Hernández brothers, "I'm going to join your group one day!" She remembers how he merely pinched her cheeks and said, "okay *mija*." This incredible weekend, reminisces Cathy, would define her destiny. She remained in Mariachi Nuevo until she graduated from high school.

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<sup>117</sup> Mariachi Cobre was founded in Tucson, Arizona, prior to relocating to Orlando, Florida's EPCOT Center.



She earned a scholarship to Pima Community College, and continued her studies at the University of Arizona in 1983.

In 1985, after two years at U of A, she interrupted her studies to make her dream come true by moving to Los Angeles to perform mariachi music. Cathy rationalized that the university would always be there, and she could always return when she was ready, "but the chance to make it as a female mariachi musician was then, without question and hesitation." In 1987, and living out of Alejandria Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, Cathy began performing with Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano at La Fonda restaurant. For approximately six to eight months, this group had two women, and since La Fonda was open 7 nights a week, both Cathy and Mónica Treviño (profiled below) alternated days so that there was one woman every night of the week. "These were amazing musicians!" recalls Cathy, "I learned so much playing with Robert Gutiérrez "El Chaparrito," Juan José Almaguer, Luis Damián, José Luis Salinas, and Chema Arellano, to name a few."

That same year, in 1987, Pedro Rey invited Cathy to join the ranks of Mariachi Los Galleros (figure 5.6). "My dream came true!!" she exclaimed. "It was an incredible feeling playing with Heriberto Molina, a man whose beautiful voice I grew up listening to while he was still a member of Mariachi Vargas," added Cathy, explaining that she learned a lot from these men, "They were great mentors and my family away from home," she affirmed. Like her female predecessors described above, Cathy, too, wore a standard matching A-line *traje de charro*, traditional earrings, and a pulled back ponytail hairstyle, as shown in figure 5.6. Cathy is standing in the second row, fifth from the left, by their director Pedro Rey.



Figure 5.6: Catherine Marin Baeza with Mariachi Los Galleros de Pedro Rey.<sup>118</sup>

Cathy recalls how she was surrounded with talented musicians, which was an experience she will never forget. She performed with Mariachi Los Galleros until 1990, when she got married to Anastacio Baeza and decided it was time to go back to school. "I thought it was over for me as a female mariachi when I got married and got pregnant, so I needed my backup plan, my education," acknowledges Cathy. She obtained her B.A. in Microbiology from Cal Poly Pomona and has been worked the night shift at Santa Marta Hospital for 13 years before it closed.

After her first daughter was born in 1990, Laura Sobrino invited Cathy to audition for the all-female Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles. During her 10-year stint with this ensemble, she had 3 more children while working the night shift at Santa Marta Hospital. Since 2004, she has

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<sup>118</sup> Catherine Marin Baeza Collection. Cathy is the fifth musician from the left.

worked with Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea meanwhile taking on morning shift at the Beverly Hospital in Montebello, in the Microbiology department.

*d. Mónica Treviño (b. 1968)*

Mónica Treviño joined Mariachi Los Camperos in 1987 and performed with them for about 10 years. They are a group based out of Los Angeles, performing regularly at their own restaurant, La Fonda de Los Camperos (figures 5.7 and 5.8).<sup>119</sup> Mónica started playing violin in the fourth grade, when she was about nine years old, at which time she achieved a perfect score on intonation and timing on a music test she took. After she graduated from high school, she begged her mother to allow her to learn to play mariachi music in California, and although she did not want to, her mother drove and moved her to California. She first performed with a group in La Habra, under the direction of Cuco DelCid, who was a member of Mariachi Los Camperos for many years. After about six months of learning the repertory and the style, Mónica I felt musically prepared to call Nati Cano to watch her perform, as a kind of audition. She fondly recalls what happened then:

After we finished our set, I introduced myself and he asked me to be at La Fonda that following Thursday. I arrived, and that same day, he showed me all the suits and hats Mariachi Los Camperos wear. He showed me around the restaurant and, to my surprise, then asked me to be at a *Sastreria* (tailor shop) in Los Angeles early the next morning. I had a beige and gray suit made for me to wear, on that following Saturday, there I was at La Fonda, a member of MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS! I call it my Cinderella story.

(Mónica Treviño, personal interview, May 2014)

I remember walking into La Fonda for the first time in 1992, shortly after I began performing mariachi music, and seeing Mónica perform. At that time, I had no other reference

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<sup>119</sup> La Fonda de Los Camperos opened its doors in 1969 as a dinner theater, offering mariachi followers a place to listen to live music by Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano on most nights. It unfortunately closed its doors permanently in 2006.

points for any women performing this music, and gained the inspiration to be like her one day. "Te defendías con tu violín" (You defended yourself with your violin), I recently commented to her. When she played her solos, one could not differentiate her violin sound from that of the other violinists who also performed with Mariachi Los Camperos. I respected and admired that kind of musicianship, woman or man, but it was inspiring that she was a woman who could play her violin just as well as her colleagues.

But she also had an amazing voice. In fact, a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer wrote a review of one of their local performances in 1994, at the Universal Amphitheater, calling attention to Mónica's mariachi singing:

Are Los Camperos de Nati Cano the world's best mariachi? That's how it looked during its set at the Universal Amphitheatre's mariachi festival. . . . Renowned *ranchera* singer Ángeles Ochoa —backed by Los Gallos— was one of the evening's highlights, but Los Camperos' Mónica Treviño also confirmed her status as arguably the best female mariachi voice of the day.

(Lopetegui 1994)

The photograph in figure 5.7 features Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, posing at the entrance to La Fonda de Los Camperos. Mónica Treviño is standing in the middle of the second row, wearing a standard matching A-line *traje de charro* and a loose hairstyle. The caption reads: "Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano of Los Angeles will perform in concert with San Antonio's Mariachi Campanas de América at 8 p.m. Friday at the Majestic Theater." In figure 5.8, Mónica, at the age of 19, is standing in the first row, third from the left.



Figure 5.7: Newspaper article featuring Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano.<sup>120</sup>



Figure 5.8: Mónica Treviño with Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Published by the *San Antonio Express-News* on June 19, 1994.

During the first few years with Mariachi Los Camperos, Mónica rotated days with Cathy Baeza (profiled above) for about five months. Nati Cano did not want more than one woman playing at a time, and a few months later, he decided to keep Mónica the five days they performed at La Fonda, and finally kept her as the only woman in Mariachi Los Camperos. Concerning all-female groups, Mónica notes: "I am not a fan of girl groups. I worked with men and the pressure to keep up with them is very different, it was a challenge but I could handle it."

It was a sad moment for many (especially for me) when Mónica left Mariachi Los Camperos in 1997. Mónica states: "I left Mariachi Los Camperos because it was just enough; perhaps it was too much of a good thing, maybe, I don't know. But I wanted something different. Nothing is forever you know." She has inspired her three daughters to play the violin. Her oldest daughter, Iliana, plays classical violin, and "is not crazy about mariachi music." Her second daughter, Nicolette, also began learning to play the violin, but a birth injury made it too difficult for her to hold the instrument, so she is switching to cello. Her youngest daughter, Monique, is her "mini me." She sings and is a natural at the violin since the age of eight. According to Mónica, "They all have beautiful voices but are shy. Monique is just like me though, all entertainer!!!"

Around 2005, when I was still performing with Mariachi Monumental de América de Juan José Almaguer, she was invited to sing as a soloist for wedding performance our group was also contracted for. During our show, the groom asked for a waltz I had never heard of. Without saying one word, I looked at her and offered her my violin, and without saying one word, she took the shoulder rest off of my violin and began to play that waltz, as if she had previously

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<sup>121</sup> Mónica Treviño collection.

rehearsed it with this group. She is currently performing with a mariachi group led by her husband Rubén Loya, Mariachi Azteca del Sol, in Tucson, Arizona. They have three daughters.

In Los Angeles, these women violinists were the first and only women to have been selected to perform with Mariachi Los Camperos, Mariachi Sol de México and Mariachi Los Galleros. When Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles was formed 1994, Laura left to lead this new all-female group. Mariachi Los Camperos continued delivering their high-profile performances with Mónica Treviño in their ranks, until 1997, and no woman replaced her either. Cathy Baeza believes that perhaps the reason there are no longer any women in these groups is that there are so many more women performing mariachi music now that it is no longer a novelty. For Cathy the fact that there were never any women in these ranks in Mexico could be explained because there "they still want to keep that tradition of just males, an old tradition that may never change. Some things are just better left alone." She is not the only person who cannot imagine Mariachi Vargas with a woman in their group.

When men first began to direct all-female mariachi ensembles, perhaps many thought they were doing women a favor by teaching them how to play mariachi music. But it could also be considered a disservice to talented women who will probably never have the opportunity to perform as members of the very best mariachi ensembles. In this sense, women mariachi musicians continue to be marginalized, not on the basis of their talent, but because of their gender.

## **2. The emergence of all-female mariachi ensembles in the United States**

After the heyday of the traveling caravans in Mexico, all-female mariachi ensembles began to sprout up throughout the United States, perhaps inspired by the many visits by Mariachi Las Adelitas, Mariachi Estrellas de México, and Mariachi Las Coronelas. This section will



briefly present these groups, although more ethnographic research is necessary in order to offer a more complete group biography.

*a. Mariachi Las Rancheritas from Alamo, Texas (1964-1980)*

Rafael Elizondo, father of four daughters, was a recognized musician in Alamo, Texas. He formed a family ensemble with his eldest daughters: Enriqueta on the guitar, BellaLucía on the guitarrón, and he on the piano or violin. A few years later, two the younger daughters, Elvira and Criola, joined the ensemble on the trumpet. The group performed Mexican music with this instrument until Rafael passed away in 1962. Two years later, in 1964, the sisters decided to not let this dream die, so they completed their ensemble with additional woman violinists from the EHS orchestra, and thus Mariachi Las Rancheritas was born (figure 5.9). At times, the group would be featured as Las Rancheritas y su Mariachi. In figure 5.9, Enriqueta and BellaLucía are the two women standing to the right.



Figure 5.9: Mariachi Las Rancheritas from Alamo, Texas.



Mariachi Las Rancheritas was a recognized all-female mariachi group performing for social events in many parts of Southern Texas. In July of 1975, there were announced in a newspaper article for the Brownsville Herald as one of the groups that would perform for an outdoor Chicano Music Festival, organized by Adelante Productions.

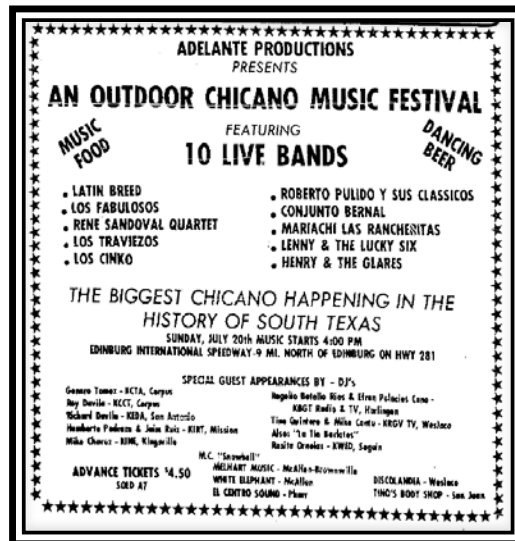


Figure 5.10: Mariachi Las Rancheritas announced in *The Brownsville Herald*.

*b. Mariachi Las Generalas (1976-1983)*

A year later in 1976, María Elena Muñoz (1924-2012) founded Mariachi Las Generalas (1976-1983) in Los Angeles, California (figure 5.11). That year, Doña Elena, who knew the basics on the vihuela, thought about asking Adela Valdez, whose husband was a mariachi musician, if she would be interested in forming part of an all-female mariachi group. When she asked Adela if she knew how to play the guitar, Adela answered: "Well, I know a few chords," too which María Elena responded, "that will do!" (Reifler Flores 2013:35). Doña Elena recruited the rest of the women from local church choirs. None of them had ever been instrumentalists, only choir singers.

Doña Elena shared with me during that informal interview in 1999 (see Chapter One) that most of the women were either wives or mothers of mariachi musicians, and that some of those men (husband, fathers, or brothers) did not take their efforts very seriously. Her son, Juan Matías Muñoz, a recognized mariachi musician, entirely supported his mother's dream to form an all-female mariachi ensemble. He took on the challenge of teaching these women how to play their instruments, and of rehearsing the group. Since Juan Matías was rehearsing this mariachi group, his colleagues would at times visit their rehearsals, skeptical of the results. At one point, one of Juan's colleagues mockingly told the women that all of their ages combined totaled over a hundred years! To this, Doña Elena replied: "Yes, son, and if you bring your mother, we'll be over two hundred! (ibid.:38).

In figure 5.11, Mariachi Las Generalas is wearing a back standard A-line *traje de charro*, with high heels instead of boots. As can be appreciated in this photograph, they were not young girls, but middle-aged women of Mexican descent who had children. Some were married; others were not. Adela Valdez and María Elena Muñoz are the two women standing on the left, respectively.



Figure 5.11: Mariachi Las Generalas directed by María Elena Muñoz.

As María Elena recruited most of the women from church choirs, one of their first performance spaces was coincidentally the church, for which they learned to play the *Misa Panamericana* (see Chapter Eight). During that personal conversation in 1999, I mentioned to Doña Elena that at the time I was performing with the Los Angeles-based all-female Mariachi Las Adelitas, directed by José Luis Salinas. She commented that her son, Juan Matías, had performed with José Luis Salinas in a renowned mariachi group before he passed away, and asked me to ask Salinas if he remembered him—and he did. Juan Matías ultimately helped his mother rehearse Mariachi Las Generalas. In 2012, Doña María Elena passed away, having had the opportunity to share with me a few memories and, thanks to Cynthia Reifler's M.A. research, she has left a lasting legacy of her narrative and intentions as a Mexican widow living in the United States, who had a dream to form the all-female Mariachi Las Generalas, and succeeded.

*c. Mariachi Estrella de Topeka (1977-1981)*

Mariachi Estrella Topeka was formed by Teresa Cuevas and Connie Alcalá, in 1977, in Topeka, which came to be the first mariachi group—men or women—in the state of Kansas (figure 5.2). The idea to have livelier Mexican music at the local church came from a Guatemalan priest, who encouraged his parishioners to study the folk music of Mexico. Since there were no mariachi musicians in the area, these women obtained their instruments from Mexico and attempted to teach themselves, beginning as a church ensemble. Teresa and Connie formed part of a mixed gender mariachi group that performed the Sunday Mass. They later decided to form their own group for a different Mass, without having the intention of forming an all-female group.

Eventually, the group was formed by seven women: Teresa Cuevas, Linda Scurlock, Isabel González, Dolores Galván, Rachel Galván, Connie Alcalá and Dolores Carmona. Like Mariachi Las Generalas, they started performing the mass as a church group, and later for social events outside the church. Fortunately, the 1980 San Antonio International Mariachi Festival offered them an opportunity to better learn to play their instruments (Laessig 2010). In figure 5.12, Dolores Cuevas is standing third from the right. They are wearing white dresses and straw sombreros, with a red bow in their individually styled hair.



Figure 5.12: Mariachi Estrella de Topeka.

On July 17, 1981, the all-female Mariachi Estrella was scheduled to perform for the Fuller Brush Company at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Kansas City (Crawford 2006:309-321). Teresa Cuevas recalls the event that killed all but two of the group members when a bridge on the fourth floor collapsed onto a walkway on the second floor, where the women from this group were walking. As a result, four members from Mariachi Estrella de Topeka were killed and another two injured.

We were going to a room to put our outfits on, and when we were walking across the skywalk, all of a sudden it felt like you were falling. It was terrible. When I woke up I was down underneath a lot of rocks and heavy rubble. Beside me was a big, heavy man. He kept saying, "What happened? What happened?" The only thing I could move was my left hand. I said, "Well, I guess I'm going to die." I made my peace with God. But then I thought, "I don't want to die here." All of a sudden I began yelling in Spanish, "God help me! God help me!" And someone heard me. He said, "We have a live one." I told him, "Don't leave me here." He said he had to get people to get the rocks off of me. I don't know how long it took because I don't remember anything after that.

(Teresa Cuevas, cited in Laessig 2010)

Only three women survived the accident: Isabel Gonzales, who was not scheduled to perform that day, as well as Rachel Galván and Teresa Cuevas. A short film documentary called *Mariachi Estrella* (2010) has immortalized this unique all-female mariachi story, in Topeka, Kansas. It illustrates how the story of Mariachi Estrella was unique because it was all-female mariachi ensemble that was born from a church choir in Topeka, a part of the U.S. that did not have a large Mexican population. This group represented Topeka in the state of Kansas to such a degree that, on July 12, 2006, that city unveiled a statue in the group's honor at the Topeka Performing Arts Center (figure 5.13). It features a woman in a *traje de charro* holding a sombrero in her left hand and raising her right arm up in the sky. The base of the statue features the four women who passed away in the 1981 accident.



Figure 5.13: Statue commemorating the all-female Mariachi Estrella de Topeka.

While Mariachi Estrella de Topeka disbanded due to this horrific accident, their memory lives on through those who survived, and through the statue that immortalizes the significance this group holds for its town of birth.

### **3. Contemporary all-female mariachi ensembles in the United States**

As opposed to the all-female mariachi groups from Mexico, those in the United States have had professional opportunities that in Mexico are yet to be created. For example, in the U.S., all-female mariachi groups have the opportunity to be nominated for a Grammy (and earn it), to appear on national television programs, and to perform in renowned concert spaces like the Hollywood Bowl and the Walt Disney Concert Hall. In the United States, all-female mariachi ensembles hail from states such as Arizona, California, Kansas, New Mexico, Texas, and New

York. In this section, I will refer to those who have earned a national recognition as all-female ensembles in the United States.

*a. Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles de José Hernández (1994)*

In 1994, José Hernández, director of Mariachi Sol de México, decided to start an all-female mariachi ensemble. In *Compañeras* (2007), a documentary that shares the story of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, José Hernández says that he represents the fifth generation in a lineage of mariachi musicians, but that his sisters were never encouraged to perform mariachi music because, in his words, "Mariachi is a man's world; it's not a woman's world." This idea changed for him in 1991, when he created the South El Monte-based non-profit Mariachi Heritage Society. He recalls that, of the 30 students who attended the center's first classes, half were girls. For Hernández, the boys in the Mariachi Heritage Society had their role models, but not the little girls. The little boys would look up to Mariachi Sol de Mexico or Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. After having participated in mariachi festivals where Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías were also featured, José Hernández decided that there were enough talented women in the Los Angeles area to create a world-class all-female mariachi.

Figure 5.14 is Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles's first poster. Laura Sobrino is sitting in middle towards the back. The original members of Mariachi Reyna were Theresa S. Chávez, Patricia Martín, Laura A. Cordova, Celia Leyva, Griselda Burruel, Griselda Pérez, Cynthia Reifler Flores, Rocío Fregoso, Sylvia Peña, Catherine Marín Baeza and Espy Donlucas Hernández.





Figure 5.14: Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles de José Hernández.

In 1993, José Hernández appointed Laura Sobrino in charge of casting auditions for the women who would form Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles. Laura selected each member of this new all-female group, and with her as their co-director and lead violinist, they debuted at the 1994 Mariachi USA Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, California. They have released four albums: *Sólo Tuya* (1996); *El Mejor Mariachi Femenino del Mundo* (2002); and *Compañeras* (2008). *Compañeras* was nominated for the Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards. In 2009, Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles was invited to perform at the White House *Cinco de Mayo* celebration.



*b. Mariachi Las Adelitas de José Luis Salinas (1997)*

In 1996, José Luis Salinas, former trumpeter and violinist with Mariachi Sol de México, decided to start his own all-female mariachi ensemble, with his wife Nataly as the guitarrón player. The group has performed at many prominent mariachi festivals all over the United States. In addition the Mariachi USA Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, they have played for festivals in Albuquerque, Tucson, Las Cruces, Omaha, and Phoenix. They recorded one album *Canción Mexicana* (2005). I worked with this group briefly towards the end of 1999 and then again around 2001 for about a year. The group recently disbanded in 2012 because the director moved to Texas, but former members started their own group called Mariachi Las Tequileras.

Figure 5.15 is a still image of Mariachi Las Adelitas, in formation for the Mariachi USA concert at the Hollywood Bowl in 1997. José Luis Salinas is standing on the left end of the trumpet section, and his wife, Nataly, is standing in the center playing the guitarrón.



Figure 5.15: Mariachi Las Adelitas at the Hollywood Bowl.

*c. Mariachi Mujer 2000 de Marisa Orduño (1999)*

In 1999, Marisa Orduño and other former members of Mariachi Reyna de Los Ángeles decided to form a new all-female group in which Laura Sobrino would serve as the musical director and lead violinist. Among their achievements, they are proud to have participated in venues such as the Hollywood Bowl's Mariachi USA Festival, the Teatro Degollado in Guadalajara, the Miami Calle Ocho festivities, the Santa Fe Opera House, and the Bird's Nest Stadium opening ceremonies for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Unlike most other all-female mariachi ensembles, Mariachi Mujer 2000 members do not all live in the same city, and they only gather for rehearsals prior to an event.

Laura Sobrino would prepare their music, and after a few rehearsals, they put on impressive shows. In the past five years, according to their website, they had an average of about five important festivals per year. Due to this relatively small number of performances, most of the women in this group perform regularly with other ensembles. Marisa Orduño, for example, frequently plays percussion with salsa groups. Mariachi Mujer 2000 released its first album, *La Nueva Imagen del Milenio*, in 2002. Figure 5.16 is Mariachi Mujer 2000's first poster. Marisa Orduño is standing in the back row, third from the right, and Laura Sobrino, to her right.



Figure 5.16: Mariachi Mujer 2000 de Marisa Orduño.

*d. Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea (1999)*

Jazz-trained trumpeter Cindy Shea is a white, American woman who has pushed the boundaries of mariachi music, thus becoming a target for criticism by traditionalist musicians and audiences. Her first experience performing mariachi music was with the Los Angeles-based, all-female Mariachi Las Alondras. By 1999, Cindy founded Mariachi Divas in that same city, with the aim of forming a high-level all-female ensemble. Her group began fusing Latin jazz styles with mariachi music, and created what they initially called a *ranchengue*, which at that time, referred to *ranchera* fused with *merengue*. They also added non-traditional instruments, such as the *guiro*, flutes, and a drum set. Many people loved it, while others preferred a more traditional take on all female mariachi ensembles. Many of these critiques regarding its authenticity are based on criteria worthy of reflection: (1) the group was all female, (2) it was multicultural, and (3) it had different instrumentation.

After several attempts at recording her group's music with existing record labels and being rejected, Cindy Shea decided to found her own record label: Shea Records. Ten years into their existence, in 2009, Mariachi Divas won a Grammy award for best regional Mexican album, tying with Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano. Since then, Mariachi Divas has been nominated for five Grammys. In their initial presentations, the members of Mariachi Divas broke the barriers of an implicit women's dress code for mariachi music by wearing men's mariachi trousers (fitted to the female body) during some of their performances. While they generally wear the female *traje de charro* today, they paved the road for the creative ways in which women have presented themselves as they perform mariachi music.

Despite critiques that Cindy Shea does not have the cultural authority to direct a mariachi ensemble, she has succeeded in earning an important place in both innovative and traditional

mariachi performance spaces. When Mariachi Divas came under the musical direction of Beto Jiménez, Cindy Shea's husband, the group's performance of *sones* became more traditional, but never completely eliminated the Latin jazz feel. Cathy Baeza, who has performed with Mariachi Los Galleros and Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, joined Mariachi Divas in 1994. "I love my journey and I would not trade it for the world!! I know it's a long story" she begins, "and there is so much more in between, like raising my children and working full-time, and managing my time, somehow, so that I can play with some of finest mariachi groups in the world." Mariachi Divas today have eight albums under their belt. Figure 5.17 is a photograph of the original members of Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea. Cindy is standing in the back row, third from the left, on the trumpet. Notice the non-standard mariachi instruments, as well as the diversity in the group's ethnic makeup.



Figure 5.17: Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea from Los Angeles, California.

Figure 5.18 is a photograph of Cindy Shea receiving her group's Grammy award.



Figure 5.18: Mariachi Divas de Cindy Shea receiving their Grammy Award.

*e. Mariachi Flor de Toloache (2008)*

From New York City, Mariachi Flor de Toloache was founded by Mireya Ramos in 2008. As with Mariachi Divas, Mariachi Flor de Toloache is also comprised of members from diverse cultural backgrounds, which include Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Italy, Colombia, Germany, Singapore, and the United States. *Toloache* is the náhuatl language name for a legendary and magical flower notoriously used in Mexico as a kind of love potion. In addition to their multicultural ambience, this ensemble is also widely known for wearing men's pants instead of the women's skirted version of the *traje de charro*.

Mireya Ramos, half Mexican and half Cuban, began playing violin in mariachi New York City mariachi groups. When she noticed that there were very few women mariachis in one of the largest cities in the United States, she deemed it important for an all-female mariachi group to be formed in NYC, similar to the ones in California. Mireya, along with vihuela player Shae Fiol, a Cuban American, searched for the rest of the musicians that would form this new cosmopolitan

all-female mariachi ensemble. In figure 5.10, Mariachi Flor de Toloache is wearing *charro* pants tapered to a woman's body, black high heels, and a flower in the hair. In addition to the standard mariachi instrumentation, they use flute and percussion (not shown in this photograph).



Figure 5.19: Mariachi Flor de Toloache from New York, New York.

*f. Mariachi Las Colibrí de Susie García (2009)*

Susie García, a 1998 UCLA graduate and Executive Director at Colibrí Entertainment, was one of the founding members of Mariachi Divas. When she separated from that group, she and her colleagues decided to form a different type of all-female mariachi ensemble: one without trumpets. Mariachi Las Colibrí (The Hummingbirds) perform with standard mariachi instrumentation violins, guitarrón, vihuela, and guitar—minus the trumpets. Instead of the female



*traje de charro*, Las Colibrí wear colorful women's traditional Mexican dresses (see Chapter Seven).



Figure 5.20: Mariachi Las Colibrí from Los Angeles, California.

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The four women presented in the beginning of this chapter —Rebecca Gonzales, Laura Sobrino, Cathy Baeza, and Mónica Treviño— are all of Mexican descent and were born and raised in the United States. They all had the opportunity to perform with the most renowned mariachi ensembles in the United States, an opportunity that was not given to other women once the last of these left those groups. Interestingly, the early all-female ensembles from the United States emerged during similar times, but in different parts of the country: California, Texas, and Kansas. These groups apparently did not know of the existence other all-female groups for the



four women profiled above —and vice versa. Whereas Mariachi Las Rancheritas was a family tradition, Mariachi Las Generalas and Mariachi Estrella de Topeka had their origins in church groups that were formed to play Sunday Mass.

These contemporary mariachi groups fit into a new socio-cultural scene in the United States. They are different from their predecessors in that they began to participate in the making of a gendered world among Mexican-American women by negotiating traditional patriarchal demands in favor of a more cosmopolitan or modern view of gender roles, a view not specific to the Mexican-American community, but linked to the multicultural life of the U.S. today.

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## Chapter Six: Engendering Mariachi Las Pioneras de México

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*Being a mariachi has its merits, but it's not easy to withstand those machistas. I believe that when a woman is professional, no matter where she stands, there you have an artist - not a woman, but an artist*

Hilda López Soto (2007)

*We existed, we were, and we continue to be mariachi musicians*

Magdalena "Malena" Berrones (2008)

Many of the women mentioned in the previous two chapters ultimately enjoyed successful careers in their respective all-female ensembles. For the women in Chapter Five, who formed part of the early all-female mariachi groups in the United States, some continued on to perform mariachi music in local groups, such as Teresa Cuevas from Mariachi Estrellas de Topeka, Kansas. For others, their mariachi musical career ended when the groups disbanded. Regarding the women who formed part of the renowned mariachi groups in the United States, they all chose to continue performing mariachi music: Rebecca Gonzales founded and directs Mariachi Tesoro, Laura Sobrino was a founding member of and musically directed the all-female Mariachi Mujer 2000, Cathy Baeza continued on to perform with Mariachi Divas, and Mónica Treviño continued on to perform in Tuscon, Arizona. The women who formed part of the early all-female mariachi groups in Mexico City faced the challenge of continuing to perform mariachi music in a different performance context or leaving the performance experience in their memories as a thing of the past.

Many years would pass before the women of the early all-female groups would receive recognition for their efforts. After decades of being faced with the societal imperative to abandon mariachi music in order to take care of their homes, the former members of Mariachi Estrellas de

México reunited in 1991 to perform mariachi music together again. When vihuela player Felisa González's first daughter was due to celebrate her *quinceañera* in that year, she made the effort to fly Lupita Morales, director of Mariachi Estrellas de México (profiled in Chapter Four), from Tijuana to Mexico City for this important celebration.

It was a magical moment for them because, after so many years, they could once again perform the music that had given them so much throughout their younger lives. Felisa (biography presented below) reunited some of the members with Lupita once again later that year to perform for Lupita Morales's birthday on December 12, 1991. This time, the members flew to Tijuana for this celebration, and that was the last time they ever played as Mariachi Estrellas de México with their director, Lupita Morales, who passed away in 2005 (interview with Felisa González).

Figure 6.1 is an image of the former members of Mariachi Estrellas de México, reunited in 1991, from Felisa González's personal collection. In the bottom row (from left to right) are Chuy Lara, Juanita Lara, Malena Berrones, and Isabel López. Standing in the top row (from left to right) are Rosa Correa, Josefina Correa, Rosa López, and Felisa González.



Figure 6.1: Mariachi Estrellas de México reunited in 1991.

### 1. Reunited to perform

In 2007, when mariachi educator Laura Sobrino (profiled in Chapter Five) visited Mexico City to interview the surviving members of the early all-female mariachi ensembles described in Chapter Four, she along with Antonio Covarrubias, former leader of the Mexican Mariachis Unión at Garibaldi, reunited the women a third time. For this group, former members of Mariachi Las Coronelas, Lupe Villa (biography presented below) and Hilda López (profiled in Chapter Four), were also invited to perform. Other women who still performed were invited, such as Luz Escoto, but she preferred to continue working comfortably with her mariachi group in Xochimilco. Since the members of this new group were not all members of Mariachi Estrellas de México, Laura Sobrino suggested a new name for them: Mariachi Las Pioneras de México.

With the creation of Mariachi Las Pioneras, some of these women were given the opportunity to "volver a empezar" (start over again). The members in this group were from Mariachi Las Coronelas and Mariachi Estrellas de México, but none from Mariachi Las Adelitas since it was difficult locating any of them in Mexico City. The women who formed part of Mariachi Las Pioneras, profiled below, are guitarist Lupe Villa from Mariachi Las Coronelas, vihuela player Felisa González from Mariachi Estrella, violinist Malena Berrones from Mariachi Estrellas de México, and violinists Juanita and Chuy Lara, who first performed with Mariachi Estrellas de México and later joined the ranks of Mariachi Las Coronelas. At times, violinists Isabel and Hilda López (profiled in Chapter Four), were also invited to perform. Since the group did not have a guitarrón or a trumpet player, they would occasionally invite other women who were not original members of the early all-female mariachi groups in question. Today, the surviving women have gained the courage to relive in this all-female mariachi group and for their struggle to be recognized by the public in general, and specifically the mariachi community, but this time as the elder, more mature women they have become. Juanita said it perfectly: "Al volver a empezar, [uno] se va dando cuenta que no está tan olvidado" (In starting over again, one realizes that all is not forgotten) (interview with Juanita Lara).

*a. Guadalupe Hernández Monroy "Lupe Villa" (b. 1931)<sup>122</sup>*

Guadalupe Hernández Monroy, better known as Lupe Villa, was born in Tacubaya, Mexico City in 1931 and grew up listening to her father, an electrician by profession, play the guitar, mandolin, and violin as his hobby. She used to take his guitar out of the closet when he

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<sup>122</sup> The main source for this biography is with formal interviews and conversations with Lupe Villa, in Mexico City, from 2008 until 2014. Some dates and details are completed with interviews that reference each other.

was not home so that she secretly could try to tune it and play it. But one fateful day a string broke, and when he found out, he scolded and hit her. Yet this did not stop her from wanting to learn and, of all her siblings, she is the only who became a musician. Although she studied accounting, her desire to sing and play the guitar never waned.

Lupe Villa remembers the exact date she had the opportunity to form part of Mariachi Las Coronelas: November 9, 1959. She recalls that this group had just returned from a two-year tour in Venezuela. Two of their musicians had become successful singing with the XEW radio cast and left the group, opening a door for Lupe. The director, Carlota Noriega, decided to fill the vacancies with younger women and she was among them. For Lupe Villa, this opportunity was fate. During that time, she was auditioning to enter an all-male mariachi group (the name of which she cannot recall).<sup>123</sup> The director of this group asked her to sing a song, but she had to stop them to say she could not sing if they were out of tune. Surprised, the director asked how she "knew," to which Lupe replied that she was a guitarist. The director shamefully confessed that his group was still learning how to play, but said that he knew a place where she would fit in perfectly. He walked her over to Carlota Noriega's house and introduced Lupe as an excellent guitar player and singer.

After they were introduced, Carlota told her to return the next morning at 8:00 a.m. When Lupe arrived, she found the musicians ready to leave with their luggage and instruments, so she asked Carlota when she should come back. Carlota asked her to fetch three taxis, which she did. All of them got in the taxis, suitcases, instruments, and all. Carlota did not know Lupe's name,

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<sup>123</sup> If Lupe had the opportunity to join a group composed of men, as their only woman, before she knew there were all-female mariachi ensembles, how many other women would not have had the same opportunity? Mariachi music is overwhelmingly popular and it would not make sense that the only women who performed were those in these all-female ensembles.

but said, "Wait, where are you going *muchacha*? Get in!" They finally arrived at the bus station, where Lupe recognized many artists getting on a caravan leaving for Puebla. She waited patiently, asking Carlota, again, when she should return to speak with her about joining the group. "Get on the bus," insisted Carlota. This turned out to be Lupe's first performance with Mariachi Las Coronelas, a three-day tour away from home. They supplied her guitar, clothing, food, and everything else she needed. On the bus, Carlota asked her what she knew. Lupe replied that she knew the major, minor, seventh, augmented, and diminished chords. Plus, she knew "un poco de nota" (a little bit of note reading). Upon arriving, she met with the trumpet player to figure out which keys the singers they were going to accompany were singing in.



Figure 6.2: Lupe Villa posing for a profile picture.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Lupe Villa Collection.

It was a great experience, she recalls, but upon returning to Mexico City, she found she no longer had a home to return to. Her father was strict about her only playing music at home. When he kicked her out, he added that he had three sons and was ashamed it was his daughter who had given him so many problems. Carlota took Lupe into her home and offered her a place to stay. A few days later they were on their way to Aguascalientes for another tour, and after that, to Chihuahua.

One of the saddest periods of her life, Lupe says, was when her mother passed away. During a performance she was unable to sing because the pain got the better of her. She eventually overcame her grief and channeled it into song. Don Luis, the group's musical director, was impressed with her performance and later asked why Lupe sang so with so much emotion. When he found out it was because her mother passed away, he said, "Ésa sí es un mariachi!" (Now that [woman] is a mariachi!). Lupe straightened up, and told me, "La función tiene que seguir; estamos comprometidas, y vámonos!" (The show must go on; we are committed [to this], so let us do it!). This anecdote symbolizes everything that this music represents for her. Days before her father's death, he asked her to take out the guitar he gave her and sing a few songs for him. The rest of the family was in the kitchen in tears, wondering how Lupe, after reconciling with her father for throwing her out of the house in her early years, could have the power to sing knowing her father was hours away from passing. According to her, "Fue mi primer maestro, y lo que yo soy se lo debo a él" (He was my first teacher, and everything I am I owe to him).

Lupe Villa performed with Mariachi Las Coronelas from 1959 to 1972. Although the early all-female mariachi groups in Mexico City did not have much contact with each other, she met some of those who played with Estrellas de México because, when that group fell apart, many of them joined the ranks of Mariachi Las Coronelas. The longest tour she had with Las



Coronelas was in Colombia. During their international tours, she was impressed with how much people loved Mexican music: "Quieren mucho lo mexicano, sobre todo por la música ranchera" (They love the Mexicans, above all because of the *ranchera* music).

After Mariachi Las Coronelas disbanded because of Carlota Noriega's death, Lupe Villa went to work as a soloist in the traveling train shows on the Ferrocarriles (trains that traveled with artists), which included 75 entertainers, such as magicians, musicians, and a variety of other artists. She accompanied herself with her guitar, or was accompanied by mariachi or norteno groups. "Después cuando se vendió, se terminó Ferrocarriles. Luego me dediqué al hogar y a bienes raíces, pero nunca dejé la guitarra" (Later when Ferrocarriles was sold, it ended. I later dedicated myself to the home and to a realty business, but I never set the guitar aside), Lupe recalled.

When the opportunity came up to take part in the new project to reunite the early mariachi women as part of Mariachi Las Pioneras, Lupe was exalted:

For me it was a surprise, a dream that I never believed would come true. Many years I sang as a soloist, while others performed in different groups, and the rest dedicated themselves to the home. There were no longer all-female mariachi groups, strong and responsible. Although there are a few groups here and there, it is not the same. The young women of today have a different mentality. . . I feel like time stopped. I am happy.

Para mí ha sido una sorpresa, un sueño, que jamás creí que se volvería. Muchos años me fui como solista, mientras muchas tocaron en diferentes grupos, las demás se fueron a su hogar. Pues ya no volvió a haber mariachi de mujeres, firmes y responsables. Aunque sí hay grupitos por allí, pero ya no es lo mismo. Las jóvenes llevan otra mentalidad. . . siento como que el tiempo se detuvo. Me siento feliz.

(Lupe Villa, personal interview, summer 2008)

Figure 6.3 is a photograph of Lupe Villa, dressed in her Mariachi Las Pioneras *traje de charro*, just outside her home in 2012. When Las Coronelas disbanded in 1972, she continued singing as a soloist, but did not play mariachi music again, until Mariachi Las Pioneras was

formed. Listening to Lupe Villa sing and play her guitar, there is no doubt that mariachi music and the *ranchera* singing style is in her blood.



Figure 6.3: Lupe Villa outside her home.

Lupe Villa reflected on the experience of the "dream" she lived, commenting on the how it differed from the experiences of her colleagues and, by extension, the more recent experiences of all-female mariachi groups of today. In the first case, she mentions how some of her *compañeras* continued on to play mariachi music, either by attempting to form their own all-female ensembles or by joining other local groups. Most of them, however, had chosen to dedicate her time to her home, as wives and mothers. Lupe explained that "Algunas mujeres se salieron porque se casaron, pero yo nunca me casé" (Some women left because they got married, but I never got married), and with a sense of satisfaction, she added, "Tenía yo muchas

responsabilidades con mi familia" (I had too many responsibilities with my family). A major reason Lupe never married was because of the great responsibility acquired as a working woman in caring for her family. She complimented her artistic career with her realty work, and in this way was able to contribute to her family's expenses. She faced a struggle against patriarchy in both the artistic and family realm, and overcame both with much maturity and a responsible attitude.

In the second case, Lupe compares her experience with the recent experiences of all-female mariachi groups of today. For example, those who attempted to form all-female groups followed by those supported by the traveling caravans could not be as successful because they didn't have the financial stability offered by this media vehicle. It was a different performance reality. Where the caravan groups performed as part of an organized spectacle, the local groups performed for local family and community social events.

*b. Felisa González Romero (b. 1936)*<sup>125</sup>

Felisa González was born in San Lorenzo Tezonco when it was still a *pueblo* (town), although now she considers it a big town in Mexico City. She currently lives in Santa Cruz Meyehualco. Felisa began listening to popular Mexican music on the radio when she was 16 years old. She recalls that around 1952, she heard an announcement on radio 620AM calling for auditions for young women between the ages of 15 and 20 to form part of the all-female Mariachi Estrellas de México. Since Felisa loved to sing and loved the music, she rushed over to the radio station to get more information about the audition. At this time, she recalled that the

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<sup>125</sup> The main source for this biography is with formal interviews and conversations with Felisa González, in Mexico City, from 2008 until 2014. Some dates and details are completed with interviews that reference each other.

mariachi group was already a year old. At the time the group was away on tour, so Lupita Morales asked her to return on December 16, which she did.

On that day Felisa went to the Lupita Morales's house. She asked her which instrument she could play, to which she responded that she did not play any, but that she really loved to sing. She began studying guitar and later, when the vihuela player quit the group, switched over to the vihuela. Since it was such a small instrument, other women were ashamed to play it, Felisa recalls. She was happy to switch over to this instrument because, with her small fingers, she felt it was more comfortable for her hands than the guitar. She joined Mariachi Estrellas de México at the age of 17, after studying diligently for a year, and soon embarked on her first tour with them to Veracruz. Figure 6.4 is a photograph from Felisa's personal collection, wearing one of the regional dresses used by Mariachi Estrellas de México in 1963.



Figure 6.4: Felisa González posing with her Mariachi Estrellas de México dress.

Her last tour was to South America. As mentioned in Mariachi Estrella de México's profile above, when the rest of the group had to return to Mexico, three women stayed in Argentina —Felisa was among them. When they returned to Mexico in 1965, Felisa recalls that she was asked to leave Mariachi Estrella de México because Lupita Morales was upset she had not returned with the rest of the group.

Felisa thus joined Mariachi Las Coronelas. The music was different, confessed Felisa, "Con Las Estrellas de México tocábamos más sones" (With Estrellas de México we played more *sones*). She was happy to be performing mariachi music with Mariachi Las Coronelas, but left the group after two years, in 1967, when Lupita Morales asked her to return to Mariachi Estrellas de México. Felisa remained with Estrellas de México until it disbanded in the early 1970s.<sup>126</sup> She then tried to get in contact with Carlota Noriega so that she could perform with Mariachi Las Coronelas again, at which point Don Luis Martínez, their musical director, mentioned that Carlota became ill and was hospitalized. Unlike her other *compañeras*, Felisa visited Carlota daily until the day she passed away in 1973.

At this point in her life, Felisa felt that her mariachi working days were over. She established a restaurant business and did not pick up her instrument for the next 15 years. It was not until her daughter Rosa Cecilia's *quinceañera* that the group reunited in 1991. Upon reflecting on her career, and the opportunity to perform with Mariachi Las Pioneras, Felisa said:

I remembered when we were much younger, we would often travel to the United States. Well, now we are happy that, despite the fact that we are much older, we still love the music. We cannot play like before, but we still have that desire.

Se me vino el recuerdo de que cuando estábamos más jóvenes, salíamos muy seguido a Estados Unidos. Pues ahora ya nos da gusto porque a pesar de que estamos más grandes,

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<sup>126</sup> Coincidentally, none of the women I interviewed recalled the exact year the group disbanded.

nos sigue gustando la música. Ya no tocaremos como antes, pero sí le echamos ganas todavía.

(Felisa González, personal interview, summer 2008)



Figure 6.5: Felisa González at her home in Santa Cruz Meyehualco.<sup>127</sup>

Her recommendation for women who are beginning to play mariachi music is to be musically responsible and disciplined. This, she proudly exclaims, is what her *compañeras* all learned from Lupita Morales and her father. I asked Felisa what it meant for a woman to be responsible. She responded that too much *libertinaje* (abuse of freedom) exists nowadays, and women now find it easy to, in her words, "a no darse a respetar" (to fail to command respect). The women in the all-female mariachi groups who were featured on the traveling caravans had chaperones who would protect, guide, and require them to maintain self-respect. Today, women perform in places where mariachi ensembles have to satisfy many customers daily, and even hourly, and who often get drunk as they listen to mariachi music. In many cases, the women do

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<sup>127</sup> Photo by Martha Irene Delgado Parra, 2012.

not have a father figure to protect and guide them, and instead have to do it themselves. An example, suggested Felisa, is a woman who accepts drinks and gets carried away with the guys; if she does not respect herself, others will not respect her.

*c. Magdalena Berrones Berrones (b. 1940)<sup>128</sup>*

Magdalena Berrones, also known as Malena, was born in Tampico, Tamaulipas and came to Mexico City with her family when she was two years old. Her father, José Berrones Martínez, was a well-known mariachi musician and songwriter who also made a living performing at Plaza Garibaldi. Malena vividly remembers being three years old when her father would come home and play mariachi music records while her mother was sitting at the sewing machine: "Me acuerdo de la música de esa época y ya traía la mariachada desde entonces" (I remember the music of that time and I already had the mariachi spirit in me).



Figure 6.6: Malena Berrones as a child holding her older brother Leonardo's hand.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> The main source for this biography is with formal interviews and conversations with Malena Berrones, in Mexico City, from 2008 until 2014. Some dates and details are completed with interviews that reference each other.

Magdalena Berrones is the sister of Leonardo Espinoza, original guitarrón player for Mariachi México de Pepe Villa. Her brothers were well-known mariachi musicians: León *El Leoncito* played guitarrón with Mariachi México de Pepe Villa for many years and David performed with Roman Palomar's mariachi ensemble.<sup>130</sup> Her sister, Rita Berrones, also liked to sing and became a songwriter. Don José Berrones taught Malena how to play the guitar when she was about eight or nine years old.

As a young girl, her father took her to radio stations so that she could have opportunities to sing, but when they asked for her to stay unchaperoned, he refused. Instead, in 1957, he took Malena to Lupita Morales, director of Mariachi Estrellas de México, so that she could perform with this all-female group.<sup>131</sup> He felt comfortable leaving her with this group because Lupita's father managed and supervised them. After a while, Lupita asked Malena to switch over to violin. Figure 6.7 is a photograph, from Malena's personal collection, in which she is wearing one of the regional dresses used by Mariachi Estrellas de México.

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<sup>129</sup> Magdalena Berrones Berrones Collection.

<sup>130</sup> León participated in many musical recordings with Mariachi Pulido, Mariachi México de Pepe Villa, and Mariachi Jalisco de Pepe Villa. In addition, appeared in many Mexican films.

<sup>131</sup> During this time, she also performed in a duet with Lupita called Duetto Las Lupes. They recorded several songs that are heard in films by Emilio *El Indio* Fernández. One of them, "El Mayor de los Dorados," written by her father, don José Berrones, appeared in the film *Pueblito* (1962). Las Lupes's soundtrack also appears in the film *Un Dorado de Villa* (1967) and *Los Albañiles* (1967).





Figure 6.7: Malena Berrones posing in her Mariachi Estrellas de México dress.

After the tour with Mariachi Estrellas de México that ended in Argentina, Malena was among the three women who stayed in South America, along with Felisa González and Josefina Correa. One of their stops before they reached Brazil was Uruguay, where Malena gave birth to her first daughter. Upon their return to Mexico in 1963, Felisa and Malena discovered that Lupita Morales and Don Jesús would not allow them to return to Mariachi Estrellas de México.

In 1967, Malena moved to Los Angeles with her husband. She calculates that she spent about 12 or 13 years away from playing music, taking care of her children and working in her home. She did not return to Mexico until 1990, and did not play mariachi music again until 1991. In 1995, Rosa Correa decided to recreate Mariachi Estrellas de México Internacional. They got a

two-month contract in Puerto Rico, but Malena said she could only stay for one. This was an opportunity for her to see her brother, who lived there and whom she had not seen for over 20 years. She decided to stay after the contract ended and got work with other local mariachi groups for an additional five months. Upon returning from Puerto Rico, Malena continued to work with Mariachi Estrellas de México Internacional for a few years until she separated from them and went to work at Plaza Garibaldi. Isabel López (biography presented in Chapter Four) then suggested that she work at the mariachi plaza in Iztapalapa, which she did for eight years. In 2009, she was working with Mariachi Iztapalapense and Mariachi Las Pioneras. She stated she would work as a mariachi musician as long as her body allowed. Figure 6.8 is a photograph of Malena Berrones in her home in Mexico City.



Figure 6.8: Malena Berrones at her home.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Photo by Martha Irene Delgado Parra, 2012.

For many years, Malena dedicated her time to performing every weekend. She tells young women interested in learning mariachi music:

Do not do this only as a way of life, but because you really enjoy it. Do not think about how much you are going to earn, but in everything that you are going to gain from the music. One needs much preparation to make good music. One needs to practice, no matter what kind of music. Music deserves respect and care. . . Music is sensibility. If you have it, and you can make it better by going to a school, then that is good.

No lo hagan solamente como modo de vida, sino porque realmente les gusta. Que no vaya pensando en cuánto vaya a ganar, sino en todo lo que saca de sí de la música. La música, para hacer un buen trabajo, se necesita preparación. Hay que ensayar, sea la música que sea. La música merece respeto y cariño. . . La música es sensibilidad. Si la tienes, y la puedes mejorar con una escuela, ¡pues qué bueno!

(Malena Berrones, personal interview, summer 2012)

She has since written memoirs of her time in South America that she hopes to publish someday.

*d. Sanjuana Lara Medina (b. 1941)*<sup>133</sup>

Juanita Lara Medina, better known as Juanita, was born in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco in 1941. Her father brought the family to Mexico City when she was eight years old. She remembered fondly what a joyful man her father was, and emphasized how her parents would take every opportunity to sing together. Her father had always wished for one of his kids to play the guitar and it just so happened to be Juanita.

Juanita joined Mariachi Estrellas de Mexico around 1956, when she was about 14 years old. She recalled that they were always traveling. Since she was a beginning guitar player, they would leave her behind when they went on tours, giving her homework so that she could practice while they were away. After several weeks, Juanita grew eager to perform with them. One time,

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<sup>133</sup> The main source for this biography is with formal interviews and conversations with Juanita Medina, in Mexico City, from 2008 until 2014. Some dates and details are completed with interviews that reference each other.

Lupita Morales told her that they were going on tour again, and that Juanita was going to stay behind. But Juanita was upset and said, "No, Lupita yo ya no me voy a quedar, le voy a echar muchas ganas, pero yo otra vez ¡ya no me quedo!" (No, Lupita I am no longer going to stay behind, I am going to work very hard, but I am not going to say anymore). And she went with them on the next tour. Figure 6.9 is a photograph of Juanita Lara, from her personal collection, wearing on of Mariachi Estrellas de México regional dresses.



Figure 6.9: Juanita Lara posing with her Mariachi Estrellas de México dress.<sup>134</sup>

A few years later, Juanita left Mariachi Estrellas de México because her younger sister was dismissed and she did not want to be left alone. They both joined Mariachi Las Coronelas. Carlota Noriega opened the doors for the Lara sisters, but was concerned with having too many

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<sup>134</sup> Sanjuana Lara Medina Collection.

guitars in her group, so she asked Juanita to play violin. Juanita protested, "Pero ni sé cargar el violín" (But I do not even know how to hold a violin!), but with Mariachi Las Coronelas, she certainly learned. Juanita explained that she arrived at Carlota's house on a Friday and by the following Sunday she was already working with them. "No esperábamos con bañarnos de lluvia a las 2:00 a.m. tocando unas mañanitas!" (We were not counting on getting drenched at 2:00am during one of the *mañanitas!* [early morning birthday serenade]), she exclaimed, adding that these were memories that came alive with every telling.

She shared a more action-filled memory about when, with Mariachi Las Coronelas on tour, men on horseback chased them with the intention of kidnapping them. The women were in a car, driving in between cacti and *terreales* (rough terrain), when at one moment, the men began shooting at their car. Juanita recounted, "¡Querían parar los coches porque nos querían robar a caballo!" (They wanted to stop the cars because they wanted to steal us by horse!). After hearing the gunshots, the chauffeur ordered them to keep their heads down. He then out-drove the horses and they were finally safe once they got to the hotel, where they rushed out of the car and into their rooms. No one was hurt.

At a different event, Juanita complained about the *rancheros*, men who worked on the ranches, because some were acting aggressively and took whatever they wanted. She explained how before getting to the venue, the event organizers tried to protect the women from these *rancheros* by making them all lie on the floor, buried in beer boxes, so that the *rancheros* could not see them. Traveling in this way, they arrived covered in dust. At a different event, upon getting ready to perform in a *palenque* (arena), some *toreros* (bullfighters) were showing off with their guns when one shot almost took Juanita's sombrero off. Although she confessed that

there were many such difficult situations, she was relieved it was not her ear, though she was temporarily deafened, and laughed that at least she still had both her ears.

Juanita recalled a time when the group performed at the Los Angeles' Million Dollar Theater, with Mariachi Las Coronelas opening the show for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. They had a good relationship with this group, but since that day, she recalls, Mariachi Vargas decided to stop doing shows with Mariachi Las Coroneles. According to Juanita, when Mariachi Vargas came out to do their show, the audience booed them off the stage and asked Mariachi Las Coronelas to return to the spotlight. She laughed and said that the friendship between the two groups never healed after that experience.

In 1963, Juanita and her younger sister Chuy appeared in the movie *El Mariachi Canta* (1963) with Luis Aguilar and Lucha Villa (figure 6.10). She recalled that she and her sister were invited by Pepe Villa, the director of *Mariachi México*, to participate. They were both members of an all-female mariachi ensemble that accompanied Juanita while she serenaded Lucha Villa. Of all the women in the group created for the film, Juanita and Chuy were the only real musicians; the others were extras. The other three posters of this film are featured above.



Figure 6.10: Juanita Lara and her sister Chuy in the film *El Mariachi Canta* (1963).

Juanita played for six or seven years with Las Coronelas, but in 1968, she left when she got married. With a straight face she said to me, "Lógico, ya no me dejaron seguir trabajando" (Logically, I was no longer allowed to perform). I asked why this was logical, and with a matter-of-fact tone, she replied that it was because husbands did not permit their wives to work. She then corrected herself and said that not all husbands forbade their wives from playing and not all understood the situation. According to Juanita, her husband's logic was, essentially, "Me casé para tener una esposa, una compañera, y si te vas, no hay matrimonio" (I got married to have a wife, a *compañera*, and if you leave, then there is no matrimony).

Before Juanita married, she had already signed a contract to perform with Mariachi Las Coronelas for two months in Chicago, so she was obligated to go, and her husband understood. Figure 6.11 is a newspaper clipping featuring Mariachi Las Coronelas in Chicago, dated August 15, 1968. The caption reads: "El Mariachi Femenil "Las Coronelas" se presentará hoy en la

noche en el formidable evento con que se inicia la Fiesta Latina en el patio de la Iglesia del Inmaculado Corazón de María, en la 45 y Ashland, acto al que se invita a la comunidad mexicana de Chicago." (Mariachi Femenil "Las Coronelas" will perform tonight in the formidable event that initiates the Fiesta Latina in the courtyard of the Immaculate Heart of María Church, on 45<sup>th</sup> and Ashland, to which Chicago's Mexican community is invited). This was Juanita Lara's last performance with Mariachi Las Coronelas. She is standing third from the left.



Figure 6.11: Newspaper clipping of Mariachi Las Coronelas performing in Chicago (1968).

After being away from her husband for a few months, he thought it was too much to bear, so he contacted her and said, "O vienes, o voy!" (Either you come back, or I come get you!). The group packed their bags and returned to Mexico, and for Juanita that was the last time she played mariachi music. From then on, she dedicated herself to the home and her children, until the opportunity arose for her to perform mariachi music once more with Mariachi Las Pioneras. Figure 6.12 is a photograph of Juanita in her daughter's home by Maravatío, Michoacán, wearing the Mariachi Las Pioneras *traje de charro*.





Figure 6.12: Juanita Lara at her daughter's home in the state of Mexico.<sup>135</sup>

Twenty years later, with grown kids, she decided, "Ahora déjenme hacerlo yo" (Now it is my turn). Mariachi Las Pioneras invited her to play again, and now, she said, there was no holding her back! In addition to performing with her other women colleagues, Juanita also became the only woman in Mariachi Tapatío, a group based out of a small plaza in Iztapalapa. At first it was difficult for her to work with the men because there were attitudes and gestures she was not familiar with. She has since become comfortable with them and they respect her. She has recorded a 78-rpm album with Mariachi Estrellas de México, playing violin and singing second voice to Lupita Morales in "Aires del Mayab."

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<sup>135</sup> Photo by Martha Irene Delgado Parra, 2012.

*e. María de Jesús Lara Medina (b. 1944)*<sup>136</sup>

María de Jesús, or Chuy, was four years old when her family brought her to Mexico City. While she was finishing up elementary school she often saw her older sister Juanita leave on performance tours with Mariachi Estrellas de México. It was when they were about to go on tour to Tijuana that Chuy developed a burning desire to go with them. "Pero cómo me iba a ir si yo no sabía música?" (How was I going to go if I did not know music?), she laughed. Juanita, who did not want her little sister to be upset about being excluded, promised her that when they returned from Tijuana, she would help Chuy learn to play the guitar with the group. She also promised that once Chuy learned enough, she could join the mariachi ensemble. This made young Chuy stop crying and wait anxiously for her sister's return. It was her dream to play the music, to wear their dresses, and go on tour with her sister, with whom she was very close.

In 1957 when Chuy was 13 years old, Juanita succeeded in getting her younger sister to learn to play the guitar with the group. Three months later, she switched over to vihuela because her future sister-in-law, Felisa González (biography presented above), got sick and Chuy was asked to cover for that performance. When she returned from her first tour outside Mexico, a performance in Puebla, she was asked to learn violin, and has played the instrument ever since. Although their parents wished that she and Juanita would finish grade school, the sisters preferred to work with Mariachi Estrellas de México and, in that way, help the family's economic situation. Chuy remembered that they traveled often to Michoacán, Monterrey, Puebla, Veracruz, Jalisco, and remote parts of Mexico. Figure 6.13 is a photograph of Chuy Lara, from her personal collection, holding her violin and wearing the regional dresses used by Mariachi Las Coronelas.

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<sup>136</sup> The main source for this biography is with formal interviews and conversations with Chuy Medina, in Mexico City, from 2008 until 2014. Some dates and details are completed with interviews that reference each other.



Figure 6.13: Chuy Lara with the dress used for Mariachi Las Coronelas.

In those days Chuy recalled that although mariachi music was largely associated with men, as it still is today, the women dedicated themselves fully to their craft:

We would run into them [the men mariachis] and they would look down at us, well they would ask why women are playing if music is not for them, and this work is not for them. But we were an all-female mariachi group and we asserted ourselves. Today there are many groups, but back then there were only three groups.

Nos los encontrábamos [los hombres mariachis] y nos hacían un poquito el feo, pues decían que porqué las mujeres van a estar tocando si la música no es para ellas, y que el trabajo este no es para ellas. Pero fuimos mariachi de mujeres y nos impusimos. Ahora hay muchos ya, pero en ese entonces éramos sólo tres mariachis de mujeres.

(Chuy Lara, personal interview, October 2012)

Chuy worked with Mariachi Estrellas de México for about seven years, until she encountered a small problem that caused her to retire from the group. According to her, "A mí me gustan las cosas rectas, y como hubo un problemita que no me gusto, me rebelé un poco y al señor no le

gustó mucho, y me despidió" (I like [to set] things straight, and since there was a little problem I did not like, so I kind of rebelled and the director did not like that, so he dismissed me). She did not want to reveal more about this "small problem".

She and her sister Juanita subsequently joined Mariachi Las Coronelas. In this group, Chuy was finally allowed to sing a few songs as soloist, and her signature song became "El Sube y Baja." She recalled during a performance one evening that she was asked to sing it ten times because the clients loved to hear her so much. It was with Mariachi Las Coronelas that Chuy was able to tour to places in the United States such as the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles, as well as theaters in Tucson, Arizona and Chicago, Illinois. Asked which group she preferred to perform with, she said that the music played with Mariachi Estrellas de México was more extensive and she loved it, but they never gave her the opportunity to sing as a soloist. With Mariachi Las Coronelas she had that opportunity and was happy singing her *rancheras*. About these reflections, she sighed, "Es lo que a mi más me gustaba, y es lo que yo más recuerdo" (It is what I liked best, and it is what I remember most).

Chuy enjoyed performing with Mariachi Las Coronelas for another three years before she left. This time, she confessed, it was because of "celos profesionales" (professional jealousy). During one of their seasons in Acapulco, she recalled that she was mentioned in the local newspapers almost every day, and this must have created friction with the rest of the women. "Tal vez por que era más chica, o no sé que les gustaría de mí" (Perhaps because I was the youngest, well I do not know what they liked about me), said Chuy.



Figure 6.14: Chuy Lara at her home in Coyoacán.<sup>137</sup>

She continued, "Al poco tiempo me casé y ya menos trabajé yo" (Soon after I married and worked much less thereafter). Chuy left the group when she was 18 years old, in 1962. She married Felisa González's brother and they had four sons, none of them musicians. The family currently lives in Tijuana, Baja California.

Reuniting with the former members of Mariachi Estrella de México was an emotional experience for her:

For years we had not seen each other, we had not heard each other play, nor had we picked up our instruments. I think that we learned well because we still remember many things very well.

Por años no nos habíamos visto, no nos habíamos escuchado, ni habíamos agarrado el instrumento. Creo que lo habíamos aprendido bien porque nos acordábamos bien de muchas cosas.

(Chuy Lara, personal interview, October 2012)

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<sup>137</sup> Photo by Author, 2012.

The public received the group well, Chuy told me, because they did not expect to see elderly women playing mariachi music.

## **2. The performance of telling their stories**

The stories narrated above are the women who came to form part of Mariachi Las Pioneras. Although there are other women from those three all-female mariachi ensembles who continue to play, they were either not invited to join this group or they preferred not to. That these women could tell their stories years after a significant amount of time had passed provide them with an opportunity to reflexively reveal themselves in the present moment by sharing the experiences of their past. The first time I met with women, already as Mariachi Las Pioneras, was in January of 2007, and we met again for a second time during the summer of 2008. It was not until the period from the fall of 2011 to the winter of 2012 that I had the opportunity to formally interview each of them individually, with the exception of Isabel López Soto (biography presented in Chapter Four), who unfortunately passed away in May of 2011. When I did finally videotape their interviews professionally, it was with the intention that these sessions would form part of a larger future documentary project on women in mariachi music.<sup>138</sup> The opportunity for these women to share their lives in front of a camera, with a full set of lights and microphones, gave the films a kind of "acting" feeling that many of them enjoyed.

The surviving members of these early all-female groups reflected upon their life experiences as young women who traveled throughout the Americas. Seventy-four-year-old Juanita Lara lamented, "A mi edad, yo qué voy a hacer?" (At my age, what can I do?). Her

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<sup>138</sup> This was accomplished with the assistance of Kristie Reinders, who helped with camera, lighting, sound, direction, and cinematography, and offered much insight beyond the technicalities of video recording.

attitude changed when these women were invited by Laura Sobrino to perform at the San José Mariachi Festival in 2008. Juanita reflected,

I have realized that I can still do a lot and I feel very happy. Today, it is nice to be reunited, to remember our youthful times in which we visited so many places. . . We toured the Mexican republic, who knows how many times. We performed in the United States and in South America. Thanks to [the performances with] the mariachi, we got to know many places.

Me he dado cuenta que todavía puedo hacer bastante y me siento muy contenta. Ahora, es bonito volver a convivir, recordar los tiempos de juventud que a tantos lugares anduvimos. . . La República Mexicana la recorrimos quién sabe cuántas veces. Nos presentamos en Estados Unidos y Sur América también. A través del mariachi, hemos conocido tanto.

(Juanita Lara, personal interview, May 2012)

For these women, who later became members of Mariachi Las Pioneras, it was an opportunity to relive a nostalgic past, one they had lived as glamorous professionals performing mariachi music. Chuy Lara had not picked up her violin since she left her group to get married and, with her husband's permission, was thrilled at the idea of playing again. When these women stopped performing mariachi music, they did not know what their futures would hold, for they were preoccupied with the betterment of their families.

Their first performance as Mariachi Las Pioneras was at the Mariachi Festival in Pozos, Guanajuato, in 2008, and then in Jilotepec, a small town in the state of Mexico, in 2009. They then rehearsed many weeks in preparation for a tour in the United States, since Laura Sobrino succeeded in getting them to two mariachi conferences in San Jose and Albuquerque. In 2010, they received an important prize in called "El Galardón a la Mujer" (The Award for Women) for their achievements in music, thus joining the many distinguished women of various fields throughout Mexico who have received this distinction.



Figure 6.15: Mariachi Las Pioneras de México receiving their recognition in Guadalajara, Jalisco.

To celebrate this occasion, they performed and received their trophy at the renowned Teatro Degollado in Guadalajara, Jalisco.

In 2011, Mariachi Las Pioneras performed at Mexico's National Auditorium for an event dedicated to elderly people in the Federal District. Each time these women get together to perform, it is a special occasion because not all the women who perform with the group live in Mexico City. Chuy Lara, for example, lives with her husband and children in Tijuana, Baja California. When she and her husband were in Mexico City during the fall of 2012, I thought it would be a great opportunity to reunite them all for a performance at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi on October 16, 2012. Beatriz Hernández (trumpet), (guitarrón), and Rosa Correa (vihuela) were invited guests.





Figure 6.16: Mariachi Las Pioneras de México performing at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi.

Mariachi Las Pioneras attracted a large audience. We took advantage of this opportunity to pay homage to Isabel López Soto, inviting all of her children to attend and say a few words in her memory.



Figure 6.17: Raquel Jáurez López with her siblings, honoring their mother Isabel López Soto.

A student's mother was moved by their performance, confessing that, had she opportunity these women had, she would be proudly up on that stage with them.



Figure 6.18: Malena Berrones serving as emcee.



Figure 6.19: Lupe Villa singing her *rancheras* with great emotion.



Figure 6.20: Sisters Chuy and Juanita Lara singing in duet.



Figure 6.21: Felisa González and Lupe Villa performing the accompaniment.

When she began playing with Mariachi Las Pioneras, Juanita encountered a whole new set of experiences. Satisfied that audiences still accepted them, she explained that this was something priceless, adding, "Aunque ya estoy grande, yo me siento joven por la aceptación de la gente" (Although I am older, I feel young because of the public's acceptance). When she was young and she stopped performing with the early all-female mariachi groups, she felt it was the end of her mariachi career. Yet when Mariachi Las Pioneras was formed, she realized that she had many more years left of performing her instrument and singing with mariachi ensembles. Performing as Mariachi Las Pioneras, these women are very aware of, and embrace, their age. As young women performing with the touring caravans, they learned that, although the income they earned as musicians helped sustain their families and gave them a sense of independence as young women, the act of performing on a stage was the most important part of their work. In order to perform mariachi music, they had to learn the repertory, rehearse, dress a certain way,

and act on stage in a specific manner. They were ladies who performed mariachi music, and had to act as such.

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After having lived that artistic lifestyle, and after having traveled all over the country, and into other countries, many of these early women mariachi musicians came to terms with leaving their mariachi performance experience as a thing of the past. With Mariachi Las Pioneras, many had the opportunity of reliving the idea of performance. This memory took them back to the experience of those days where, even if they were depressed or sick, the show had to go on! And in their seventies and eighties, these women were not only physiologically transformed into aged women, but also socially transformed by the experience of life.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> A brief review of their experiences is available on the mariachi school's radio program "Voces de la Escuela de Mariachi": <http://www.codigoradio.cultura.df.gob.mx/index.php/programacion/de-autor/musica-contextualizada/voces-de-la-escuela-del-mariachi/18733-la-mujer-en-el-mariachi-ii-pioneras>

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## Chapter Seven: The theatricality of gendered mariachi performance

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*In persecuting me, World, what do you seek? Wherein do I offend you, when all I want is to give beauty to my mind, and not my mind to beautiful things?*

*¿En perseguirme, Mundo, qué interesas? ¿En qué te ofendo, cuando sólo intento poner bellezas en mi entendimiento y no mi entendimiento en las bellezas?*

Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz, *Soneto XXVI* (1600s)

The previous chapters have centered on locating women within the socio-historical context of the mariachi tradition. They have illustrated the *bravía* singers' influence on mariachi repertory and presented women's narratives as mariachi musicians from various parts of the Americas. Due to mariachi music's complex origins, the tradition has undergone major sociological and musical changes. Furthermore, its wide reception throughout the world and the omnipresence of symbols of virility, such as the *sombrero* and the *traje de charro*, have contributed greatly to popular perceptions and gendered stereotypes associated with this musical expression. What is left to examine and understand is *how*, beyond the effects of the mass media, women may overcome these perceptions through their creative musical expressions. To complement the panoramic view of the mariachi tradition, this chapter aims to provide a performance analysis of mariachi music, from text to gesture, focusing on the particularities of the mariachi style as performed by both women and men.

The first part of this chapter exposes the trials and challenges for women singing mariachi music from the first-person point of view. I draw on examples from *ranchera* soloists as well as women mariachi performers to show how they have re-read or re-formulated the lyrics of the songs they sing from a gendered perspective. The second part describes the musical challenges women singers and instrumentalists have encountered specifically *because they are women*. This

includes the necessary transposition of songs into higher keys to better accommodate a woman's vocal range, which I examine through a case study of the *son jarocho* piece "El Cascabel" (The Rattlesnake). The third section presents the various ways in which all-female mariachi ensembles embody the tradition through a visual representation of their musical and cultural identity: some wear the traditional A-line skirt modeled after a *traje de charro* for women, others opt for traditional regional and colorful dresses, and others choose a less traditional appearance by wearing tightly fitting pants.

To better understand the challenges and negotiations women encounter with the texts they sing, the creative adaptations to the music that will fit their vocal needs, and what they choose to wear, I propose to focus on a unifying thread through the concept of intentionality. In this vein, negotiations are bounded by a woman's free will and the social forces that may limit how she desires to perform mariachi music. Focusing on how a woman artist can make a difference within discourse, Susan McClary writes: "In a world in which many people assert that [Madonna] (along with most other woman artists) can't have meant what one sees and hears because she isn't smart enough, claims of intentionality, agency, and authorship become extremely important strategically" (1991:150). Similarly, a work has the power to mean something other than or more than its author claims she intended. While social conventions often encourage freedom for the performer, many performances balance a set of rules. These rules enable musicians to perform together, making sense to one another and to the audience (Titon 2009:17). Yet these rules are not the performance itself: they are the "guidelines that connect every performance to the past, the tradition, and to the future" (Schechner 2013:249).

As a result, rules governing mariachi performance are malleable because, in setting parameters for the performance, they can give rise to new rules. This includes the kind of

traditional and non-traditional repertoire mariachi groups choose to play, such as the latest pop songs, rock music, and even rap—with mariachi instrumentation. Guidelines that connect performances to the past also rely on musical interpretation, performers' dramatization, pauses, fermatas, facial expressions, bodily gestures, and singing style. In fact, the most difficult part of writing about music is explaining its "uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms" (McClary 1991:23). Let us begin with the poetry and meaning of songs.

### **1. Singing popular poetry**

Poetic content is communicated through rhetorical devices such as images, similes, and metaphors. These devices, along with the performers' enactment, reveal multiple layers of meaning and produce emotive expressions. These sung texts may originate as: (1) songs explicitly written for mariachi performance; (2) previously published poetry adapted for musical representation; or (3) anonymous song texts sung from early *corridos* and traditional *sones*. Regardless of how they were created, sung texts have both a poetic content (themes, metaphor, imagery, feeling, and emotion) and poetic form (structure, meter, scansion, and rhythmic schemes).

#### *a. Content and form in sung poetry*

In music studies, scholars have often explored music as a kind of metaphor for emotions, thoughts, and life. In the nineteenth century, even Edward Hanslick, noted advocate of formalism in music theory, recognized the inherent metaphorical sense of musical discourse. As he stated in 1891, "what in every other art is still description is in music already metaphor" (Hanslick 1986: 30). For Hanslick, a verbal description of *sound* is, of necessity, an interpretation. Hanslick thus

identifies music content with the movement of its tonal forms, thereby ratifying the formalist view that music lacks an ostensive reference (Savage 2009:57-68). Since words have content and concepts, verbalizing what music is, from representation to technique, uses figurative language, metaphors in particular.

As previously mentioned, the poetic message in many songs relies on rhetorical devices that allow for the thematic content to acquire poetic meaning and expressivity. Metaphors have the power, argues philosopher Paul Ricoeur, to transfer the meaning of a word or idea from one domain to another because of a word's polysemy, which has several meanings and can generate more (Ricoeur 2003:136). In renowned songwriter Agustín Lara's "Noche de Ronda," the use of metaphor is a tool for being able to express affect that a man would otherwise not confess to the world.

Noche de ronda, qué triste pasas, qué triste cruzas por mi balcón.	Night of making rounds, you move so sadly, you cross so sadly through my balcony.	Dime si esta noche tú te vas de ronda como ella se fue: ¿Con quién está?	Tell me if this night you will make your rounds like the way she left: Who is she with?
Noche de ronda, cómo me hieres, cómo lastimas, mi corazón.	Night of making rounds, how much you wound, how much you hurt, my heart.	Dile que la quiero dile que me muero de tanto esperar: Que vuelva ya.	Tell her that I love her tell her I am dying from waiting so long: to return now.
Luna que se quiebra, sobre la tiniebla de mi soledad: ¿A dónde vas?	Moon that shatters upon the darkness of my solitude: Where do you go?	Que las rondas no son buenas, que hacen daño, que dan penas, que se acaba por llorar.	[Tell her] that these rounds are not good, that they cause harm, that they cause pain, that one eventually ends up in tears.

In this song, Agustín Lara makes the night personify his sorrow, as if it were his rival, begging the moon to tell his beloved who travels along in the night to return to him. The metaphors he uses to describe the pains of unrequited love are vivid and allow him to express his feelings poetically. Instead of literally stating that a woman hurts his heart, which might put into question his manliness, he can sing: "Noche de ronda, cómo me hieres, cómo lastimas mi corazón" (Night



of making rounds, how much you wound, how much you hurt my heart). Yet the multiple layers of interpretation allow for more. Mexican feminist Marta Lamas has explored the image of women in many texts, offering her interpretation of, for example, *double entendres*, whose content could never be sung literally (Lamas 1978). In this same argument, literary critic Carlos Monsivais suggests that this song is about a man who falls in love with a prostitute, and the woman, not the night, gets around (Monsivais 2005:81-82). Through metaphorical—even allegorical—imagery, the author has been able to confess of his existential pain for falling in love with his *vénus noire*.<sup>140</sup> Such allegories and polysemic layers permit one to speak openly of almost anything, even taboos.

The *son jarocho* "El Cascabel" is an excellent example of the allegories and polysemic layers in a song, insofar as its literal and musical meaning. A musical interpretation will be presented in the next subsection. Regarding its literary meaning, the title "El Cascabel," which means rattle, bell, or rattlesnake, is already charged with metaphorical expressions: eroticism, sexuality, danger, fertility, trance, melancholy, health, and so on. The verses in sung poetry are presented in two ways: the poetic form, in trochaic tetrameter sestet, and the sung form, which consists of a modified musical adaptation. In the poetic form presented below, the verses are numbered from 1 to 6, and the letters show the rhyme scheme (ABABAB CDC):<sup>141</sup>

<b>Primer verso</b>		<b>Segundo verso</b>		<b>Tercer finale</b>
1 Yo tenía mi cascabel	A	Anoche por la ventana	A	¡Ay, cómo rezumba y suena! C
2 Con una cinta morada	B	Platicando con Leonor	B	Rezumba y va retumbando D
3 Y como era de oropel	A	Me pidió que le cantara	A	Mi cascabel en la arena C
4 Se lo di a mi prenda amada	B	"El Cascabel" por menor	B	
5 Pa' que jugara con él	A	Y que no le diga nada	A	
6 Allá por la madrugada	B	Me lo pedía por favor	B	

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<sup>140</sup> A term coined by French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire to describe his mistress Jeanne Duval.

<sup>141</sup> There is no rhyme scheme in the English translation.

**First verse**  
 1 I had my rattle[snake]  
 2 With a purple ribbon  
 3 Since it was gold-plated  
 4 I gave it to my beloved  
 5 So she could play with it  
 6 Until about dawn

**Second verse**  
 Last night by her window  
 In talking with Leonor  
 She asked me to sing to her  
 "El Cascabel" in minor key  
 And that I tell no one  
 She implored of me

**Third finale**  
 Oh, how it resonates and rattles!  
 It resonates and rattles  
 My rattle[snake] in the sand

The sung form is modified into two separate trochaic tetrameter quatrains, the first with a (ABBA) rhyme scheme and the second with (ABAB). The modification from a sestet to two quatrains is possible because lines one through three are repeated at particular points during this sung version, illustrated as 1221 3 3456.

<b>Introducción musical</b>		<b>Interludio musical</b>		¡Ay, cómo rezumba y suena!	E	
1	Yo tenía mi cascabel	A	Anoche por la ventana	C	¡Ay, cómo rezumba y suena!	E
2	Con una cinta morada	B	Platicando con Leonor	D	Rezumba y va rezumbando	F
2	Con una cinta morada	B	Platicando con Leonor	D	Rezumba y va rezumbando	F
1	Yo tenía mi cascabel	A	Anoche por la ventana	C	Mi cascabel en la arena	E
3	Y como era de oropel	A	Me pidió que le cantara	C		
3	Y como era de oropel	A	Me pidió que le cantara	C		
4	Se lo di a mi prenda amada	B	El cascabel por menor	D		
5	Pa' que jugara con él	A	Y que no le diga nada	C		
6	Allá por la madrugada	B	Me lo pedía por favor	D		

<b>Musical introduction</b>		<b>Musical interlude</b>		Oh, how it resonates and rattles!	E	
1	I had my rattle[snake]	A	Last night by her window	C	Oh, how it resonates and rattles!	E
2	With a purple ribbon	B	In talking with Leonor	D	It resonates and it rattles	F
2	With a purple ribbon	B	In talking with Leonor	D	It resonates and it rattles	F
1	I had my rattle[snake]	A	Last night by her window	C	Oh, how it resonates and rattles!	E
3	Since it was gold-plated	A	She asked me to sing to her	C		
3	Since it was gold-plated	A	She asked me to sing to her	C		
4	I gave it to my beloved gem	B	<i>El Cascabel</i> in minor key	D		
5	So she could play with it	A	And without another word	C		
6	Until there about dawn	B	She implored that of me	D		

Since certain lines are not repeated, the lines that were presented as 123456 are now presented as 1221 3 3456. The presentation of the poetic form illustrates how the text is modified when adapted into the sung form. Most, if not all, of these old, traditional *sones* are anonymous texts that have survived in the collective memory of various performers and aficionados. In traditional

contexts, many musicians will improvise texts on the spot, attempting to match the sung form to the extent possible.

To give an idea of the great diversity of the content that mariachi songs exhibit, let us consider another example of poetic form. The following is the text to Lucha Reyes's signature song, "La Tequilera," in which the poetic form and the sung form are the same.<sup>142</sup>

Borrachita de tequila	A	Drunk with tequila
llevo siempre el alma mía,	B	I always have my soul,
para ver si se mejora	A	to see if it improves
de esta cruel melancolía.	B	this cruel melancholy.
¡Ay! por ese querer,	A	<i>Ay!</i> for that love,
pos' ¿qué le he de hacer,	A	well, what am I to do,
si el destino me lo dio	B	if destiny gave him to me
para siempre padecer?	A	in order to suffer forever?
Como buena mexicana	A	Like a good Mexican woman
sufriré el dolor tranquila,	B	I will suffer the pain quietly,
al fin y al cabo mañana	A	but tomorrow I'll ultimately
tendré un trago de tequila.	B	have a drink of tequila.
¡Ay! por ese querer,	A	Oh! For that love,
pos' ¿qué le he de hacer?	A	well, what am I to do?
Aunque me haya traicionado,	B	Despite his betrayal,
no lo puedo aborrecer.	A	I can't hate him.
Me llaman la tequilera	A	They call me a tequila woman
como si fuera de pila,	B	as if it were my baptismal name,
porque a mi me bautizaron	C	because I was baptized
con un trago de tequila.	B	with a shot of tequila.
Ay, ya me voy mejor,	A	Oh! I'd better leave,
pos' ¿qué hago yo aquí?	B	well, what am I doing here?
Disque por la borrachera,	C	That due to my inebriety,
dicen todo lo perdí.	B	I lost it all.

Written by songwriter Alfredo d'Orsay Sotelo specifically for Lucha Reyes around 1937 (Quirarte 1994), it describes a woman's alternative approach to dealing with unrequited love. This woman battles with curing her pain with alcohol in public, declaring: "Como buena

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<sup>142</sup> Composed by Alfredo d'Orsay (c. 1937). For the sake of an accurate translation, the English verses do not follow the rhyme scheme.

mexicana sufriré el dolor tranquila" (Like a good Mexican woman I will suffer the pain quietly), before "al fin y al cabo mañana tendré un trago de tequila" (but tomorrow I'll ultimately have a drink of tequila). She suffers quietly, as society expects her to, but remedies her suppressed emotions with alcohol. This song is also significant in that it has a dramatic character that presents a monologue, as if a scene from a zarzuela. Moreover, it employs rhetorical figures that have not appeared in the previous examples, such as irony. Who would sing about being baptized with tequila without lending an ironic tone?

I have never known of a man to sing "La Tequilera." Vihuela player Raquel López Juárez and I talked one day about how this song was untranslatable for a man's point of view, unless, I added jokingly, we call him a *tequilero* (a tequila-drinking man). But we agreed that referring to a man who sings *rancheras* as a *tequilero* was somewhat redundant, particularly since they have a reputation for drinking tequila, which is not a novelty. So Raquel suggested a satiric alternative: a woman should compose a song called "El Pulquero!"<sup>143</sup> The satire in her solution is endless, for a woman writing a song about a man drinking *pulque* would not only show how he would fail to resist temptation in drinking this beverage because of an unrequited love, but also that he does not have the class or style to drink tequila instead.

#### *b. Performing the poetic persona*

Poetic persona is the point-of-view of the singer and the poetic texts can either be gender neutral or marked, either from a man's point of view, or less commonly, from a woman's point of view. If the text of a song is simply written from "yo" (I) to "tú" (you), then the song is

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<sup>143</sup> *Pulque* is a fermented, milky alcoholic beverage with a sour yeast-like taste. It was used in indigenous sacred celebrations and then became popular drink throughout the colonial era. After the twentieth century, however, this alcoholic beverage became lost its popularity and it was relegated to many rural lands and poor areas of the larger cities. There has recently been an effort to involve this beverage in touristic endeavors.

considered neutral since it reveals neither the narrator nor the subject's gender. In other songs, the nouns, pronouns, and adjectives identify a narrator's gender. Any changes to these properties necessarily affects the natural perspective and, thereby, the structure and tone of the poem. As such, language can reveal, embody and sustain or reject attitudes towards gender.

Gender-neutral songs might include "El Crucifijo de Piedra" (The Stone Cross), "Por Un Amor" (For a Love), "Sabor a Mí" (Taste of Me), "Si Nos Dejan" (If They Let Us), "La Charreada" (The Rodeo), and "Desdén" (Disdain). In these songs, the theme could be from the point of view of either a woman or a man, and in fact all these songs have been performed by both women and men. Songs from the point of view of a man include "El Rey" (The King), "Ay Jalisco, No Te Rajes" (*Ay Jalisco, Do Not Back Down*), "Ella" (Her), "Allá en el Rancho Grande" (Over on the Big Ranch), "El Mil Amores" (Man of a Thousand Romances), and so on. The text in these songs may refer to men describing a woman's beauty, expressing their love for a woman, or presenting a male macho attitude. Most of these songs have been performed by women, and some of these will be described below. In the same way, there are those songs that were specifically written for women, such as "La Tequilera", "Traición a Juan" (Betraying Juan), and "Macho Panzón" (Potbellied Macho).<sup>144</sup> These songs express a women's point of view, which is evident from the titles, and I know of no instances of these songs being recorded by men. And finally, there are songs that, without changing the text, have a different meaning depending on the gender of the singer, such as "La Reina es el Rey" (The Queen is the King), which is described in detail below.

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<sup>144</sup> "Macho Panzón" is the popular title of this song. The official title is "Esta Situación."

There are three things a woman can do if she wants to sing those songs written from a man's point of view: (1) sing it without modifying the text for the sake of "tradition" and to be respectful to the original work; (2) adapt the text to a woman's point of view, thereby avoiding gender implications linked to certain roles or identities, as when a song written originally for men acquire homosexual implications if sung by women; or (3) leave the text unchanged when, in performance context, she purposefully sings it to another woman, even when the song was conceived originally to be sung by a man.

In the first case, where the text is left unchanged, there are many examples of women who believe that being faithful to the composer's original text is more important than having to modify it to fit her feminine *persona*. In her autobiography, *ranchera* singer Lydia Mendoza (see Chapter Two) explains:

Nowadays, if the lyrics to a song speak from a man's point of view, but a woman is singing it, they switch the names and everything around so that it's as if it were a woman's song. But in those years when I was recording, that wasn't done.

(Mendoza 1993:334).

It was natural for Lydia Mendoza to sing her songs without having to change the text to read from a woman's perspective, and not give it any meaning other than to sing a song that she liked to sing. One example is a song called "Mujer Paseada" (Woman Who's Been Around):<sup>145</sup>

Así te quiero, mujer,  
no le hace que seas paseada.  
Te quiero porque me nace  
de las entrañas de mi alma.

This is you how I love, woman,  
it does not matter that you have been around.  
I love you because it naturally comes  
from the bottom of my soul.

One might interpret this as a woman singing to another woman, yet, Lydia Mendoza sang songs like this because she liked them, and it was not common to change the text (Mendoza 1993:334).

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<sup>145</sup> Text transcribed from the Youtube video "Lydia Mendoza – Mujer Paseada" [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqXE3bpiz\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqXE3bpiz_8), accessed April 13, 2013.

The listener is free, however, give the text a different signification, such as attributing the text towards someone of the same sex). Even today, many women will not change the words to texts like these for the sake of tradition, and do not feel the need to change the gendered point of view.

*Los Angeles Times* staff writer Benjamin Epstein interviewed the director of Mariachi Las Perlitas Tapatías, asking precisely this question. Alma Rocío Corona responded

We change (the lyrics) as little as possible. . . We try to respect the authors, and our peers, as much as we can. If the words obviously don't work, sometimes we change it. But especially if the songs were written a long time ago, we won't.

(Epstein 1993).

On the other hand, there are women who do feel the need to change the text they sing. Anthropologist Olga Nájera-Rodríguez provides a variety of examples of songs in which woman do this, and features a medley by José Alfredo Jiménez's songs, in which he sings in dialogue with his last wife, Alicia Juárez (Nájera-Ramírez 2003:193-196). But few scholars have touched on the examples that pose a true challenge upon attempting to change the text to adapt to a woman's point of view. While many women have held that there are songs they believe should be left alone, claiming this for the sake of tradition, the reality is that adjusting the gendered point of view can be prohibitively difficult.

In many cases, singers and audiences are conditioned to listen to some of these songs as sacred, yet I believe that only ideological forces can keep a woman from modifying the text, so long as it continues to fit the form. One example is "Árboles de la Barranca," which contains difficult content and follows a special rhythmic scheme:

De esas tres que van pasando,	A	Of those three [women] passing by,
¿cuál te gusta, valedor?	B	which do you prefer, [male] champ?
Esa de vestido blanco	A	That one with the white dress,
me parece la mejor.	B	I think is the best.
Me puse amar a una mujer,	C	I started to love a woman,
con la ilusión de amar.	C'	with the illusion of romance.

In adapting the song for a woman's point of view, the first impulse is to change the "o's" to "a's" and "mujer" to "mi bien" (or similar gender neutral terms). Yet songs like these pose a different kind of challenge: substituting for a different gendered point of view changing the meaning of the song. This song describes a couple of men discussing which of the three women is finest, the narrator opting for the one in white, alluding to the presumed virgin among the group. He then says, in general, that he fell in love with a woman, with the illusion of having a romance, alluding to an extended sexual metaphor. How would the context change if it were a woman, rather, in the position to discuss with another woman which of the three men is finest, referring specifically to the man dressed in white? Should a woman wish to sing this piece in that context, certain things could first be changed in order to suit the poetic rhythmic scheme.

Modifying the text to suit a woman's point of view is a challenge since the meter and rhythmic scheme cannot be altered (this is, after all, what makes it a song), one could attempt the following:

De **esos** tres que van pasando,  
 ¿cuál te gusta, **valedora**?  
**Ese** del vestido de blanco  
 me parece **bien ahora**.  
**Se puso a** amar a **otra** mujer,  
 con la ilusión de amar.

Of those three [men] passing by,  
 which do you prefer, [female] champ?  
 That one dressed in white,  
 I think is the best right now.  
 He started to love another woman,  
 with the hope of loving.

Now the subject refers to a man, and not a woman, by the pronouns "esos" (they, masculine) instead of "esas" (they, feminine) and "ese" (him) instead of "esa" (her). Lines two and four are supposed to rhyme, where "valedor" is matched with "mejor." If changed to the female "valedora," the rhyming word can be "bien ahora." The changes made to this verse now say that the woman is impressed with the man dressed in white, for now, but that *he* is the one who "started to love another woman." Should a woman sing this, would it mean the same to her and her audience? Many prefer to leave this song as is. Due to its musical simplicity, however, it has



become a popular piece taught to youth mariachi groups. Does the meaning change when little girls and boys sing about these topics?

Another example is José Alfredo Jiménez's "El Rey," which narrates the story of a man who declares himself a king, despite his unrequited love and whether he has a good socio-economic standing or not:

Yo sé bien que estoy afuera,  
pero el día que yo me muera,  
sé que tendrás que llorar.  
(Coro): llorar y llorar, llorar y llorar.

I know well that I am out,  
but the day that I die,  
I know you have to cry.  
(Chorus): cry and cry, cry and cry.

Dirás que no me quisiste,  
pero vas a estar muy triste,  
y así te vas a quedar.

You'll say you did not love me,  
but you will be mourning,  
and that's how you'll stay.

Con dinero y sin dinero,  
hago siempre lo que quiero,  
y mi palabra es la ley.  
No tengo trono ni reina,  
ni nadie quien me comprenda,  
pero sigo siendo el rey.

With or without money,  
I always do as I wish,  
and my word is the law.  
I do not have a throne or a queen,  
nor anyone who understands me,  
but I will always be king.

Figure 7.1 is a still image of José Alfredo Jiménez singing "El Rey" on the television show *Siempre en Domingo*, hosted by Raul Velasco, in 1973. He is shown raising his hand while he sing "pero sigo siendo el rey" (but I will always be king).



Figure 7.1: José Alfredo Jiménez "El Rey" on *Siempre en Domingo* (1973).

Images of this kind of "king" can flow through one's mind, and many will be directed towards the macho stereotype represented on the big screen, through the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. If a woman sings this song, she can leave the text as it is, but embody a different meaning through its performance, or she change the text to show the irony in this macho text. In the first example, Mariachi Femenil Mujer Latina performs this piece without changing a single word.

Alternatively, *ranchera* singer Lola Beltrán became popular for being one of the first women to sing this song. In 1994, she performed it on a televised program hosted by Ricardo Rocha. When the first three notes of "El Rey" were played, the crowd roared in recognition of this as one of their favorite songs.<sup>146</sup> During the instrumental introduction, she says, "El Rey. . . pero para otro Rey" (The King. . . but for a different King), and she points upward. Most of the text is left untouched, except that instead of singing "No tengo trono ni reina" (I do not have a throne or a queen), she sings "No tengo trono ni reino" (I do not have a throne or a kingdom), altering the meaning of this phrase entirely by changing only one letter.

In a response to "El Rey," *ranchera* singer Ana Gabriel wrote the lyrics for and recorded "La Reina" in her album *Historia de Una Reina* (History of a Queen) (2005). The following are select verses of the song:

Tú no quisiste ya el trono,  
preferiste rodar y rodar.  
No digas que nadie te comprende,  
que a ti, mi amor te daba igual

You did not want the throne,  
you prefer to roll about.  
Do not say no on understood you,  
because you were indifferent to my love.

Tú serás el rey que todo lo puede,  
pero se te olvidó que yo soy la reina,

You will be the king who can do it all,  
but you forgot I am the queen.

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<sup>146</sup> Yes, three notes are enough for fans to recognize this song. The arrangement was made by don Rigoberto Alfaro.

y mientras la reina no muera,  
el rey se queda fuera

and meanwhile the queen does not die,  
the king can stay out.

Tú serás muy rey... pero yo soy la reina    You can be very king[ly]... but I am the queen.

A last example in this regard is the *son huasteco* "El Mil Amores" (Man of a Thousand Romances) as performed by Mariachi Divas. The original text in the second and last verses says:

Pa' las mujeres bonitas  
que son de mi adoración,

To the beautiful women,  
who are my adoration,

...

Tengo viudas y solteras  
y una que otra casada.

I have widows and single women.  
and a married one here and there.

Guitarist and renowned mariachi singer Melinda Salcedo playfully switches the "Pa' las mujeres bonitas" (To the beautiful women) to say "A todos los papacitos" (roughly: To all the handsome men). Yet the context of the last verse places women in a singular place when she sings "Tengo viudos y solteros, y uno que otro casado" (I have widowers and single men, and a married man here and there). Melinda's adjustment to the text is an illustration of the difficulties women have to face when singing these songs. These musically challenging pieces are empowering to perform because the violins and the trumpets carry challenging melodies, and the singer has an opportunity to demonstrate virtuosic *falsetto* techniques typical of the *huasteco* style.

Then there are songs from a woman's point of view. One example is "Macho Panzón" (Potbellied Macho), made popular by *ranchera* singer Beatriz Adriana (b. 1958), and which served as Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles's signature song for several years. Composed by a man, Miguel Ibarra, it tells the story of a woman who voices her dissatisfaction with her lazy, overweight husband. More than a demand for a serious change in her situation, this humorous piece makes people laugh and enjoy a concert. The chorus part, for example, says:

Yo ya no aguanto más una vida así,  
yo necesito un hombre que me haga feliz.  
Yo no soporto más esta situación,

I can no longer tolerate a life like this,  
I need a man to make me happy,  
I can no longer endure this situation,

yo ya quiero un hombre, no un macho panzón. What I want is a real man, not a potbellied macho.

The stereotype is generally about the potbellied macho man who does not succeed in caring for his family because he prefers to be drinking with his friends.<sup>147</sup> It is unlikely that a man would want to sing this piece because transferring this stereotype onto a woman does not have the same effect. There are other songs specific to women, such as Rocío Dúrcal's "Así Son Los Hombres" (That's How Men Are) and "Vestida de Blanco" (Dressed in White); Beatriz Adriana's "La Solterona" (The Spinster); and Paquita la del Barrio's "Rata de Dos Patas" (Two-Legged Rat). Most of these songs are in fact written by composers who are men, and they in some ways commercially exploit what could be viewed as a kind of feminist take on a women's perspective in *ranchera* songs, which is why most men would not sing them. Yet men do occasionally sing songs written by women and from the woman's point of view. Mexican composer María Grever is the author of one of the nation's most popular songs "Júrame." The original text reads:

Todos dicen que es mentira que te quiero  
Porque nunca me han visto enamorada

They all say it is a lie that I love you  
Well they have never seen me in love

A man who wants to sing this will obviously change "enamorada" to "enamorado," as guitarist Arturo Palacios sings it with Mariachi Los Camperos. This is an example of a song that is about love with none of the stereotypes associated with love from a gendered point of view.

Finally, there are songs that, without changing its text, have a very different meaning, depending on whether sung by a woman or a man. One such example is a song called "La Reina es el Rey" (The Queen is the King) by Daniel Valdez.

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<sup>147</sup> The word macho was originally used to describe a male animal. It also describes, at once, a (1) foolish man and a (2) valiant, strong, and vigorous man.

Primer verso

Unos dicen que el hombre no llora,  
otros dicen que el hombre es el rey.  
Yo les digo que todo es mentira,  
que el hombre si llora por una mujer

*Coro*

Nada importa que sea muy valiente,  
ni que tenga medallas de honor,  
porque el hombre se vuelve cobarde  
y pierde su orgullo por un gran amor

Y llora por ella, y toma licor.  
Y aunque sea muy hombre,  
se arrastra y se humilla  
nomás por su amor.

Tercer verso

Y que el hombre será el que gobierna,  
claramente lo dice la ley.  
Pero basta el embrujo de un beso,  
y de ese momento la reina es el rey.

First verse

Some say that men don't cry,  
others say that a man is the king.  
I tell them that it's all a lie,  
that a man does cry for a woman.

*Chorus*

It doesn't matter if he is valiant,  
nor whether he has medals of honor,  
Because a man becomes a coward  
and loses his pride for a great love.

And he cries for her, and he drinks liquor.  
And although he's a true man,  
he crawls and is humiliated,  
simply for love.

Third verse

That a man shall be who governs,  
it is clearly stated in the law.  
But the spell of a kiss is enough,  
and from that moment the queen is the king.

Singer Beatriz Adriana recorded this song in her album *¡Ora Pues!* in 1988. Whereas the archetype of the macho man that emerges in José Alfredo Jiménez's "El Rey" depicts a valiant, strong, and vigorous man, it is the foolish macho that most of these songs evoke.

When Mexican pop idol Alejandro Fernández recorded this song in his album *Niña Amada Mía* (My Little Darling Love) (2003), he modified one verse of the original lyrics. In the fourth verse, Alejandro Fernández's interpretation transformed the song into one where the man admits he has cried for his love:

Nada importa que sea muy valiente,  
ni que tenga medallas de honor,  
porque el hombre se vuelve cobarde  
y pierde su orgullo por un gran amor

Cuarto verso

Nada importa que sea muy valiente,  
para todo le sobra valor.  
Y tampoco ha podido evitarlo,  
también ha llorado por un gran amor

It doesn't matter if he is valiant,  
nor whether he has medals of honor,  
Because a man becomes a coward  
and loses his pride for a great love.

Fourth verse

It doesn't matter if he is valiant,  
he has much courage to spare.  
And he hasn't been able to avoid it,  
for he too has cried for a great love.

He changes " Nada importa que sea muy valiente, ni que tenga medallas de honor" (It doesn't matter if he is valiant, nor whether he has medals of honor) to " Nada importa que sea muy valiente, para todo le sobra valor" (It doesn't matter if he is valiant, he has much courage to spare), and "porque el hombre se vuelve cobarde y pierde su orgullo por un gran amor" (Because a man becomes a coward, and loses his pride for a great love) for "Y tampoco ha podido evitarlo, también ha llorado por un gran amor" (And he hasn't been able to avoid it, for he too has cried for a great love). By changing this text, he converts the foolish macho into the strong macho, who has no shame in sharing that even a courageous man may cry for his love.

The above examples demonstrate techniques employed when singing texts as originally written, and how it is deemed important to preserve the intended point of view. While there are aspects of this performance experience motivated by the poetic text itself, which engenders powerful subjective responses in both the performer and the listener, there are also situations in which the meaning escapes the power of language. Sometimes, singers cannot express with words what they are feeling, and thus they also turn to non-verbal language gestures to convey meaning in visual and vocally expressive ways.

### *c. Embodiment of expressivity*

As mentioned in previous chapters, the *canCIÓN bravía* is characterized as bold and apologetic, and conveys emotions of the text with the gestures and the expressivity of the body. The poetic text in these songs conveys expressivity and emotion, which are consequently translated and interpreted by both performers and audiences. When mariachi listeners describe this music and reflect upon what it means to them, many refer to the passion and emotion in the music. Regarding the transcendence of music, musicologist Roger Savage suggests that "Music's redescription of affective dimensions of experience evinces the vital significance of the epoché of

reality effected by music's worlding power" (Savage 2009:13). The affective dimensions do not entirely depend on the body as a physical experience, in which the music creates a feeling of going beyond the limits of ordinary time. During this moment, the culturally specific and meaningful instances in the performance may make a person *feel* a connection to a different reality.

Music induces affect in its listeners through its melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, dynamics, timbre, range, and the layering of musical activity (McClellan 2000:142). The combination of these musical qualities and the movements created by them produce the mood qualities to which listeners respond emotionally (ibid.). With mariachi music, there are various musical and embodied expressions that may make a listener feel a sense of transcendence, in this case, the use of *falsete*:

... in the case of the solo singers, with overacting, the theatrical use of the *falsete* (which at the middle of the phrase produces an effect of suspense) and the abundance of explanatory gestures.

... en el caso de los solistas, con la sobreactuación, el uso teatral del falsete (que a mitad de frase produce un efecto de suspenso) y la abundancia de gestos explicativos.

(Jáuregui 2007a:155)

The use of the *falsete* has changed from its early uses, which was more a vocal adornment, but has been modified to be part of a spectacle by holding out the note for long periods of time, which, according to Jáuregui, is complimented by gestures to create an effect of suspense.

The physical manifestation of the emotion expressed in songs is also demonstrated by performers in non-musical ways. For example, a singer on a stage uses of both sung texts and non-verbal actions —such as postures, facial expressions, and expressive movements— in order to allow us to "see" her anger, pain, joy, or sorrow, so that we can "read" them. The multiple layers of meaning produced through this embodied expressivity are not fixed; rather, they reflect

the idiosyncrasy of each performer. They are associated with self-presentation and interpersonal communication.

The combination of these corporal gestures and the emotion expressed in *rancheras* prompt singers to claim: "vivo lo que canto" (I live what I sing). In Figure 7.2, Amalia Mendoza sings about her pain regarding that fateful night in which her beloved rejected and humiliated her: "No quiero ni volver a oír tu nombre. No quiero ni saber a donde estás" (I don't ever want to hear your name. I don't even want know where you are). Her hand to her head and her pained facial expression convey the meaning of the text and suggest that she herself is living this pain even as she sings about it.



Figure 7.2: Amalia Mendoza *La Tariácuri* singing "La Noche de mi Mal" (The Night of my Suffering).

But the true pain and suffering comes when Amalia Mendoza wonders what would have been if she had asked him to stay: "Mi propio corazón, se iba a reír" (My own heart would laugh) —but she performs this with real tears in her eyes. Similarly, *ranchera* singer Yolanda del Río (b. 1955) has adopted the intense weeping style in her singing. In her signature song, "La Hija de



Nadie," she expresses a kind of hyper-sentimentality of pain and suffering by crying as she performs.

In figure 7.3, María Rojo, former member of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, sings "Solo Tuya" (Only Yours) in their homonymous album (1998). This song tells the story of a woman who regrets letting her beloved go, a decision, which has left her "triste y sola" (sad and lonely). In the beginning of the music video, María Rojo is sitting alone, almost in a fetal position, beneath a window, in a dark room lit with candles. She asks for his forgiveness and, if he wishes for her return, she promises to be only his. These images capture the desire and her passion to always only be his.



Figure 7.3: María Rojo singing "Sólo Tuya" in the homonymous music video with Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

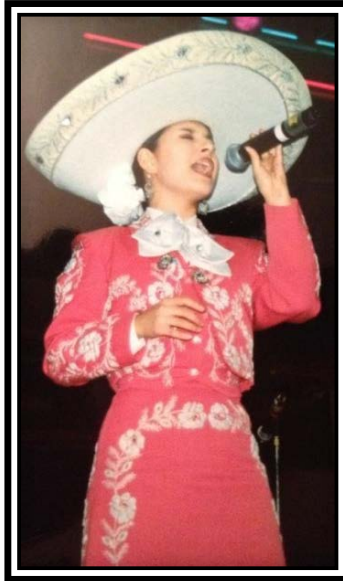


Figure 7.4: María Rojo singing with Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

In the film *El Gallo de Oro* (1964), Lucha Villa sings to her beloved, and recalls what it is like to wake up in his arms. The sensuality conveyed in her texts is translated into her gestures, provocatively singing to him: "Me cobijé la cara con tus manos para seguirte amando todavía" (I covered my face with your hands so that I could continue loving you). Note in figure 7.5 the sensuality in her facial expression and the provocative dress.



Figure 7.5: Lucha Villa singing "Amanecí en Tus Brazos" (I Woke Up In Your Arms) in *El Gallo de Oro* (1964).

As shown in the images above, a performer's gestures have the power to arouse emotions through their iconic resemblance to the expression of real emotions in real-life situations. The embodiment of expressivity intends on communicating a sentiment with gestures of the body, which are usually complimented by the sung text.

When Lupe Villa's father reprimanded her for playing mariachi music, as described in Chapter Four and Five, she defied his will and continued performing mariachi music. After Lupe's father overcame his opposition, and he saw her perform at a theater, Lupe remembers his shock in the way she would play a *son* on her guitar (figure 7.6). She recalled him saying, "¡estaba esperando que volaran pedazos de la guitarra!" (I was expecting pieces of the guitar to break off and fly away!).



Figure 7.6: Lupe Villa playing her guitar with Mariachi Las Coronelas de Carlota Noriega.

According to Lupe's father, a guitar was like a woman: one needs to caress it and treat it with a lot of care. "Pero tú" (But you), she scolded her, "tú pareces que la estás. . ." (you look like you

are. . .), and Lupe interrupted, knowing what he was going to respond with: "así es la música, papá, es alegre" (that's how the music is, father, it's joyful).

Sometimes words are so powerful and the song so emotionally significant for the audience that gestures are secondary. Mireya Ramos, co-director of New York City's Mariachi Flor de Toloache, captures this reality:

"Cucurrucucú Paloma" is beautiful song, it's a classic from Mexico. It was never my favorite song, but one time I sang it, and I just closed my eyes, and I sang it. When I opened my eyes, there were people crying.

(Mireya Ramos, cited in Yee 2013)

There are times when the words are beyond any explanation. Not even metaphors could explain exactly what people feel when they listen to these songs. It is a feeling that is both of the body, as a physical experience, and one that also transcends the body,. And very often they generate strong emotions because listeners associate them with their own personal experiences.

These emotional states, or moods, have the power to alter the perception of a sense of time. To perceive the dimension of the limit experience, one must explore the measure by understanding and experiencing what is in-between our experience and our expectations. Roger Savage suggests that works "escape their creators' and first audiences' horizons of understanding when, by addressing us in changed situations and contexts, they intersect with, and refigure our experiences and expectations" (Savage 2004:522). For Savage, the work's hermeneutical autonomy is the condition for the fact that works continue to "speak" in new situations to different audiences. The hermeneutical examination of the experience and expectations reveal a sense of timelessness as a limit-experience that has a valuable significance in music.

## 2. Engendering mariachi music as women

In 2007, I was invited to perform with one of the few mariachi ensembles in Guadalajara, Jalisco, that includes women: Mariachi Reyes de Jalisco. I was the third woman in their mixed-gender group for a few of their shows. On one occasion, some of the men were complaining about the women in their group. One violinist said that they could sing well but did not dedicate as much time to their instruments as men did. The director asked me if I knew of at least one woman who could play her instrument as well as a man. I replied with, "well, what does a man play like?" The rest of the men jumped in to describe "male" mariachi playing by mentioning musical qualities such as "intonation," "tempo," "a large singing repertoire," and "aggressiveness" in both the voice and the instrument. I thought about it for a while, and then answered, "so if that describes how men play, then what of Mariachi del Río (pseudonym)? Yesterday you were critiquing them for rushing their *sones* and playing out of tune. Are they not men?" Interestingly, the conversation took a turn then and led to a discussion of woman's responsibilities in the home and how this limits her rehearsal times.

Similarly, in his dissertation, anthropologist Russell Rodriguez shares a time when the mariachi group he performed with in Guadalajara had the opportunity to observe Mariachi Las Reynas de Jalisco, a group that was directed by Francisco *El Pílon* González in 2002.<sup>148</sup> Although over a decade had passed since the first all-female group was formed in Guadalajara, there were still negative judgments about their capability to perform this music:

While listening to them play Don David, in discussion with Heri, Mirinda, Jorge and myself, stated "tocan bien pero falta sonido" (they play well but they still lack the sound). It was obvious that their sound would not compare to ours. We had musicians. . . [who]

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<sup>148</sup> By 2007, when I visited Guadalajara, Mariachi Las Reynas de Jalisco did not exist anymore.

have experience playing at least 30 years. . . Heri, in a sympathetic manner, stated "pues [les] faltan experiencia [sic]" (they lack experience). . .

(Rodriguez 2006:189-190)

Rodriguez softens this critique by stating that "there were no feelings of animosity or threat towards these women" and that there was a "consensus that a couple of the women did sing very well and that they were a good group and good performers" with much potential (ibid.: 90).

In regards to this "lack of experience," I have known many men to have over thirty years "experience" who sound worse than a beginner. And although these men are harshly critiqued for their musicality, the judgments against women are not entirely based on musical terms alone. For example, one guitarist who had recently arrived in Los Angeles from Mexico City to perform with a mariachi ensemble I was working with had mentioned he had seen Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles perform at Cielito Lindo restaurant during the first year after their debut. He ostentatiously commented to the mariachi group the next day, "well, they were in tune and in rhythm, but when they played the *sones*, something is missing, I don't like it." For him, and many other people (women included), it was the male voices that were "missing." When people argue that all-female groups "lack the sound" or "are missing something," they are not always referring to the quality of the music. They are referring to what they consider the "maleness" of the vocal sound.

For many musicians, it did not seem musically correct that these traditional *sones*, in the keys originally for men's voices, would be modified for an all-female mariachi ensemble.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> The women *ranchera* singers mentioned in Chapter Two had already been introduced to many musical genres as vocalists, and audiences were already used to listening to their voices in higher keys. Lucha Moreno was among the women to perform *sones*. In the film *Aquí Está tu Enamorado* (1963), she sings the "Que Te Vas, Te Vas" (That You Are Leaving, You Are Leaving), a *son huasteco* in the key of D major, when men usually sing it in G major. The musical transposition to D major is well positioned for the female voice. The melodic instruments, the trumpets and the violins, are in a constant dialogue with Lucha

These women's groups are not the same as another type of mariachi ensemble (all-male or mixed gendered); they are a unique category of their own. They can play similar repertoire, but due to the natural qualities in their voices, there are going to be differences.

There are two issues to keep in mind when singing these traditional *sones*. First, as mentioned in the text analysis above, the lyrics to these *sones* were originally conceived from a man's perspective and therefore contained contexts related to male roles: the harvest, livestock, traveled rural roads, and hunting. This is not to say that women did not play these roles, but that they were associated with the man's point of view. To my knowledge, *sones* written from a woman's point of view are a recent phenomenon. Second, transposing these *sones* to fit a woman's vocal range would not pose serious problems, on the surface, not even for those who have perfect pitch. The problem is of a different nature. The majority of the traditional *sones jaliscienses* (those not pre-composed into the authored songs of today) are most commonly in G major, although there are many exceptions.

There are keys that are euphonic for mariachi instrumentation, since they allow many open strings to resonate. These open strings produce a more open and clear sound, compared to keys that employ many or all stopped strings, which mute certain sounds. An important characteristic in many of the tradition *sones* is the use of certain open strings during specific moments of a piece performed on the violin, the guitarrón, the vihuela and the guitar. If *sones* in G major were transposed to C major, for example, different open strings would get the open-string timbre, which might produce that sense that "something is missing." Perhaps this key change might not produce the same sound quality due to the different open strings being played.

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Moreno's voice. It is difficult to find early *ranchera* singers who sang *sones jaliscienses*, the quintessential musical genre performed by mariachi ensembles.

For example, a G major chord on the vihuela has a different timbre from a Bb major chord. String instruments rely on the resonance of strings, and open strings are more resonant than stopped strings, which do not have the same timbre and do not vibrate as much.

For many people, listening to traditional *sones* in different keys, by an all-female ensemble, poses a threat to tradition. Yet it does not have to be this way. The creativity required to resolve these kinds of situations need not be the cause of gendered musical conflicts, so long as those who try to resolve them desire to make mariachi music sound good. Later in this section, I analyze four examples in which all-female mariachi ensembles have explored musical solutions to the problem of vocal range and traditional key signatures. In the case of all-female mariachi ensembles, audiences have employed metaphorical language to characterize and express what the music means to them. This was neither the traditional mariachi sound many were accustomed to, nor was it the masculine image ubiquitously associated with mariachi music. As a result, the judgments are not an attribute of the music; they are attributed *to* the music. In this sense, music serves as a metaphor for the significance of the experience, where the significance is founded on an ideological framework. I suggest that music performed by all-female mariachi ensembles should be judged based on their own musical qualities and not in relation to previous notions of the mariachi musical tradition. In making this change, listener will have to give up their associations between certain sounds and the correctness of tradition in favor of new associations between certain sounds (keys, female singing, good rhythm and intonation) and ideas of competent and emotionally satisfying musical performance. Is this too much to ask?

*a. Performing vocal identity*

In *Thinking Musically: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, ethnomusicologist Bonnie Wade defines timbre as the sound quality of an instrument or voice (Wade 2004: 43).



She suggests that the most meaningful question regarding timbre concern the aesthetic values of the musical sound quality. She adds that of most instruments, the human voice is the most flexible in producing a variety of timbres. The evaluation of vocal quality is generally a social construction that does not have universal validity. Descriptions of timbre are based on metaphors that connect the sound quality to other senses, such as the visual (bright, dark, dull), spatial (compact, spread, hollow, dense), touch (rough, smooth), and extramusical processes of vocal production.

Educator Leonor Xóchitl Pérez wrote of her experience as a female mariachi in Los Angeles, California. She touched on the negative reception of an all-female mariachi performance in the 1990s: "one man told me indignantly that women are the downfall of mariachi. He objected to the high-pitched voices. . . [and how this] deviated from the deep *male* sound" (Pérez 2002: 159). Curious as to what musicians themselves considered as female and male timbre, I have asked several mariachi musicians over the years to define timbre. Most have the idea that feminine timbre is ideally high pitched, having a light sound, soft, clear, airy, and is less nasal sounding than men's voices. Masculine vocal timbre would be characterized as being in a lower register, lower pitched, using the chest voice, having a dark, rough, deep, and throaty sound.

In the early mariachi recordings, men sang traditional *sones* with natural high-pitched non-formally trained voices, in a tenor's tessitura. Today, the majority of men who sing in the urban modern mariachi groups will sing in the same tessitura, but with formally trained voices. Generally, the highest pitch for these men is A4. The male voices in mariachi music that made contributed to mariachi music becoming a musical symbol of Mexico are refined singers, such as Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Javier Solís, and many others, all formally trained.

Unfortunately I have come across no record of women singing traditional *sones* prior to the women *ranchera* singers described in Chapter Three. Those women who have recorded mariachi music have generally done so in a contralto tessitura, with B4 or C5 being the highest pitches they sing in the chest voice, or a G5 or A5 when singing *falsete*. For the most part, men will strain their voice to sing the upper register of a tenor, while women do not strain and sing the middle register of a contralto.

Most mariachi musicians and listeners will argue that women sing in a lower tessitura in order to conserve the mariachi singing style. I am of the idea that women, with the correct formal training as mariachi tenors, can sing an D5 with her chest voice. One example that this is possible is the recording of Spanish singer Rocío Dúrcal's (1944-2006) "Desaire", where she ends the song precisely with a D5 in chest voice. Composers and arrangers, however, favor the lower range, as do many women who find it more comfortable to sing in a middle contralto range. As a result, the above definitions of feminine and masculine vocal timbre are a social construction of style authenticity in vocal sounds in mariachi music.

As a result of the social construction that yields that a woman conserves a mariachi style in a comfortable contralto range, a woman's singing timbre in mariachi music has been identified as, bold, unapologetic, and aggressive, which are qualities generally associated with the male "husky masculine voice". One example of this stereotype is what Thomas Stanford writes in "The Mexican Son:"

The female vocalist seems also to have been introduced by radio and the motion picture industry. She dresses like "la Adelita" - in the china costume picturesquely associated with the female dancer in the traditional execution of the Mexican *jarabe*. In short, she represents the *soldadera* of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, who followed "her man" through the campaigns of that war, to cook for him and serve him his meals after the day's battles. She sings with a husky masculine voice songs that by their text-content are obviously intended to be sung by a man - romantic songs about the lover abandoned by his ingrate girl friend, and so forth.

(Stanford 1972:73)

The earliest woman *ranchera* singer to record with mariachi ensembles, as described in Chapter Three, was Lucha Reyes, who complimented her damaged soprano voice with a *bravía* style. Other women who recorded mariachi music in the mid twentieth century has some formal vocal training and sang in a contralto range. These women would include Sofía Álvarez, Matilde Sánchez "La Torcacita", and Irma Vila. Many women who came after them did not have vocal training and, as they matured in their careers, they continued singing into their late years, in a similar tessitura but with an altered vocal timbre that sounded more *bravío* as they aged.

Many might think that the higher the tonalities, the more feminine the singing voice might be, yet this is not entirely the case. *Ranchera* singers such as Lucha Villa, Lola Beltrán, and Irma Serrano have each performed the same *corrido* called "Gabino Barrera." This song was made popular by singer and actor Antonio Aguilar, and was originally recorded in C major. It tells of a man who loved many women, leaving many of them with children, which made him a hated man. On one fateful night, after he visited one of his lovers, he was assassinated.

In the first example, Lucha Villa sings this *corrido* during a *Siempre en Domingo* television show.<sup>150</sup> If we recall from Chapter Three, Lucha Villa was well known for her deep and profound singing voice. Although she sings "Gabino Barrera" a whole step above the original recording by Antonio Aguilar, in G major, her voice appears deeper, raspy, and aggressive. In the second example, Lola Beltrán sings this piece in the movie *Gabino Barrera*

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<sup>150</sup> The video clip can be viewed on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFX1UO-wew>, accessed July 5, 2010.

(1956).<sup>151</sup> The qualities of perfect tuning, facility of vocal production, and beauty in her voice would make us believe she is singing in a higher pitch than Lucha Villa, yet both sing the song in the same key and same pitch. In the final example, Irma Serrano "La Tigresa" sings this song to the man the *corrido* was written for, also in the film *Gabino Barrera*, with Antonio Aguilar. Her rendition of this piece is also aggressive and overflowing of emotion, but the power in her voice might make us imagine she is singing in a higher tonality than both Lucha Villa and Lola Beltrán. All three women sing this same piece in G major, one whole step above tenor Antonio Aguilar.

What becomes evident, based on the aforementioned examples, is that the appropriateness of the female voice to singing songs in the mariachi repertoire is not a simple consideration. Referring again to Bonnie Wade's thesis about the social construction of timbre, even when we accept its validity in general, there are at least two aspects of the problem that must be taken into consideration. First, the desirability of vocal quality as a social construction is comprised of many agents, which includes composers, arrangers, music teachers, and the performers themselves. Second, the vocal characterization and the ideals of vocality are not dependent on isolated aspects, such as pitch. It must also consider all the aspects that determine the vocal production in the context of the musical practice.

*b. The politics of key changes*

A women's voice, given that her range is generally higher than a man's, requires musical modifications. Therefore, many women mariachi musicians have been encouraged to sing repertoire produced by the women *ranchera* singers profiled in Chapter Two. Mainly, it is

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<sup>151</sup> The video clip can be viewed on [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0\\_88Z8kU90](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0_88Z8kU90), accessed July 5, 2010.

already in a key, with the musical arrangements, suitable for the woman's voice, preset in their recordings. Most other songs would require transposing, and in many cases, writing new arrangements. "Por eso no nos llevan a trabajar" (That's why they don't take us to work) exclaims Raquel, who says that it is difficult for women "en la maroma" (freelancing) to get work with the mariachi groups who do not want to have to transpose songs in order for them to sing. "Está bien, te llevo a trabajar, pero no vas a cantar," (Fine, I'll take you to work, but you won't sing), she has heard some men tell women musicians at Plaza Garibaldi.

The problem arises when women are discriminated against because of their natural singing repertoire. Vihuela player Raquel López Juárez, in referring to the difficulties in performing at Plaza Garibaldi, says that

They tend to not want to take women to work with them. I say it is because they are "racist" against women. They do not want to take us to work with them because they do not want, or do not know how, change keys —because *they* do not know how to transpose. While women have to know how do both, to play in both keys [the woman's and the man's], they just want to step all over us.

A las mujeres luego no nos quieren llevar a trabajar. Yo digo que es porque son "racistas" contra las mujeres. No nos quieren llevar a trabajar porque no quieren, o no saben, cambiar de tono —porque *ellos* no saben transportar. Mientras la mujer tiene que hacer las dos cosas, poder tocar en los dos tonos, ellos sólo nos quieren pisotear.

(Raquel López Juárez, personal interview, April 2013)

If a woman does sing when she is performing as the only woman or in a mixed gender group, the key needs to be specified before they begin to play the music. Although sometimes they refer to the key by its name (G major, D minor, etc.), it is also commonly referred to as *tono de mujer* (women's key) or *tono de hombre* (men's key), depending on whether a woman or a man sings it. These notions of gendered semiotics are not limited to mariachi musical uses, but have existed fundamental concepts and procedures in Western music theory, in which "music theorists and

analysts betray an explicit reliance on metaphors of gender ("masculinity" vs. "femininity") and sexuality in their formulations" (McClary 1991:9-10). These include masculine/feminine cadences and male/female triads.

Many all-female mariachi ensembles have felt the need to change the keys to *sones* in order to fit the groups' overall vocal range. Mariachi Las Adelitas de José Luis Salinas often performed the traditional "El Son de la Negra" both in A major (when they performed it alone) and G major (when they performed it together with other groups). Most other all-female groups play it in G major, and simply make modifications to the vocal intervals.

With the participation of women in these groups, the timbre of the sung chorus parts instantly changes. In many of the vocal chorus parts, a female voice tends to allow for the inversion of voices, producing a unique timbre that only a high voice can convey. In addition to the musical texture, the vocal intervals tend to change: if a song in the key of G ends in the first inversion I chord (B – D – G), voices with a higher range can modify the chord to the second inversion I chord (D – G – B), which consequently impacts the vocal timbre of the sung chorus parts. The female voice may also drive some songs to a higher key, as is the case with "Gema" (from G minor to A minor).<sup>152</sup> Tonality changes are also common for youth mariachi groups with children who have a naturally higher vocal range.

*c. All-female ensembles performing "El Cascabel"*

As a case study, I will examine the way women have treated one of the most canonical pieces in the mariachi repertoire, "El Cascabel," a *son jarocho* piece introduced to mariachi

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<sup>152</sup> While this higher vocal timbre is generally associated with the female voice, there are cases where men too have a high vocal range, causing groups that are comprised of all men to perform songs like these just mentioned in the latter keys.

music in the mid twentieth century. The earliest known recording of "El Cascabel" with mariachi was released in the album *Sones Mexicanos: Antonio Maciel y los Aguilillas con el Mariachi México* (1958) by Musart-Balboa, as shown in figure 7.7).



Figure 7.7: *Sones Mexicanos: Antonio Maciel y los Aguilillas con el Mariachi México* (1957).

While I have not been able to locate a copy of this album, I understand that it features Antonio Maciel's adaptation of the melody to violin. A year later, Antonio Maciel released a single album featuring a combination of *El Cascabel / El Pájaro Cu* released by Capitol Records (1958).<sup>153</sup> In 1977, the celebrated version adapted entirely to the mariachi ensemble by Mexican composer Lorenzo Barcelata was included within the selected pieces featured on the *Murmurs of Earth*, a recording sent to outer space on the *Voyager* mission. It featured Antonio Maciel and his

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<sup>153</sup> According to mariachi historian Jonathan Clark, José "Pepe" Martínez, mariachi violinist and former musical director of Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, learned this violin adaptation from Antonio Maciel and many versions came from this point on.

trio Las Aguilillas, accompanied by Mariachi México de Pepe Villa.<sup>154</sup> The adaptation of "El Cascabel" is not a mere reproduction of the *son jarocho* melodies; they are re-creations that underwent diverse transformations upon their inclusion in the mariachi repertoire canon. Moreover, mariachi groups from all over the world continue to perform this piece in order to exhibit their musical virtuosity and stylistic mastery.

The reflections regarding the participation of women in mariachi music allow us to value not only what happens in the text, but also the modifications in the music. "El Cascabel," has undergone changes from new instrumentation to standardization of verses and an alteration of original melodies. The key is conserved in A minor, accompanied by a harmonic cycle: A minor, D minor seventh, and E dominant seventh. I will refer to four examples to demonstrate the diverse musical contributions by women in mariachi music that, by necessity, resolve the musical challenges in various ways. First is the 1991 recording of arrangements by Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, ordinarily sung in A minor, which concludes with a modulation to C minor, a minor third above—more comfortable for a woman's voice. The second example is by Mariachi Mujer 2000, directed by Marissa Orduño. They perform a similar arrangement as Mariachi Los Camperos', but with a distinct introduction and a new arrangement for violin. In the third example by Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán, the group plays the song in A minor, the original key, but they invert intervals in order to adapt the melody to the female voice. Finally, Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles performs a version by José L. Hernández that changes

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<sup>154</sup> The pieces on this recording were intended to be a representative list of the music of our planet, and it is interesting that the piece selected to represent Mexico was "El Cascabel" (Sagan 1979: 176). See Carl Sagan, *Murmurs of Earth: the Voyager Interstellar Record*, (New York: Random House, 1978) in which he presents a brief description of this version of "El Cascabel."



the key between A minor (when they exhibit the instrumental solos) and C minor (when they sing the verses).

The Mexican regional *son* is rhythmically characterized by the *sesquiáltera*, as described in Chapter Two, is defined as the alternating meter between 3/4 and 6/8. The *son jarocho* is by its nature, improvisational, and is performed by *jarocho* groups whose instrumental make up generally includes a *jarana* (five-stringed guitar-like instrument), a *requinto* (four-stringed guitar-like instrument), a harp, and sometimes a *cajón* (wooden box). In *jarocho* music, the concept of solo improvisation by individual instruments allows various instrumentalists to demonstrate their improvisational skills.

When I first started performing "El Cascabel" about fifteen years ago, due to my limited formal musical training, I mistakenly assumed it was in E major. I later learned that the chord progressions follow the i-iv-V pattern, with chordal ostinatos that end on the V. I remember questioning why the chord progression would not follow instead a iv-vii-I pattern, as if it were in the Phrygian mode, instead of being in the A minor tonality. In any case, a recurrent harmonic formula is known, in which one measure of an A minor is followed by one measure of a D minor seventh and then by two measures of an E dominant seventh chord, which means that in this progression there is a predominance of the "Phrygian cadence." As this chord progression generally repeats throughout the song, the vihuela may change the strumming patterns, adding the *apagón* (muted strum) to different beats on the measure.

*Example 1: Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, Los Angeles, California.*<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano. "El Cascabel." *Canciones de Siempre*. Peer Southern Productions US, 1991. A video of this example can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyLlfDiyrAk>, accessed June 15, 2010.

Although this example does not explicitly relate to an all-female mariachi group, it was one of the first professional mariachi ensembles in Los Angeles that incorporated a woman, and this arrangement demonstrates this by featuring a woman's voice in the final verse of this song. This version of "El Cascabel" by Mariachi Los Camperos (1991) begins in A minor, but the final verse modulates a minor third higher, to C minor. In this recording, the modulation to a higher key signature for the voice of Mónica Treviño permits her to sing the last verse in a register that highlights her voice. The key change lasts only forty-five measures and the climactic moment occurs when Mónica sings the final C. A chorus part with the highest pitch as a C was uncommon in mariachi music until women began performing the music. The voices in this example end in a chord in the first inversion (Eb – G – C):



Figure 7.8: Final vocal chord for "El Cascabel" in the first inversion by Mariachi Los Camperos.

Years after Mónica left the group, Mariachi Los Camperos continued playing this same arrangement, with the same key change, but without the female voice that would compliment the final chords. Today, the final chord for the voices ends in a minor triad in root position (C – Eb – G): a trace of a female voice prevails in this version.

*Example 2: Mariachi Mujer 2000, Los Angeles, California.*<sup>156</sup>

From its origins in 2000, the aim of Mariachi Mujer 2000 has been to demonstrate that women can compose, arrange, and play mariachi music as well as men. The musical arrangement

<sup>156</sup> Mariachi Mujer 2000. "El Cascabel." *La Nueva Imagen del Milenio*. Mariachi Mujer 2000, 2002.

written of El Cascabel by Laura Sobrino had served as a closing piece many of their early concerts and, as a verification of having lived up to the group's purpose, to play the same canonical pieces the men play. This version immediately breaks away from any previous version: they begin with a call in three voices:

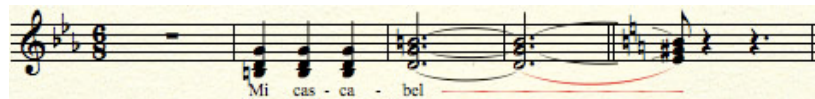


Figure 7.9: Initial vocal chord for "El Cascabel" by Mariachi Mujer 2000.

This vocal introduction serves as an instant index of the feminine voice because the first thing one hears is, precisely, a chorus of women. Followed by a trumpet melody, the piece contradicts the idea that women are not great trumpet players. The tempo taken by Mariachi Mujer 2000 is similar to the traditional tempo as performed in son jarocho ensembles; it is more tranquil than the versions performed by most mariachi ensembles today.

The first verse is still sung in A minor, in Laura Sobrino's voice. That a woman sings in this range contests the idea that the feminine timbre is necessarily a high-pitched sound. To end the first verse, they play four measures of the original violin solo, then play straight into an arrangement written by Laura Sobrino:



Figure 7.10: Violin solo for "El Cascabel" written by Laura Sobrino for Mariachi Mujer 2000.

This unique arrangement for violin uses double and triple stops. Later in this piece, Mariachi Mujer 2000 also modulates from A minor to C minor to introduce the second verse. In addition, they switch the phrase "platicando con Leonor" (talking with Leonor) to "platicando con mi amor" (talking with my love).

*Example 3. Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán, Guadalajara, Jalisco.<sup>157</sup>*

Since they were formed in 2006, this group has become one of the most renowned all-female mariachi groups in Mexico. The musical director, Carlos Martínez, whose sister is one of the violinists who sings this piece, is also the director of Mariachi Nuevo Tecalitlán. In their version, Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán has adopted Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán's most recent arrangement of this piece. They play the piece in the original key of A minor, but they change the vocal melody:

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<sup>157</sup> Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán. "El Cascabel." *El Cascabel*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzPUm4D7hmg>, accessed June 15, 2010.

Figure 7.11: Vocal melody sung by Mariachi Femenil Nuevo Tecalitlán.

The musical introduction, instead of leading the melody a fifth above (on the E), they design a new melody over the root note (A), a fourth above the part men generally sing. In the second and third beat of measure 39, they sing an A instead of a G#, perhaps to eliminate the augmented second interval from G# to F.

*Example 4: Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, California.*<sup>158</sup>

This all-female ensemble's director, José L. Hernández, also director of Mariachi Sol de México, understanding the damage that can be done to the voice by singing out of a comfortable natural register, made an arrangement specifically for this group. The instrumental sections,

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<sup>158</sup> Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles. "El Cascabel." *Compañeras*. Arias Music Entertainment Inc. 2008.

which are written in the tonality of A minor, include solos for violin, trumpet, guitarrón and vihuela. If these parts were to be transposed to C minor, it would lose the *son jarocho* timbre, change the chord positions in the strummed instruments, and would produce a darker sonority. To conserve the timbre and the performance style of this piece, changing the tonality on the instrumental parts would alter the aesthetic quality.

To avoid these problems, Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles plays all the instrumental parts in A minor and all the sung parts in C minor, modulating before and after each sung verse in order to present the instrumental solos.



Figure 7.12: Violin introduction performed by Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

With these examples, which are by far not the only ones, we can conclude that musically, how this piece is performed varies greatly depending on the group, whether it is an all-female group, an all-male group, or a mixed gender group. The differences are many: the melodies, the harmonies, the musical form, the vocal registers, and the use of instruments. The case of "El



Cascabel" is but one example of many of the contributions women have offered to a tradition that is male-dominated. Women's participation has given rise to a myriad of musical negotiations, many of which have led to the renovation of this music.

### **3. Performing image**

Physical gestures may not be essentially gendered, for male and female bodies are essentially identical in this respect. However, very quickly children in every culture learn which gestures are appropriate to men and which are appropriate to women. The result is an elaborate set of gendered physical gestures that adults must negotiate in their everyday life and musicians must negotiate in their musical lives. Earlier this summer (2015), a theater artist presented a proposal at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, which aimed to promote women's performativity in mariachi music. My argument, however, is that this theater class should be geared to all students, both women and men, for understanding one's body while performing is crucial for all.

When embodying songs and performing mariachi music, both male and female musicians have to be concerned with how they visually present themselves in public. As a different kind of non-verbal performance, what women and men wear while they perform mariachi music is also imbued with multi-layered meanings. Sociologist William J. F. Keenan, attempting to take the importance of visual appearance out of the margins of sociological projects, explains "Clothes are society's way of showing where we belong in the order of things, our role and our position in the social pageantry" (Keenan 2001:4). More than viewing visual appearance as superficial, Keenan suggests that what we wear tells us "who we are, what we have been and what we are becoming" (ibid.:25). What people wear cannot be entirely divorced from culture or gender. Sociologist Joanne Entwistle also situates the dressed body in a social context:

Dress lies at the margins of the body and marks the boundary between self and other, individual and society. This boundary is intimate and personal since our dress is the visible envelope of the self and . . . serves as a visual metaphor for identity; it is also social since our dress is structured by social forces and subject to social and moral pressures.

(Entwistle and Wilson 2001:37)

In this sense, a person's visual appearance becomes their vehicle for identifying with something meaningful. In this regard, clothing could be considered the first index of one's gender.<sup>159</sup>

Anthropologist Marcel Mauss had also taken interest in understanding how society shapes the cultured body. While some scholars initially perceived his "techniques of the body" to be obvious, Mauss suggests that there are gendered and cultured ways in which the body is used, such as in giving birth, sitting, drinking, making a fist, a Turk walking down stairs in slippers or women learning to walk in high heels (Mauss 1973).

The costuming associated with mariachi music is crucial to mariachi identity, not least in the form of the *traje de charro* and why mariachi ensembles began to appropriate it. Just as, when women began performing mariachi music, they entered in a struggle against gendered texts and inadequate tonalities, the same is true for the costumes they chose to wear. They have had to determine how they wanted to look while performing a musical tradition deeply associated with men. This is not as simple as putting on a dress; it is about designing their visual appearance in accordance with tradition, ideals, and their gender. In this way, a woman's performing body, in mariachi and in many other genres of music, is a site of opposition and resistance. In her chapter,

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<sup>159</sup> Gender studies scholars have presented a myriad of cross-dressing examples that would contrast my statement. Nonetheless, it would not be considered cross-dressing if our society did not associate make-up and colorful dresses with women and a specific kind of pants and boots with men.



"This is Not a Story My People Tell," musicologist Susan McClary examines the work of composer Laurie Anderson, reflecting upon the idea of a *female* body:

The fact that hers is a *female* body changes the dynamics of several of the oppositions she invokes in performance. For women's bodies in Western culture have almost always been viewed as objects of display. Women have rarely been permitted agency in art, but instead have been restricted to enacting —upon and through their bodies— the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios concocted by male artists. Centuries of this traditional sexual division of cultural labor bear down on Anderson (or any woman performer) when she performs, always threatening to convert her once again into yet another body set in motion for the pleasure of the masculine gaze.

(McClary 1991:137-138)

This "traditional sexual division of cultural labor" also bears down upon women mariachi musicians who insist on celebrating their femininity as mariachi performers. All-female mariachi ensembles have traditionally selected one of three choices: a traditional *traje de charro* with an A-line skirt; creative ways of modifying the *traje de charro*; or avoiding the *traje de charro* entirely in favor of expressing their femininity in the way that best fits their social and cultural identity.

#### *a. The traje de charro*

The *traje de charro*, as described in Chapter Two, is a costume tradition inherited from *jinetes* (horsemen) from Spain. The *traje de charra*, a costume tradition from Salamanca, has very little in common with the man's version of the *traje de charro*. It consisted of a jacket and a skirt, in velvet or wool, embroidered with gold or beads, with matching shoes (de Sousa Congosto 2007:293-294). As shown in figure 7.13, the woman and man's version of this attire has very few commonalities, except for the name *charra* and *charro*. The left image is Spanish Queen Victoria Eugenia de Battenberg, wife of Alfonso XIII, wearing a *traje de charra*. The right image is a man from a province of Salamanca wearing a black velvet *traje de charro*, decorated with a long line of large buttons along the vest and the sides of the fitted pants.



Figure 7.13: *Traje de charra* and *traje de charro* from Salamanca.

Since the beginning of its global popularity, the charro image has symbolized manliness—in part established by the National Charro Association's 1921 code of ethics—in addition to its significance as a symbol of Mexico. Embraced as an emblem of Mexican identity during the nationalist movement in the 1930s, the mariachi image was constructed from a collection of symbols—such as the *sombrero*, the *traje de charro*, (the stylized bullfighter outfit adopted by mariachi musicians), and pistol brandishing—all which collectively presented an image of Mexican maleness through films, television, and radio. Moreover, the self-representation of mariachi performers has largely influenced the common perception of this musical expression, and it is primarily this male conception that has been accepted by most of the media and scholars of this performance practice. In semiotic terms, the *traje de charro* is an index of mariachi performance (an element in Chapter Two). This means that women had another tough choice

when they decided to play mariachi music. They could choose to adopt a variant of one of mariachi tradition's most potent symbols, or an alternative. A dress, for example, would index their femininity, where pants would index a kind of empowerment.

In her article on the discourse surrounding the Mexican *charro*, Olga Nájera-Ramírez suggests that the *charro* must be approached as both a national symbol and a cultural construction of maleness (Nájera-Ramírez 1994). In discussing this construction of maleness with non-Mexican scholars, many have often responded that they deem the *traje de charro* as a bit feminine, considering the tightly fit pants and the short jackets they wear. Although a feminine translation for the word *charro* (*charra*) exists, mariachi musicians do not describe the female versions of the mariachi suit as a *traje de charra*, as is the case in Salamanca. Women have nonetheless created and negotiated their image in a variety of creative ways. The following are only a few of the ways in which women mariachi musicians have dealt with the *traje de charro*.

Leonor Xóchitl Pérez's explains predominant ideas about women in mariachi, suggesting that although Latinas in the United States have moved away from traditional gender roles, the contemporary woman mariachi musician usually "conforms to the gender expectations characteristic of traditional Mexican culture" (Pérez 2002:156). Her conclusion is based on different experiences encountered when she began performing mariachi music in 1974 and when she returned to the same scene in 1985. Having always worn her hair loose, Leonor observed on her return that it became necessary to wear her hair in a ponytail, which she had never done previously. She adds that there was a growing difference in the way women visually presented themselves, suggesting that they continued to heighten their sexuality through

identifiable "female" characteristics in dress, such as the feminized versions of the traditional *charro* suit in all female groups; how a female mariachi wears her hair;

through the instruments women are encouraged to play; by how a female handles her body on stage; and most importantly by the biologically based criteria, the male voice, used to measure what is legitimately "mariachi."

(Pérez 2002:156)

Mariachi music is no longer legitimized based on how closely female groups fit traditional stereotypes or what instruments women are encouraged to play. In fact, mariachi groups all over the world aim to be distinguished from other groups and have spectacular outfits in ostentatious colors with this goal in mind. Leonor's conception of a woman's image in mariachi performance was limited to Los Angeles and the all-female mariachi ensembles that emerged there since the 1990s:

Women in mariachi always have worn skirted versions of the *charro* suit. However, the black traditional *charro* suit and its powerful meaning are currently being exchanged for brighter pastel *charro* suits by most all-female groups. Pink is the color of choice for the all-female group Reyna de Los Angeles (queen of Los Angeles). The color pink is the classic symbol of femininity and youth. . . . However, these new visual codes prevent women from identifying with the traditional connotations of power and wealth of the male *charro* suit and reinforce traditional conceptions of subordinate female roles.

(ibid.)

Still, we must uncover the rich history in the way women have dressed as mariachi performers. The images by the *ranchera* singers presented in Chapter Three illustrate that there have long been a variety of ways in which women have decided to project a mariachi image. Women have had the liberty of dressing the way they wish, despite the social norms that have posed challenges.

#### *b. Folkloric regional dresses*

The *ranchera*, duo and trio singers presented in Chapter Three generally wore regional dresses to index their femininity, and to illustrate a sharp contrast from their male counterparts.

Oftentimes they wore a *china poblana*, a traditional Mexican dress, which is a full length skirt made of red silk with sewn sequins, worn with a white blouse, a green shawl, or a long scarf — combined to feature the colors of the Mexican flag: red, white, and green. Its origins lie in the late eighteenth century. According to José Rogelio Álvarez in the *Enciclopedia de México*, a "china poblana" is neither from China nor from Puebla.<sup>160</sup> The word "china" was a general term that referred to a young woman, either a native, a servant, or in some cases, a concubine.

The earliest documentation of this word dates to 1553. Santillán, in his *Tres relaciones*, refers to the Spanish soldiers in Peru who had natives "as *chinas* of their women and as concubines for themselves and others." Juan de Olloa, in his *Relación histórica del viaje al América Meridional*, describes his trip to Quito around 1749 and says that *chinas* "that's what they call the indian single women, house and convent servants." According to Rufino Cuervo, in the Bogotá language of the [nineteenth] century, "china" was equivalent to *chica*, girl, lass. It is not known when and how the word came to Mexico. . .

La primera documentación de esta palabra es de 1553. Santillán, en sus *Tres relaciones*, refiere que los soldados españoles en Perú tenían indias "para *chinas* de sus mujeres y a veces para mancebas de ellos y de otros". Juan de Ulloa, en su *Relación histórica del viaje al América Meridional*, describe su visita a Quito hacia 1749 y dice de las *chinas* "que así llaman a las indias mozas solteras, criadas de las casas y conventos". Según Rufino Cuervo, en el lenguaje Bogotano del siglo [XIX] "china" equivalía a *chica*, *muchacha*, *rapaza*. Se ignora cuándo y cómo llegó el vocablo a México. . .

(Álvarez 1978:387)

Joaquín García Ycazbalceta (1828-1894) writes in his in his *Viaje a Veracruz* that a "china" in Mexico was a mestiza who was beautiful and wore a "traje pintoresco, hasta ligero y provocativo, no menos que por su andar airoso y desenfadado" (colorful dress, light and provocative, not the least due to her graceful and relaxed walk) (ibid.). Concerning the "china" as a "poblana", Álvarez notes that:

The interpretation of the *poblana* from Puebla, applied to the *china*, is debatable: *poblano* in Hispanic America sometimes refers to a *pueblerino*, a peasant, villager, resident of a

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<sup>160</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Jesús Jáuregui for access to the references and images from his personal collection.

small town. [...] It is possible that the [semantic] convergence of a *poblano* as a peasant and as a gentile from Puebla, could caused confusion. In the works of Guillermo Prieto, *china* and *china poblana* do not necessarily refer to a *china* from Puebla.

La interpretación de poblana de Puebla, aplicada a la china, parece discutible: poblano en Hispanoamérica equivale en ocasiones a pueblerino, campesino, lugareño, habitante de aldea. [...] Es posible que por la convergencia [semántica] de poblano como pueblerino y como gentilicio de Puebla, se haya creado una confusión. En las obras de Guillermo Prieto, china y aún china poblana no necesariamente se refieren a china de Puebla.

(ibid.:387)

Álvarez writes, "El traje de la china poblana es de fines de siglo XVIII o principios del XIX..."

(The costume of the *china poblana* dates back to the end of the eighteenth century or beginning of the nineteenth) (ibid.:388). He describes the dress as:

. . . a costume derived perhaps from the *maja* (flagrant) Andalusian woman or the traditional woman's dress from Lagartera: red cloth embroidered with sequins, a blouse that lets one to guess the opulence of a bosom, white hosiery, pumps and a shawl

. . . un traje derivado tal vez de la maja andaluza o de la largarteana: castor rojo bordado de lentejuela, blusa que deja adivinar la opulencia del seno, medias blancas, zapatillas y rebozo.

(ibid.:387)

Figure 7.14 illustrates a drawing of a *china poblana* in *Los Mexicanos Pintados Por Sí Mismos*.

*Tipos y Costumbres Nacionales* (1954:89-94). It is important to note the lower ends of the dress, which feature pointed tips all around, very characteristic of a *china poblana* dress today.

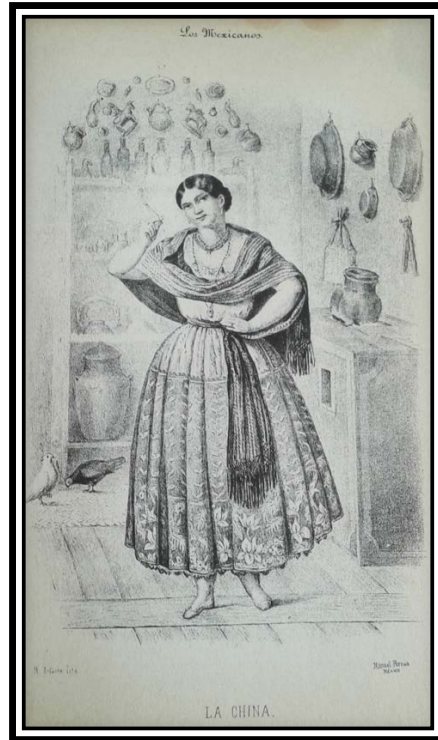


Figure 7.14: The *china poblana* and the dress.

Rivera does not relate the Mexican *china* to China, or any other Far East culture, but rather considers her as a legitimate daughter of Mexico, typical of the Anáhuac Valley. He describes her natural beauty and her dress, which consisted in a:

. . . shawl with ends tied in knots [...], filled underskirt, fragments of yellow, sequins and beads; the shirt is full of lace and strings, white petticoat with *peppered* ends. . .

. . . reboso de bolita [...], enaguas de mascadas, castor de cortes amarillos, lentejuela y *camarones*; la camisa llena de randas y deshilados, las enaguas blancas con puntas *enchiladas*. . .

(Rivera 1854:94).

He adds that the *china* is also an extraordinary dancer of *jarabes* in the *fandangos* (ibid.:95).

In Luis González Obregón's *La Vida en México en 1810*, the *china poblana* dress as shown in figure 7.15, which illustrates two drawings by J. Enciso of a *china* (left) and one of *currutaca* (right) (González Obregón 1911:23 and 32).



Figure 7.15: The *china poblana* and the dress.

Together with the *charro*, the *china poblana* was officially adopted in the 1940s as an important visual symbol of Mexican national folklore. Thus, when the three all-female mariachi groups that emerged with the traveling caravans in the 1950s—Mariachi Las Adelitas de Adela Chávez, Mariachi Estrellas de México de Lupita Morales, and Mariachi Las Coronelas de Carlota Noriega—they already had a national feminine archetype as a reference to how they should appear to their audiences. Malena Berrones captures it nicely:



A man has always dressed as a *charro*, or previously as a peasant or a foreman. There are many styles [of male *traje de charro*], but they are all Mexican. Well, the same hold true for us women. I understand that the counterpart of the *traje de charro* is the *china poblana*. That's our traditional dress, but we also use what could be called the *traje de charra*. . . Back when my father and brother worked in Plaza Garibaldi, they used a *sombrero charro*, but that doesn't go well with women; it's more of a man thing. The *sombrero* doesn't go with a woman's braids and bows, although braids aren't used anymore. . . . We would use *china poblanas* for theaters and festival, and *traje de charro* for private engagements; this was more comfortable.

El hombre siempre se ha vestido de charro, o anteriormente, de campesino o de caporal. Son de muchos estilos, sin dejar lo mexicano. Y nosotras las mujeres pues también era eso. Yo entiendo que el traje contrario al de charro es la china poblana. Pero lo teníamos por tradición, pero también usábamos el *traje de charra* por decirlo de una forma. . . . Cuando mi papá trabajaba en Garibaldi, y mi hermano, usaban sombrero. Pero no va casi con la mujer. "el atuendo va más con el hombre. La mujer, pienso que no, porque lleva sus trenzas y sus moños. . . aunque ya no hay trensudadas. . . Usábamos las chinas poblanas para teatros y festivales y el traje de charro en eventos particulares, pues era más cómodo.

(Malena Berrones, personal interview, summer 2008)

In addition to wearing a woman's version of the *traje de charro*, these early all-female mariachi groups handcrafted their own dresses. The dresses were folkloric and many of them were modeled after the *china poblana*, held up by crinoline and hoops. Yet they were not exactly the traditional *china poblana* dresses; they were modified into knee-high dresses, adorned with a variety of colors. Felisa González recalls: "Y eran más económicos que los trajes de charro, pues nosotras los hacíamos" (And they were less expensive than the *trajes de charro* since we made them ourselves). Figure 7.16 is a photograph of Mariachi Femenil Estrellas de México, from Felisa González's personal collection, which illustrates an example of the dresses they made.



Figure 7.16: Mariachi Femenil Estrellas de México de Lupita Morales.

Choosing to wear and make these traditional dresses, however, was not entirely their choice. As all-female mariachi groups formed for the traveling caravans, the producers and group directors decided for them that they would wear dresses. The gendered implication of this choice involved multiple layers of meaning, that begin with a women's role in Mexican society, their place as instrumentalists and not merely singers, and the national identity associated with mariachi music. Considering these three layers, the most appropriate way to present an all-female ensemble on a theater stage was to highlight their femininity by wearing a modified version of a Mexican traditional dress. Looking too conservative would not win a crowd (or sell beer). In this way, as mariachi musicians, they continue to represent a national identity with the same criteria: men wear the already national *traje de charro* and women wear the traditional regional dresses.

In a more recent example, Mariachi Las Colibrí, directed by Susie García, opt out of a *traje de charro* entirely, wearing instead a colorful variation of a woman's regional dress (figure 7.17).



Figure 7.17: Mariachi Las Colibrí from Los Angeles, California.

Individual women in mariachi ensembles also have a hand in choosing what to wear. After the early all-female mariachi ensembles disbanded, Isabel López Soto joined the Mariachi Los Caporales as the only woman, wear she chose what she wanted to wear for their performances. In figure 7.18, Isabel is wearing a full-length folkloric dress adorned with flowers and a *rebozo* (shawl).



Figure 7.18: Isabel López Soto player her violin with Mariachi Los Caporales.<sup>161</sup>

The dress choice for all-female mariachi groups and even individual women specifically addressed their purpose: "we are women who play mariachi music." In this sense, they are presenting an alternative image to the globally known and masculine-associated image of the Mexican mariachi ensemble: the all-female mariachi ensemble.

*c. Standardizing woman's appearance in mariachi performance*

Despite the freedom to dress as they wish, a standardized version of the *traje de charro* for a woman does exist, but there are differences of opinion as to how the women's version of the *traje de charro* (namely, full-length A-line skirts with the same material and design as the men) came to be. In her dissertation, anthropologist Mary-Lee Mulholland writes the following:

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<sup>161</sup> Raquel Juárez López Collection.

Laura Sobrino (2003) attributes the adoption of a female version of the traje de charro with a floor length skirt to Rebecca Gonzales. While playing with the Mariachi Los Camperos, the director, mariachi legend Nati Cano, encouraged Rebecca Gonzales to wear a floor length skirt as part of the traje de charro that matched the trajes de charro of his mariachi. This look was preferred over the various experimentations with the women's traje de charro in the 1970s that included hot pants,  $\frac{3}{4}$  length skirts, mini-skirts, and folkloric dress.

(Mulholland 2007b: 248)

While, Laura Sobrino, and by extension Mary-Lee Mulholland, like to give Nati Cano the credit for standardizing the *traje de charro* for women with Rebecca Gonzales, *ranchera* singers in Mexico had already sported that look as early as the 1930s. Figure 7.19 features Manolita Arriola (left) and Maria Luisa López (right), in the duet *Cantadoras del Bajío* (1936) wearing a *traje de charro* with a skirt, although not necessarily A-line.



Figure 7.19: The duet *Cantadoras del Bajío* (1936) wearing a female *traje de charro*.

Similarly, in figure 7.20, Lucha Reyes wears a *traje de charro* with a skirt in her debut as the "Emperatriz de la Canción Ranchera" (Empress of the *Ranchera* Song).



Figure 7.20: Lucha Reyes's debut as the "Emperatriz de la Canción Ranchera" (Empress of the *Ranchera* Song).

Just as the men in their respective groups have sought a common uniform, so too do women want to look as much alike as possible. All women in the group must wear similar fashionable long and shiny earrings, pull their hair back into a ponytail tied with the same hair bow or flower, and if applicable, a matching *sombrero*. Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles opted for pink suits, which, aside from their skirts, is an immediate indicator of femininity, as shown in figure 7.21.





Figure 7.21: Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles wear their signature pink *traje de charro*.

In San Antonio, Texas, Mariachi Mujer Internacional by Lucila Torres, formed in 2008, modified the *charro* image by adding a bright pink *rebozo* (shawl) with a matching flower in their hair (figure 7.22). The *rebozo* has a special significance to Mexican women; although linked to indigenous and rural Mexican women, it emphasizes femininity across social classes.



Figure 7.22: Mariachi Mujer Internacional from San Antonio, Texas.

In Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mariachi Las Morenas (The Brown-Skinned Woman), integrated by mostly sister, was formed in 1995, also modified the *charro* image by changing the top into a matching off-the-shoulder shirt and switching the large *sombrero* for a smaller for feminine-looking one. The skirt is a bright orange or purple color and no longer A-line, but a bit flared at the bottom, in order to outline a woman's hips (figure 7.23).



Figure 7.23: Mariachi Las Morenas in Guadalajara, Jalisco.



In Jerez, Zacatecas, Mariachi Continental Femenil, directed by Carla Bibiano Riveles, employ a variety of mariachi suits that uniquely draw attention to the female body. In one example, they perform wearing formal contemporary strapless dress with "botonadura" decorations (the designs all the way up the legs and bodice), sometimes with a jacket, as shown in figure 7.24. In other occasions, they wear a strapless top with a long and colorful Mexican regional skirt, which seems like a return to the *china poblana* ethic.



Figure 7.24: Mariachi Continental Femenil from Jerez, Zacatecas.

Mariachi Femenil de América by María de Jesús Xolocotzi Mata and her husband, Armando Muñoz Vázquez, was formed in 2011 in Tlaxcala de Xicoténcatl, Tlaxcala. In designing their first *traje de charro*, María de Jesús chose to have a more traditional look, albeit with yellow princess-cut jackets, as shown in figure 7.25. They have these suits in yellow, light blue, and blue with white.



Figure 7.25: Mariachi Femenil de América from Tlaxcala de Xicohténcatl, Tlaxcala.

Since their formation in 1982, Mexico City's Mariachi Xóchitl by Ramona Madera Gálvez had a different vision of how to highlight their femininity as an all-female mariachi ensemble. Despite the mass dissemination of the masculine image associated with the *traje de charro*, and the feminine examples set by the first all-female mariachi groups that preceded them, Mariachi Xóchitl feminized their image by wearing skirts that came just above the knees. Figure 7.26 is a photograph of Mariachi Xóchitl, from Ramona Madera's personal collection, posing with mariachi mini skirts.



Figure 7.26: Mariachi Xóchitl de Ramona Madera.

In addition to the desire to create a feminine image, the underlying notion of "the traditional" and "the proper" continues to frame ideas regarding what all-female mariachi groups decide to wear. In a recent interview with Ramona Madera, director of Mariachi Xóchitl, she felt the need to justify why they prefer wearing their short skirts. She explained that it was more convenient because the long skirts can be dangerous and their heels tend to get stuck in the hem, causing them to trip if they are not careful. She added that with the long traditional mariachi skirts, they wouldn't be able to walk fast if they needed to.<sup>162</sup> Truthfully, as she later revealed, they did not mind looking like sexy women mariachi musicians. Despite their reasons for wearing knee-length skirts, Mariachi Xóchitl has a matching full-length skirt to use in front of audiences who prefer more "proper-looking" all-female mariachi groups.

While they are only exposing their knees, their hands, and their faces, many people critique them for wearing "mini" skirts, which, in comparison to other pop star women, are not as

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<sup>162</sup> Personal interview with Ramona Madera, 17 December 2010.

mini. The critics say that they are being hired for their bodies as opposed to their music. A man I spoke to on Plaza Garibaldi commented to me "con falda corta y coquetas, ¿cómo no van a tener trabajo!" (with short skirts and flirting, how can they not get work!). I was shocked by this comment. Mariachi Xóchitl is a talented and professional mariachi group, and they sound much better than some other groups I have heard on the plaza, composed of all men.

Ramona is aware of these comments and understands that her desire to balance male and female performance characteristics in her own way is met with resistance. This resistance probably has much to do with the public's sense of what is proper for a woman and what is not, and not what is proper for the mariachi tradition. Concerning these comments, she tells me that she ignores them and is confident that the group's music will speak for itself.

The choices women make concerning their performance attire affirms their awareness that they are entering what has, until now, been a man's domain. The negotiation of a new kind of gendered identity thus includes what they choose to wear, their choice of repertoire, and how they choose to perform it. For some women, simply trading skirts for pants seems to have resulted in an unsatisfactory balance between female and male indexes, and they have sought other ways to amplify the female aspect of their *traje de charro* choice.

#### *d. Mariachi pants are not only for men*

In the above examples, all-female groups have opted to choose a dress or variant of *traje de charro*. A third option is to wear pants, which index a kind of empowerment and independence of indexes that refer to femininity. Texan *ranchera* singer Rita Vidaurri (b. 1924) was one of the first women to wear pants when singing this music (Vargas 2012:vii). Figure 7.27 is a publicity photograph for XEW radio, in Mexico City, that features Rita wearing *charro* pants

instead of a dress or a *charro* skirt. The photograph is used with permission from Jesús Jáuregui's *El Mariachi. Símbolo Musical de México* (1990:57), and also appears in Deborah Vargas's article "Rita's pants: The charro traje and trans-sensuality" (Vargas 2010).



Figure 7.27: Rita Vidaurri accompanied by a mariachi group on XEW radio.

Perhaps not knowing that Rita Vidaurri had performed as a soloist wearing *charro* pants, all-female mariachi ensembles like Mariachi Divas and Mariachi Ellas (now Trío Ellas), have also opted to wear pants instead of dresses or skirts.

In formal interviews and informal conversations with women mariachi musicians, many enthusiastically share what they do to make the mariachi image more feminine. Some describe



the colors they choose for their attire, the length of skirt they prefer, whether they prefer skirts or pants, and some still critique women who choose not to wear the long "feminine" traditional skirt while performing mariachi music. New York City's new all-female Mariachi Flor de Toloache, instead of opting for the previous options, have chosen to wear the *traje de charro*, just as the men wear it, with pants (figure 7.28).



Figure 7.28: Mariachi Flor de Toloache from New York City.

By developing their awareness of the signs and signals that serve as a language of their body, and by choosing to perform their image in order to present a female version of the historically masculine mariachi suit, women mariachi musicians metaphorically assert and contest the male-centered nature of mariachi music. Women in mariachi music, either as

individuals or collectively in all-female groups, are modeling, literally, a female way of being a mariachi *charro*. The metaphoric assertions by women in mariachi today, seen as perhaps a metaphor of the role of women in musical activities, thus provoke enticing questions regarding tradition, judgment, and symbolic meanings.

#### **4. Renovating the mariachi tradition**

Mariachi music's vital presence in films has contributed to popular perceptions, gestures, and stereotypes about mariachi music both inside and outside Mexico. When one listens to and witness the numerous ways that the emergence of all-female mariachi groups has contributed new energy to this music, one might get the impression that new ideas about gender equality and freedom have been gaining ground in this field of artistic endeavor. Woman's participation in mariachi music centers on renovating a tradition that has already been evolving for years. The mariachi tradition has adapted to its socio-musical environment so well that it has been transmitted to the following generations without schools or government intervention. These adaptations include all the changes mention in each of the elements presented in Chapter One. That women should choose to perform mariachi music, and continue modifying in their own way those eight elements is only part of the evolution of the tradition as a whole.

The many negotiations women have dealt for being-a-woman in this tradition have modified the tradition, which has brought upon new ideas concerning musicality and authenticity in a tradition considered a musical symbol of Mexico. Yet there is a claim in part of this negotiation that goes beyond that of being-a-woman or being-a-man who sings particular words, in a particular vocal range, with particular repertory, or wearing particular clothing. The claim concerning an ideology of gender, introduced in Chapter One, would address a gender ideology as a point of departure when defining the mariachi tradition as a whole, with women included.

This chapter has presented situations in which women have chosen to interpret, subvert, and transcend dominant ideologies associated with the mariachi tradition. Their negotiations have induced a kind of social change in order to attempt to transcend conventions and stereotypes based on gender. Much work is still necessary in this respect, for the musical work, for both men and women, lie in their musical formation and the preservation of a style that is going to be lost if it is not passed on to the next generations in a more responsible manner.



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## Chapter Eight: Patrimonialization, social realities, and performance spaces

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*The way she carries on her profession and her devotion to it depend on the context supplied by the total pattern of her life. For when she begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy; she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself in a different perspective. The fact of being a woman today poses peculiar problems for an independent human individual.*

Simone de Beauvoir, "The Independent Woman" in *The Second Sex* (1953)

The mariachi tradition has been a vibrant part of Mexico's intangible cultural heritage for over two centuries. On November 27, 2011, the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gave mariachi music external international validation by inscribing it on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as "Mariachi, string music, song and trumpet." While national and international cultural policy works towards establishing legitimacy for this significant Mexican musical tradition, it has yet to expand its advocacy efforts on gender equality on the inscribed traditions. For example, UNESCO's institutional validation of this tradition overlooked, perhaps unintentionally, women's role in this tradition in the general description, states that:

Learning by ear is the main means of transmission of traditional Mariachi, and the skill is usually passed down from fathers to sons and through performance at festive, religious and civil events.<sup>163</sup>

The description mentions the word "usually," which has been historically the case. However, the tradition was not exclusive to men as it did not prohibit women musicians, as can be observed in some of the previous chapters in this study. The reality has been, however, that women have been a minority, a fact that is slowly changing.

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<sup>163</sup> See Mariachi, string music, song and trumpet, as inscribing it on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, on UNESCO's website: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00575> (accessed August 18, 2015).

Since the mariachi tradition has historically been dominated by men, the general public has come to believe that women are not tradition bearers. Unlike other intangible heritage communities supported by UNESCO policy efforts, where women are the main bearers and providers of the tradition, woman mariachi musicians challenge the idea brought forth by community, national, and international that they are not the key transmitters of this cultural identity.

### **1. Patrimonialization of Mariachi Music**

Musical cultures from around the world have had to deal with and reflect upon the realities that women are performer and creators of music.

At present, gender-discrimination is so frequently defended by reference to culture, religion and tradition that it seems safe to conclude that no social group has suffered greater violation of human rights in the name of culture than women. For example, women are denied the right to vote, subjected to violence and customs that deny them personhood, for instance, by being forcibly married (or denied the right to marry), being prevented from earning, or disallowed freedom of movement, association and expression, all in the name of culture.

(Shaheed 2014:4)

In *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings*, ethnomusicologist Jane Sugarman observes that a once male-dominated musical tradition is transforming into one in which performance practices may engender, enforce, and change traditional musical and cultural practices (Sugarman 1997). In Albania, during the nationalist process, women musicians became accepted and helped transform musical expression that gradually came to represent Albania.

In the case of male and female polyphonic singing in Georgia, a central European nation, ethnomusicologist Nino Tsitsishvili noted that the all-female polyphonic ensembles, known as "rooster women," felt the need to perform like men in order to be valued. She concluded that

female participation would not likely transform the music due to its close ties to Georgian nationalism. Tsitsishvili argued that women could not adopt notions of empowerment in traditional polyphonic singing for two reasons: first, it was a male song-culture that was closely tied to nationalism; second, it was a tradition that had been sanctioned as a UNESCO Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage (Tsitsishvili 2006, 2009). Georgian traditional polyphonic singing, despite being performed by women, was considered to be a men's musical expression that UNESCO has sanctioned as such, creating a formidable challenge to women who wanted to participate.

Feminist musicologist Susan McClary presents an important case in which women were important creators of an African American musical form. In *Conventional Wisdom's* chapter "Thinking Blues," McClary shows how early Blues queens—Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Ida Cox—offered an unparalleled moment in the history of cultural representation. Yet their presence was overlooked in the way history was told by later British rockers who regarded African American musicians as their precursors. Even if women were pivotal in the origins of this mode of musical expression, there was a cultural mythology that traced a pure lineage of blues from a "cluster of rural, male blues singers recorded in the 1930s." This mythology tended either to "erase the women who first brought the blues to broad public attention or else to condemn them for having compromised that pure lineage with commercial popular culture" (McClary 2001:41-42).

*a. Government supported mariachi ensembles in Mexico*

What was true for the status of female traditions in Georgia, among Albanians, and in the U.S. blues tradition is no less true in the Mexican case. Mexican nationalism has been an important social, political, and ideological movement, and music in these movements has been

used to create, sustain, or change these ideologies. In the Mexican case, for example, artistic efforts to shape the national identity became more inclusive by incorporating vernacular, folkloric, and regional elements that were thought to promote a synthetic mestizo identity rather than a European or Spanish-derived one. As both a regional and national project, mariachi music celebrated a diversity that represented Mexico to the world while appealing to people within its borders. For ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino, mariachi music's popular appeal was due to its dependence on the culture industry because its "impetus was largely commercial and not generated by state institutions directly" (Turino 2003:197). While the state may not have, in the early years, supported mariachi music institutionally, as Turino claims, in the 1930s Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas took advantage of its commercial popularity and appropriated it for political goals when he invited Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán to perform for his campaign and later in his presidential inauguration (Jáuregui 1990, Clark 1992, Flores and Dueñas 1994, and Sheehy 2006). Having been born in Jiquilpan, Michoacán, which was where Mariachi Pulido was from, President Cardenas also offered this famed group a space in a government sponsored radio program in Mexico City on XEFO (Miguel Martínez cited in Jáuregui 2010:294). President Cárdenas also succeeded in giving Mariachi Vargas employment as musicians with the Mexico City police department. These musicians were, needless to say, all men.

Today there are at least three mariachi ensembles who enjoy state institutional support and are employed by the Mexican government: Mariachi de la Secretaría de Marina (Navy), Mariachi de la Guardia Nacional (National Guard), and the Mariachi de las Fuerzas Armadas (Army). All of these groups are paid a monthly wage with benefits and are at the service of government officials. Their work consists of regular rehearsals and performance at government events, with unrestricted availability as part of the contract. Such an arrangement benefits the

government because the wages paid always guarantee a well-rehearsed mariachi ensemble for its official events. When performing for these events, these musicians do not wear the *traje de charro*; they wear the official uniform of the government agency they represent (Army, National Guard, or Navy). Only recently has one of these groups, Mariachi Guardia Nacional (the National Guard's exclusive mariachi ensemble), included women in their mariachi ranks. Its musical director has invited his wife to perform with the group as one of the violinists, along with another female who sings with the group. Figure 8.1 is a photograph of Mariachi Guardia Nacional, wearing their official government uniform. The musical director's wife is standing fourth from the left playing the violin. She blends in with the rest of the men because they all wear the same uniform. In this group, both men and women must wear the same uniform, which consists in navy blue pants and a coat with silver buttons.



Figure 8.1: Mariachi Guardia Nacional performing in their government uniforms.

*b. Mariachi ensembles present in official U.S. events*

In the United States, no single musical genre could represent the cultural diversity of the country, despite efforts by the U.S. Congress in the early 1980s to name square dancing the national dance of the United States. Rather, U.S. government, educational, and cultural institutions seek to represent the full measure of local, regional, and national diversity under the umbrella of an ideology of multiculturalism. In the political arena, for example, President Barack Obama's 2008 outreach campaign, "Amigos de Obama," commissioned a mariachi song in the *corrido* musical genre: *Viva Obama*.<sup>164</sup> The commissioned mariachi group recorded the piece and posted it on all the social networking sites. This mariachi group included a female violinist, which is not uncommon in the United States. For his 2009 inauguration parade, President Obama invited Española Valley High School's Mariachi Sol Del Valle, a student mariachi group from New Mexico that included, at the time, four young women. Later that year, President Obama and first lady Michelle Obama invited the Los Angeles-based all-female Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles to perform during their *Cinco de Mayo* celebration at the White House.

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<sup>164</sup> "Viva Obama" was also recorded in a *norteño* version. In addition, they commissioned a separate campaign piece with a reggeaton rhythm to reach a wider Latino audience.



Figure 8.2: Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles at the White House.

More recently on November 19, 2012, First Lady Michelle Obama honored 12 of the United States' National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award Recipients, among them a group of young students of the Mariachi Master Apprentice Program from San Fernando, California. It was during the celebration of these exemplary extracurricular arts and humanities program recipients that a group of students from the Mariachi Master Apprentice Program not only received recognition, but also performed for this event (figure 8.3).



Figure 8.3: Mariachi Master Apprentice Program from San Fernando, California.

Mariachi music is important in the American education system because it both represents diversity and engenders pride through celebration of the U.S.'s Mexican heritage. These efforts by the Obama administration fit into not only an ideology of multiculturalism, but also to an ideology of equal opportunity for all—regardless of race, gender, religion, and other social factors. These efforts are not limited, of course, to the Obama administration but are echoed in hundreds of community festivals and school music programs in all parts of the country with a significant Mexican-American population.

*c. Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*

That UNESCO has declared mariachi music as Intangible Cultural Heritage makes women reflect upon how this might affect women mariachi musicians. Considering the aforementioned example of Georgian traditional polyphonic singing presented in Chapter One, it would be fair to predict that a similar situation might occur with women in mariachi music, yet in a less visible way. Women are accepted as mariachi musicians, to a certain point. So long as they



play the music in certain mixed groups, generally comprised of family members, or in all-female mariachi ensembles—all is just fine. But suggest that women, say, join Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, and social ideologies will work strongly against it.

Many mariachi musicians outside this official space have expressed great pride in being recognized by UNESCO as part of Mexico's intangible cultural heritage. But they also use it as a political tool against the government. In late November 2012, a few weeks after the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli opened its doors to the first generation of mariachi students, the Federal District prohibited the selling of alcohol on Plaza Garibaldi. Many small businesses and mariachi musicians whose income was based on selling songs to visitors to the plaza demonstrated opposition to the implementation of this new law because it brought fewer visitors, which meant less work for all. For the school, a better law could not have been implemented; but for the musicians, it created despair.

*d. The road towards institutionalizing mariachi music*

To keep traditions alive, cultural heritage must be relevant to its community, which involves transferring knowledge and meaning, as well as skills and customs, to the following generations. Musical cultures have traditionally carried this out in a community context and independent from formal education (Schippers 2010). In the mariachi tradition, the teaching and learning experience encompasses this transmission process, transferring knowledge traditionally from father to son, just as the UNESCO ICH points out. Daughters were rarely receivers of musical skills and knowledge. Exceptions include fathers who opted to teach their daughters so that they too could help provide economic assistance to the family with music performance, as is the case with the López Soto sisters, Isabel and Hilda (Chapter Four). Younger generations of women interested in learning mariachi music have, in the past few decades, gained the

opportunity to enter formalized music programs where they learn to perform, arrange, and compose music.

Formal mariachi music education in Mexico at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli is unprecedented. Before this school was created, as with any oral tradition, mariachi musical transmission was traditionally passed from one generation to the next within a community context generally independent from formal education. Mariachi music was—and continues to be—learned through imitation, either from other musicians or, in some cases, musical recordings. But outside the familial context and the possible educational spaces offered in many mariachi plazas, in Mexico there are still few places where one can learn to play mariachi music.

The first signs of institutionalized mariachi education in Mexico were in 1994, when the *Encuentro Internacional de Mariachi* (International Encounter of Mariachi) developed the first mariachi music workshops offered to national and international musicians.<sup>165</sup> Mariachi groups from all over the world now travel to Guadalajara to learn repertoire and refine their performance techniques. Instructors are well-known musicians with an established history of performance, although some argue that they have more artistic merit than pedagogical. Participants in these workshops are given a selection of written mariachi music, which includes transcriptions and adaptations from a variety of contributors. While the annual workshops are certainly helpful, they are more focused on sharing information than on driving the future of mariachi music education, as is the case with most short-term education efforts, which are not long enough to offer substantial formation.

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<sup>165</sup> It was later called *Encuentro Internacional de Mariachi y Charrería* (International Encounter of Mariachi and Horsemanship).

In the U.S., formal mariachi music education extends back to 1961, at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), when ethnomusicology graduate student Donald Borchardt took the initiative to implement the first mariachi classes in an educational setting, employing mariachi musician Jesús Sánchez as the instructor. This led to the formation of the first mariachi ensemble at a university: Mariachi Uclatlán (Koetting 1977:187, Loza 1993:90, L. Salazar 2011:13).<sup>166</sup> Due to this initial effort in bringing mariachi music into academia, today one finds educational mariachi programs in a wide variety of academic spaces in the United States, including grade schools, non-profit cultural centers, and universities.

In Tanglewood, Massachusetts, in 1967, members of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) saw the importance of including non-Western music in academic curricula and led a symposium to redefine the role of music education in contemporary U.S. society (Choate 1968). They had three general questions:

1. What are the characteristics and desirable ideologies for an emerging and postindustrial society?
2. What are the values and unique functions of music and other arts for individuals and communities in such a society?
3. How may these potentials be attained?

The idea of outlining "desirable ideologies" illustrates the preference for cultural plurality. The second question deals with the challenge of including other musical expressions in the academic curriculum. The third question is the most difficult to address. Considering how mariachi music has been included in the U.S. educational system, it has been a challenge to establish who is qualified to teach mariachi music because the music has generally been transmitted orally. Yet

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<sup>166</sup> Other pioneers in this project include Mark Fogelquist, Daniel Sheehy, and Lawrence Saunders.

only by asking these kinds of questions can we comprehend the risks in institutionalizing an oral tradition in a long-standing social model.

*e. The institutionalization of mariachi education, in retrospect*

When the first school to offer formal mariachi music education, the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, was created on October 15, 2012, there were contradictory reactions: some unconditionally supported the new educational endeavor while others severely critiqued its existence. Those who critiqued it saw the institutionalization of mariachi music as a threat to the natural aural teaching and learning methods used throughout its history. Among other things they feared that creating uniformity with sheet music and standardized methods of grading would alter the music's traditional aesthetics. Those who supported it believed that institutionalizing mariachi music in Mexico would give it the value and status it needed in society.<sup>167</sup>

But, why institutionalize a tradition that has long survived through oral transmission? In general, we institutionalize that which we perceive as valuable, and that we fear will die out without some sort of official recognition and support. Furthermore, institutionalization also gives a practice legitimacy by virtue of the institution's authority. For example, as jazz musicians in the 1940s and 1950s turned away from many of the forms and practices that had made their music popular in the 1930s and toward types of harmonic and rhythmic complexities that alienated a popular audience, they tried to legitimize their new practice as an institutionalized music, perhaps at the cost of standardization, and it eventually became absorbed into the culture of the music conservatory and school music programs. Institutionalizing mariachi music has

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<sup>167</sup> I presented a paper on this topic at the 2014 American Musicological Society Southwest Chapter Conference. The proceedings are available on their website: <http://ams-sw.org/PV3Spring.html> (accessed July 18, 2014).

moved the teaching and learning experience from an informal and aural setting to a context of higher education. The limitations of the mariachi tradition posed by institutionalization, however, include:

- A loss of a democratic and aural culture when entering a formal university setting.
- A loss of improvisational and collaborative teaching and learning efforts.
- Danger in changing a musical cultural or aesthetic by transmitting a uniform identity.
- An emphasis on an approved formal curriculum, with organizational structures and discursive practices under extensive observation and evaluation.
- A standardization of performance models where before the music was stylistically different, regionally.

In September of 2014, when the Mexican Secretariat of Culture held a press conference to announce the grand opening of the first mariachi school in Mexico to offer a professional degree, to my surprise, a journalist asked if the school was going to accept women. It would seem obvious that all public schools are legally required to offer equal opportunities on multiple levels, including gender. This journalist, however, was curious about the impact the school would have on the traditional association of mariachi music with men. As the director of this school, I replied that, for the level offered at the time, the school opened auditions to anyone—women or men—who had at least one year of musical experience, preferably but not exclusively in mariachi music.

Concerning the impact on the tradition, I told this journalist that mariachi music has been viewed as a tradition dominated by men, but that some women had been performing the music for over a century, and that the increase in the number of women and all-female groups in the past few decades will begin to change a few things about the tradition: how the music is performed and perceived, and the gender ideologies associated with the tradition. I also explained that during my tenure as the director of the school, gender equality was a priority, and

giving women and men the same opportunities would impact a tradition strongly associated with men in a positive way, on both the musical and social level. If the institutionalization of mariachi music in Mexico has challenged traditional notions of the maleness of this tradition, it has brought about positive considerations for women. For women who were born into mariachi families, but whose fathers could not teach them, the school offered them an opportunity to learn the tradition in a new setting. For those women who already perform mariachi music, and count on their family's support (parents or husbands), it gives them the opportunity to perfect their musicianship and performance skills. Yet, for those women who were not born into the mariachi tradition, a mariachi school might be the only opportunity to learn to play the music.

## **2. Social realities and room for change**

If women have the same musical capacity as men, what prevents them from joining high profile mariachi ensembles, if women too are mariachi tradition bearers? I am now prepared to propose three answers:

1. Unsuitable performance spaces
2. Gendered social implications
3. Changing a tradition

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the issue of gender arises not only when women are questioned as to their capacity for performing mariachi music at a given level. It involves other issues as well, including the changing dynamics of a woman among a group of men, the concepts of performing one's gender both on and off the stage, negotiating or obliterating gender stereotypes, and taking on the roles of musicians in the private and public sector. If audiences associate legitimate (or worse yet, "authentic") mariachi music with male voices, male tonalities,

and a masculine image, then when women attempt to assert their places in this tradition they are subject to adverse value judgments on both social and musical levels.

*a. Mariachi performance as a form of livelihood*

Mariachi music is also a form of work, and beyond its performance venues challenges traditional structures of work in society at large. Behind the performance attire, many of these people, both women and men, are in large part informal laborers in a modern society. Anyone working in the informal economy has it tough —men just as women. Most have no medical insurance or retirement funds and pass away without enough money for their own funeral costs. Many mariachi musicians who make a living performing this music depend entirely on the wages earned to support their families. If in the informal economy the work is tough in general, what makes it different for a woman to choose such a profession? The factors include the problem of: 1) work schedules, 2) balancing the home and the profession, 3) social needs, and 4) wages paid for work. These four factors are not mutually exclusive, for they tend to affect each other. For example, mariachi music is generally performed when their clients are enjoying their leisure time: on nights and weekends. This being the case, general childcare is not available for women, so they must seek out alternatives.

Many mariachi musicians today have decided to compliment their mariachi profession by working or studying at par with their performance experience. Some of them, in fact, have chosen to perform this music as a kind of hobby, to supplement their income while they pursue an education or work elsewhere. For these people, their financial stability does not depend on mariachi music. There are also mariachi musicians who cannot afford to sacrifice their work in order to further their music education by attending a music school.

In the PBS documentary on Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, *Compañeras* (2007), José Hernández explains that women earn less than men in high-profile groups. Yet this is an unfortunately reality for many more women who make their living working at local social events. According to José Hernández, referring to Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, "we have a hard time selling the group." He justifies lower pay by explaining that he is lucky if he can get them half of what his all-male Mariachi Sol de Mexico gets. He attributes this to the consumers who do not want to pay the women what they are worth.

When the all-female Mariachi Las Coronelas disbanded in the late 1970s, violinist Hilda López Soto faced a difficult financial situation. She shared her social struggles due to being a woman and a mariachi performer. As a single mother, she performed late nights, all in order to support her family. This was not her hobby. She did not play this music because it offered extra income; she performed it because it was a necessity to earn money and she had the talent to earn it playing music. Like many of the other women who performed mariachi music during the height of the caravans, Hilda did not continue with their schooling because they had been making more money playing mariachi music than securing alternative employment available to women of their social standing.

Hilda was left without an alternative except for finding another nearby mariachi ensemble to join. "Tocar la música de mariachi era lo único que podía hacer para sacar adelante mi familia y hacer mi casa" (Playing mariachi music was the only thing I knew how to do to support my family and build my home), she explained, adding that she obtained her beautician's license but the income did not compare. With regards to the opportunities that women have, Hilda says:

they discriminate a lot here; the music union offers mariachi music workshops, but they are very expensive. Beside the money, it takes a lot of time, and how can mothers who also have to see the best for their children dedicate this time?



aquí discriminan mucho; el sindicato de músicos tienen talleres de mariachi, pero cuesta muy caro. Además del dinero, requiere de mucho tiempo, y ¿cómo pueden las madres que tienen que sacar adelante a sus hijos?

Perhaps, as Isabel suggested above, if there were social programs that offered funding to support mothers who wanted to perfect their mariachi musicianship, the reality would be different. If this were the case, women would be able to afford their education and care for their family in order to strive to better their musicianship. Beneath the surface, however, is the reality that women are expected to stay in the home to care for their family and never put their own desires first.

Then there is the other side of the problem, where musicians, including some women, tend to lose interest in practicing their music, to become better musicians, because they are already getting paid as professionals. The particular case with some of the musicians of Mariachi Las Generalas comes to mind:

The problem with earning money for performing mariachi music is that some women, as was the case with some members of Mariachi Las Generalas, became seduced by the money they earned. Some deemed that the practice to performance ratio was not very important because they were already earning money with their abilities

(Reifler Flores 2013:42).

There is a general idea for many musicians, who tend to lose interest in practicing their instrument and learning more repertory, because they know that they will get paid the same amount. Those musicians who succeed, however, have the musical satisfaction that they can continue growing, and that if opportunities arise, they will be musically prepared.

*b. The realities of mariachi motherhood*

How can mothers, who work in a profession primarily during leisure times, resolve their child's care when there is no childcare available during those hours? The social realities women face by choosing to perform mariachi music poses a challenge to conventions of their womanhood. Among the barriers to being a woman mariachi is pregnancy. The tailored look of a

women's mariachi outfit is attractive when they are slim, but the waistlines may be unforgiving to the changing body of a pregnant woman. Violinist Maribel Medina, from Los Angeles, came up with her own solution in the late 1980s, substituting her *traje de charro* for a Mexican skirt and poncho in her last trimester. Laura Sobrino followed her example and wore the Yucatán *terno* (Yucatán regional dress) in the late stages of her pregnancy in 1991. Other women have said that they will play mariachi music until the day their *traje de charro* no longer fits them. An interesting alternative is the solution offered by Mariachi Continental Femenil, who designed a *traje de charro* specifically for the woman's changing body. Figure 8.4 illustrates the kind of top they used as their mariachi outfit, where instead of using a zipper to hold the skirt up, they designed a long dress with a corset that would easily adjust when they become pregnant.



Figure 8.4: Mariachi Continental Femenil design a corset into their mariachi outfit.

In the *Compañeras* documentary, the members of Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles spent a few moments discussing the reality of maternity. Once at a concert, violinist Cindy Reifler explained to the audience that the real difference between women and men mariachis is not that women have to do their make-up—men want to look good too. The real difference is maternity leave. Catherine Marin Baeza (Cathy) is a mother of four who does not work with Mariachi Reyna anymore; she is currently performing with Mariachi Divas. In this documentary, she describes how she would work the night shift as a nurse and with Mariachi Reyna on weekends, meanwhile caring for her four children. She did not get maternity leave as one would at a "regular job." She performed until she was eight months pregnant and returned to playing with Mariachi Reyna within two weeks of giving birth. In this documentary, José Hernández confesses that, at first, he would get frustrated when his top singer or first violinist would announce she was pregnant. He was initially worried their leave would produce an imbalance in the music, but things changed when he realized this is a woman's reality.

Trumpeter Ramona Madera, director of Mariachi Xóchitl, recalled that when she was younger, she had always imagined herself retiring from mariachi music at a certain age. But when she got to that age, she felt that she still had the energy and the desire to continue performing. The most difficult thing about being a woman mariachi, she recalled, is having children. Ramona reports about leaving kids to go on tour: "Le duele a la mamá porque otra persona nunca cuida un hijo igual que la mamá" (It hurts the mother because another person may not care for the child like the mother does).

On one occasion, right before Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles jumped on the bus to start a one-month tour, Cathy showed up with her son Christian. José Hernández said she could not bring him along, but she took him anyway. Cindy Reifler commented on how this was a big

shock for José because he didn't know how to deal with it, having never encountered the problem among his male musicians.

Violinist Isabel Aguilar, former *Secretaria de Actas y Acuerdos* (Secretary of Minutes and Agreements), has suggested that the Mexican Mariachi Unión at Plaza Garibaldi form a women's council to discuss particular items relating specifically to women. Isabel is relieved that mariachi music is what is being celebrated by UNESCO: "Ya lo merecíamos" (We already deserved it). Yet she insists that policy makers should do more for women, perhaps by offering them funding to study music and child care during the mariachi working hours. "No hay guarderías de noche o los fines de semana; esto está pensado para trabajadoras de oficina" (Childcare is not offered on nights or weekends since; it is only for woman who work in offices).<sup>168</sup> Childcare is organized for women who are not expected to be away from the home on nights and weekends.

*c. Mariachi music as a hobby*

For some women, choosing mariachi music as a career is not an option. In *Compañeras*, José Hernández had to deal with the reality that for the women in Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles, their lives are not entirely centered on mariachi music. One of the violinists says that for some of the men, mariachi performance is their full time job and they do not do anything else but perform mariachi music. Most of the women in Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles also attend high school or college in order to have a separate career.

It's very rare to see a woman completely committed to this music and to this lifestyle, very rare. You'll see 90% men, that are committed, and maybe 10% women. Men are more like (mimicking in a deep tone) "this is my life, this is my job, have to provide for

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with Isabel Aguilar in August of 2011. Shortly after this interview, Isabel was elected as [verify position].

my family," and the women, they are more emotional, (mocking a higher voice) "I want to get married, I want to have kids." They put it in the back burner, the music and their careers. I guess that's just the way it is.

(Hernández, cited in *Compañeras*, 2007)

One of the violinists from Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles sees it as a break from her husband, from her school and from her house chores. It is an opportunity to get away—to "be with the girls and play." Violinist Cindy says that for some of the women in the group, performing with Mariachi Reyna is "what they are doing until they start doing what they are going to be doing for the rest of their life." But that is not necessarily the case for guitarist Judith Kamel, who has earned her B.A. in Ethnomusicology with a minor in Spanish Literature from UCLA, and also works at the port in Long Beach. She says she has to have the job at the port to support herself because she cannot do that with what she earns from performing with Mariachi Reyna alone. Judith adds that mariachi music is her passionate hobby, and this for her is the "the ideal situation." "Those men who were wandering around in Mexico 150 years ago, they weren't doing it for the money, they were doing it for the passion, for the music" expressed Judith in the *Compañeras* documentary. While the men were almost surely doing it as their full-time income, for many women, passion for mariachi music gives them the drive to overcome these various obstacles to performing.

*d. Housewife or public life?*

The social pressures women face when choosing to perform mariachi music are not limited to what society at large has instilled in the public imaginary. In some of the stories from women I spoke, they were caught between their intention to continue playing mariachi music and their husbands, many of whom asked them to stay home. When I asked why their husbands would ask them to leave mariachi music, some would say that it was not common for a

housewife to also have a public life. To exemplify this I will refer to an interview I had with guitarist Eva Galván and violinist Carla Bibiano, director of Mariachi Continental Femenil, during June of 2012. Carla refers to Eva's story:

She was practically dedicated to her home. But when I heard her sing, I saw that in reality she has a beautiful voice, and I needed something like that for my mariachi group. She shared with me her situation: her husband was a musician and he played in a local *tamborazo* band [similar to a military band] here in Jerez—who was then her husband. She had many problems with working with the mariachi group, well he did not allow her to, he did not want that, and this [resulted in] abuse and fights with him. Then the moment came when she said "no more! I don't need this." And thanks to this project, she saw that she could truly support her family, her children, her alone, without the need to deal with that kind of situation. Many women think that in order to survive, they need to support those kinds of situations. Eva lived it, and she left it, and thank God she is well. I see that she, thanks to the support she had from us, because a part from being *compañeras*, we have always been great friends, and she is a great example for all the women to see that they can truly succeed.

Prácticamente se dedicaba al hogar. Pero cuando la escuché cantar, vi que tenía en realidad una bonita voz, y sí me hacía falta algo así para mi mariachi. Ya me platicó bien cómo estaba su situación: su esposo es músico y tocaba en un tamborazo aquí en Jerez—el que en ese entonces era su esposo. Ella tenía muchos problemas para poder salir a trabajar y para poder empezar a trabajar en el mariachi, pues él no la dejaba, él no quería, y hasta con malos tratos y peleas con él. Hasta que llegó el momento en el que ella dijo: "¡Ya no más!, ya no lo necesito." Y gracias a este proyecto ella vio que de verdad podía solventar a su familia, a sus hijos, ella sola, sin la necesidad de estar aguantando ese tipo de situaciones. Muchas mujeres piensan que para poder sobrevivir, necesitan aguantar esas cosas. Eva lo pasó, y lo dejó, y gracias a Dios está muy bien. Y yo la veo a ella que, gracias al apoyo que tuvo de nosotras mismas, porque a parte de ser compañeras, siempre hemos sido buenas amigas, a mí me parece un muy buen ejemplo para todas las mujeres que vean que en verdad se puede salir adelante.

(Carla Bibiano, group interview, June 2014)

There are also examples in which women's husbands were supportive of their wives' involvement in mariachi music. María Elena Muñoz, former director of Mariachi Las Generalas from Los Angeles, took the necessary precautions, as described in violinist and educator Cindy Reifler's M.A. thesis:

. . . María Elena would not take jobs that ended past nine o' clock in the evening. In this way she hoped to avoid problems for the women with their husbands. "Nos hablaban para una planta de las 7 hasta la madrugada. Nunca agarraba los trabajos así. No quería tener o la preocupación... [pensé] 'yo soy sola y yo no quiero ver que alguien se quede sola para mi'." (They called us for a steady gig from 7 until dawn. I never took the jobs like that. I didn't want the worry... [I thought] "I am alone and I don't want anyone else to end up alone because of me"). No woman should have to jeopardize her marriage to perform in the mariachi. Most of the husbands felt that their wives were under responsible authority when María Elena was in charge and trusted her good judgment.

(Reifler Flores 2013:41)

### **3. Performance spaces**

Mariachi groups have historically tended to perform in spaces such as *fandangos*, and more recently, bars and nightclubs, the latter not generally considered suitable for a lady. However, a woman performing in her father's group has been admitted to such places as a kind of exception. For example, it is acceptable for a daughter to perform in these spaces if she is under her father's patronage, or where a father figure is around to protect her honor. Fortunately, the spaces in which mariachi ensembles perform have been extending into new environments that are both suitable for women, but also for the mariachi tradition as well.

There are performance spaces that have been adverse for women mariachi musicians, such as bars, nightclubs, and places that charge a fee per song. It does not mean that women do not work in these spaces, but that the performance dynamic is different from men's performances. First of all, their safety is at risk by the kind of customers that naturally attend these places. Unfortunately, some women performers have been accused of being a kind of prostitute because they perform in these locations, in part because they are seen as selling their bodies instead of providing the service of performing their music. The examination of such performance spaces might serve as a productive approach to understand larger social issues, such

as how women locate themselves in the mariachi tradition and what purpose this serves in their personal lives.

Anthropologist Russell Rodriguez explains how mariachi performance spaces have recently been extending: as "mariachi music moves into distinct and new public spaces—theaters, institutions (educational and cultural), community centers, and politics—various changes become increasingly evident" (Rodriguez 2006:1). Yet these spaces are not all entirely new, for all-female mariachi groups that, since the 1950s, have adapted to many performance spaces, such as upscale theaters, Mexican films, radio programs, televised shows, outdoor arenas for cultural events, restaurants, banquet halls for politicians, and more recently to outdoor plazas, parks, and backyards.

*a. The religious context*

In Chapter Three, the panoramic view of women in mariachi music shed light on a performance space that has been little discussed when referring to mariachi as popular music: the church. Canadian priest John Mark Leclerc implemented the *Misa Panamericana*, under the auspice of Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, which brings together religious chants in Spanish language from various traditions of Latin America. The mass was inaugurated in a small chapel in Tepoztlán in 1996 (Suárez 1970). It quickly became popular, and since the small chapel could not hold very many people, the *Misa Panamericana* began to be celebrated in the Cuernavaca Cathedral, and from there it went to other parts of Mexico and the United States. Mariachi groups were also widely influential in the popularization of the *Misa Panamericana*. With the advent of the *Misa Panamericana*, Catholic churches all over the Americas opened the doors to mariachi ensembles. Mariachi Estrellas de Topeka, directed by Teresa Cuevas began as mariachi musicians performing at Topeka's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the late 1970s. Mariachi



Las Generalas also learned the mass repertoire, which is performed for weddings and other religious ceremonies celebrated inside a church.

Mariachi Santa Rosa was an ensemble that was created in 1991 by a priest of Santa Rosa Church in San Fernando, California, in order to perform for the 8:00 a.m. Sunday mass. In the mid 1990s the group changed their name to Mariachi Alma de México but continued to play the Sunday mass until 2006. I performed with this group from 1993 to 2000. At that time in Los Angeles, there were few groups who would dedicate themselves to perform for the Sunday masses. This responsibility includes learning which pieces are appropriate to each kind of ceremony.

In this sense, the Catholic Church, after the Second Vatican Council, provides a space that is rich in history, culture, and tradition. This aspect of mariachi music is largely ignored, yet fundamental. For women, the church offers a safe space, in comparison to some of the other spaces in which they are at risk because they are women. Yet this space is no longer limited to the Catholic Church. Violin and former guitar student Adriana Hernández shared with me, early in 2013, that her goal is to learn mariachi music so that she could take it to her non-denominational Christian church. She believes that the moving power of mariachi music is not limited to songs about love, but that mariachi music also has the power to communicate a greater good to the world.

Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano, from Querétaro, has been invited on multiple occasions to perform for community festivities that celebrate the Virgin of various towns.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> In many towns all over Mexico there are Marian devotions, which in Catholicism, is directed to the Blessed Virgen Mary. Some of the Virgins include: la Virgen de Guadalupe, la Virgen de la Concepción, la Virgen de la Candelaria, la Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos, and many more.

Carla Reséndiz Rodríguez states that precisely because they are an all-female mariachi group, they enjoy the trust of the believing community because of the types of gender associations that women have: forgiveness, sentiment, and the mother figure. In these events, they enjoy celebrating the Virgin and performing in a religious ambience in the pueblo's fiestas.

*b. Plaza Garibaldi*

Plaza Garibaldi has had a reputation as la UDG (Universidad de Garibaldi) since the early to mid nineteenth century.<sup>170</sup> In 1925, entrepreneur Juan Hernández Ibarra founded Salón Tenampa, now known as El Tenampa, which became home of the also historic Mariachi de Concho Andrade, who was from Cocula Jalisco (Jáuregui 2007a:75). Concho Andrade soon invited his *compadre* Cirilo Marmolejo in 1927 to perform at Plaza Garibaldi and direct the Mariachi Coculense Rodríguez, and thus the mariachi tradition at Plaza Garibaldi was initiated ([Méndez Rodríguez] 1983a). Those who sought the spirit of Jalisco and Western Mexico by listening to mariachi music visited Plaza Garibaldi.

Inside Salón Tenampa was a kind of dinner theater and, outside on the plaza, a kind of drinking theater. On the north side of the plaza, one can visit the renowned Mercado de San Camilito (San Camilito Market), a few shops, a mariachi and tequila museum, several nightclubs, bars, and the famous *pulquería* La Bella Hortencia.<sup>171</sup> Around the corner of La Bella Hortencia, in a cul-de-sac called Callejón de la Amargura (Alley of the Sour) is the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, of the Federal District's Secretariat of Culture del Gobierno.

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<sup>170</sup> This is a play on the acronym UDG, which stands for Universidad de Guadalajara.

<sup>171</sup> *Pulque* is an indigenous fermented alcoholic beverage with a milky texture from the from the maguey plant.

At Plaza Garibaldi, one can hire a mariachi group for one song, an hour's worth of music, or for private events. Most mariachi musicians arrive at the plaza before the sun sets, either individually or as organized groups, and wait for customers to hire them. On a good night, Plaza Garibaldi can fill up with hundreds of mariachi musicians, and hundreds of customers, each soliciting different songs from different groups, all at the same time. *La maroma* (tight rope) is a metaphor for freelance mariachi musicians who do not belong to a group, but wait for the *borreguero* (shepherd) to pick his *borregos* (sheep) for a particular performance.

Plaza Garibaldi never closes its doors to customers. Hilda López used to work from 8:00 pm to 3:00 am. Then she would come home and sleep for a few hours before she got her daughters ready for elementary and middle school (respectively) at 7:00 am. Hilda says that what motivated her was her daughters. Her daughter Verónica, present during our conversations, said that it was comforting to her that when her mother arrived after 3:00 am, that she liked that Hilda would wake her up and share that evening's experiences. The daughter recounted how one time Hilda dragged her, against her own will, to the Tlaquepaque restaurant so that she would know what it was like to work those hours (she would not let her sleep during the day). She waited in a corner booth while Hilda played her music and the waiters helped take care of her. Then the next morning, Vero did not want to wake up for school, but Hilda said, "Así me pasa a mí, ahora te levantas!" (now you know what it's like, so get up!). And she got up to go to school.

A man, says Hilda, can work all those hours and when he comes home he can expect, rather demand, the opportunity to sleep. All of his mariachi shirts will always be washed and ironed for him, his boots will be cleaned, and his food will be cooked. But not a woman: "la mujer llega a su casa a hacerlo" (the woman comes home to do it). She has to wake up early, have breakfast ready, take the kids to school, wash and iron clothes, and so on. With all these

experiences, I asked her why she stayed with this group for twenty years. She said that because she was a single mother, it was important to have steady income, and since several of the group members and waiters didn't live too far from her home, the director offered to take them to and from work. There was security, and that for her was invaluable. They worked at Plaza Garibaldi every day except for Wednesdays. That's why they nicknamed the director "jefe mata-mariachis" (mariachi-killer boss). After Tlaquepaque shut down, they went to work at restaurant Santa Anita, off of Insurgentes Blvd., not too far from the Presidente Hotel, and there they lasted a year. In reflecting upon the years she performed with Mariachi Cihualteco, Hilda laughed when she mentioned how the director never believed Hilda performed with an all-female group. Since these all-female groups performed mostly for the traveling caravans, most of the mariachi musicians, like Hilda's director, not in the same circuit did not know they existed.

Women do not have the opportunity to work as often as men at Plaza Garibaldi. Men can stand on the plaza to wait for work at whatever time they want; some arrive at 12:00 noon and others not until after 8:00 p.m. But Raquel Juárez's concern about this type of work is heightened as she laments: "Nosotras como mujeres no podemos estar en la plaza todo el día" (We as women cannot stand on the plaza all day). If they had as much work as men, women could afford childcare or pay a *niñera* (nanny). Except women do not get the same amount of work by standing on the plaza the same amount of hours.

Some women avoid Plaza Garibaldi all together. There are other smaller mariachi plazas across Mexico City and places in Mexico State, where mariachi musicians have the opportunity to stand and wait or seek out customers. These include a turnaround by a large statue of Benito Juárez's head, called precisely, *La Cabeza de Juárez* (Juárez's head). More recently, Hilda López has found a safe space here working with a group of men who prefer to meet at this location

rather than Plaza Garibaldi. Another small plaza in which mariachi musicians gather to find work is in the city of Iztapalapa, which is where Malena Berrones and Juanita Lara have worked in the past few years.

The all-female Mariachi Xóchitl does not search for work on any plaza, and specifically avoid Plaza Garibaldi because they do not want to be associated with this "gran mercado de música, muchas veces maleado" (big music market, often corrupt), as director and trumpeter Ramona suggests. She thinks that with their manner of working and performing, "agradamos a la gente y eso lo agradecemos, y donde actuamos sentimos la buena vibra" (we please our customers and we appreciate that, and where we perform we feel the good energy).

Plaza Garibaldi is, nonetheless, the mecca of mariachi music. While in recent years it has suffered many changes imposed upon it by government authorities, such as the replacement of the neo-Greek style columns at the main entrance with a modern style tequila museum and a recently passed law that prohibits drinking alcohol in the open plaza. These changes have reduced the number of visitors to the plaza, and thus, the earnings of mariachi musicians.

### *c. Restaurants and dinner theaters*

In the United States, a myriad of restaurants offer live mariachi music, which has brought new customers to their business and given mariachi musicians the opportunity to work regularly in one location. This new space for mariachi musicians to work can be attributed to Nati Cano's dream of opening the first dinner theater in the United States to feature high quality mariachi music (figure 8.5): La Fonda de Los Camperos. In 1969, they not only opened their doors to mariachi fans in Los Angeles, but also to tourists who travel from all over the world and have access to a nightly performance by Mariachi Los Camperos.



Figure 8.5: Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano at La Fonda Restaurant.

In the city of Guadalajara, there are a series of restaurants that offer great food and high-profile mariachi music presentations. Of the most renowned is Casa Bariachi, which has an spacious atmosphere decorated with traditional Mexican seating and décor. It is a place for both tourists and local audiences who want to listen to great mariachi music. In Guadalajara, there are other restaurants, such as El Abajeño and El Parián in Tlaquepaque, which also offer top-level mariachi music.

In Mexico City, however, the mariachi restaurant business is a different reality. Customers prefer to go to Plaza Garibaldi and pay musicians low wages than to visit a high-profile group at a restaurant and pay for a good Mexican meal. While important venues in which mariachi ensembles would have the opportunity to perform regularly have existed, these venues

are slowly disappearing. A historic location to eat and listen to mariachi music continues to be the renowned Salón Tenampa, which in addition to hosting mariachi music, one can also listen to jarocho music.

Another restaurant is Amanecer Tapatío, where Mariachi Las Alteñitas and Mariachi Zapotlanejo performed for many years. Important singers, such as Pedro Infante and Vicente Fernández, have performed here as well. When this restaurant was at its height, it had about five banquet spaces and each one featured its own mariachi ensemble. The owners passed away around 1981 and this kind of operation ceased to continue. The Sheraton in Mexico City also offers live mariachi performances; its higher than average prices are generally intended for tourists. In the Zona Rosa, El Lugar de Mariachi (The Place of Mariachi) is a restaurant where mariachi groups will play a song or two on their own and dedicate the rest of the show to accompanying solo singers. While I am not against so much accompaniment, restaurant owners do not understand that mariachi ensembles have the talent to put on a show of their own, since most of the musicians today are required to both sing and play their instrument. Thus, mariachi musicians that have access to these types of venues will spend their time learning the music they are going to accompany and spend less time preparing pieces that will showcase the talent of the individual musicians in the group.

In other restaurants, like La Polar, the mariachi ensembles have to pay the owners for the right to perform. The customers then pay the mariachi group per song. But this kind of scenario is adverse for women, as suggests vihuela player Raquel López:

It is a restaurant where they don't want women. Aida worked there for some time. But today the owner doesn't want women. The clients, because they drink so much, can be disrespectful and the responsibility would fall on the owner, and this would cause her problems.

Es un restaurante donde no quieren mujeres. Aída trabajo allí un tiempo.<sup>172</sup> Pero ahora la dueña ya no quiere mujeres. Los clientes, como toman mucho, pueden faltarles el respeto y la responsabilidad cae en la dueña, y puede haber problemas para ella.

(Raquel López Juárez, personal interview, April 2013)

If there were more safe places in which mariachi musicians could play their music with dignity, not only would the social the situation for both women and men change, but perhaps so would the music itself.

#### *d. Bars and nightclubs*

In addition to the restaurants that offer a space for mariachi ensembles to perform their music while the guests eat, there are also bars and nightclubs for the audiences who like to enjoy mariachi music with alcohol. In an interview with Karina Gómez, vihuela player for Mariachi Femenil Rosa Mexicano, she stated that the group avoids performing in these bars and nightclubs because of the insecurity this could pose for an all-female group. Alejandra, the lead singer (and not a student at the music conservatory where the majority of the women in this ensemble), stated otherwise: that they can perform in any space, because in the end this is just work.

I think work is work. We are musicians that can be bought by the highest bidder, because that is the way this is. Where they pay us, where they offer us the best earnings, at least that is the way I think. There are many people who misinterpret this. Perhaps another *compañeras* father may think of this another way, but this work takes us wherever. Of course, we are only at the margin of what our work is. And the rest, let them say again and again what they want to say, because we are going to work, we are not going to do other things. And if they pay us well, then much better, that is what I think. We can go to bars, taverns, and restaurants, and in the end it is all a communication of art, that is all.

Yo pienso que el trabajo es trabajo. Nosotras somos elementos que nos podemos vender al mejor postor, porque así es esto. Donde nos paguen, donde nos ofrezcan mejor sueldo, al menos es mi manera de pensar. Hay muchas personas que lo malinterpretan. A lo

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<sup>172</sup> Aída is Raquel's sister.



mejor el papá de otra compañera lo puede pensar de alguna manera, pero este trabajo nos lleva a donde sea. Claro, nosotras manteniéndonos al margen de lo que es trabajo nada más. Y lo demás, que digan y que vuelvan a decir, porque nosotros vamos a trabajar, no vamos a hacer otras cosas. Y si nos pagan bien, pues mucho mejor, es mi manera de pensar. Podemos ir a bares, a cantinas y a restaurantes, al fin y al cabo es una comunicación de arte, nada más.

(Alejandra de Santiago Mendoza, group interview, December 2011)

Karina Gómez replied to her *compañera's* comment by stating that, although the main point is to communicate their art, the group still needs to choose carefully which spaces to perform in.

We have tried to be careful and not enter a bar at 3:00 am where we know there are going to be drunks. Yes, work is work, but we have been able to differentiate it. I think that if a contract came for a bar at 3:00 am, all of us would think about it more than twice. It is also a question of security for all, well Dulce Samantha is only 15 years old, and because we are all women.

Hemos tratado de cuidar y no meternos a alguna cantina a las 3:00 am que sabemos que va a ver borrachos. Sí, el trabajo es trabajo, pero lo hemos sabido diferenciar. Creo que si llegara un contrato en una cantina a las 3:00 am, todas lo pensaríamos más de dos veces. Es una cuestión también de seguridad de todas, pues Dulce Samantha tiene sólo 15 años, y porque todas somos mujeres.

(Karina Gómez, group interview, December 2011)

Rosario Paredón added to this that a male mariachi musician once told her that their group should focus on performing on stages and theaters because, since they are women, men cannot always hold back on disrespecting women, and in a late fiesta "los borrachos son los borrachos" (the drunks are the drunks).

#### *e. Theaters and concert halls*

In performance spaces such as masses, weddings, quinceañeras, or other similar gatherings, the mariachi ensemble's performance is not the principal attraction; it is a complement to the gathering. Today, various ensembles have the opportunity to form part of the

principal attraction in their performances, such as theaters and concert halls, but this does not limit their contracts to these performance spaces. Such was the case for the early all-female mariachi ensembles, presented in Chapter Four, which illustrated the importance of the revue theaters, or the traveling caravans, offering all-female mariachi groups a new space in which to perform mariachi music.

\* \* \*

Upon reflecting on the years of ethnographic and archival research, as well as my own experiences as a musician of this tradition, I have come across two contradictory valuative discourses regarding the ways in which women view their place in the mariachi tradition: to be or not to be "one of the guys." In the first discourse, to be "one of the guys," a woman acknowledges a level of legitimate identification. For example, violinist Malena Berrones (biography presented in Chapter Four) described that her father was her first mariachi violin teacher, and recalled how it was important for her father that she learned to play like the other men. In the 1960s, Malena's father would remind her that it should not matter that she is a woman, but instead that it was important that she played with the same strength and style as the men. "Tengo que tocar como los hombres" (I have to play like the men), she told me (interview with Malena Berrones). For Malena, in order to "play like a man," she took the initiative to learn to all three violin parts, and developed the ability to do what mariachis call *cordear* (chording), which is an improvisational technique that requires violinists to play the

harmony to the second or third parts in harmony to a melodic passage, even at the moment whether they know the song or not. The reality, however, is that many men can't even do this, yet Malena's father considered this a masculine trait.

For women who not choose to identify as "one of the guys," the discourse is based on the idea of difference. Rebecca Gonzales (biography presented in Chapter Five) is the first woman to perform Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano. In an interview, she suggested that women mariachi musicians do not have to be "one of the guys." She deems that women do not have to participate in gestures or behaviors associated with men that may be demeaning. Where, at once, these two discourses may seem conflicting or contradictory, they essentially argue that women want to identify themselves in this musical tradition. They interpret, and even recreate this artistic form, because they have made it their own.

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## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

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*Voy a ponerme a cantar / el muy famoso corrido / de un asunto que se llama / el eterno femenino, / y del que escriben los sabios / en libros y pergaminos.*

...

*Vuela, vuela palomita, / y saludame al pasar / a Eva y a la Malinche, / a Sor Juana, a la Xtabay, / y a la Guadalupanita / si vas por el Tepeyac.*

*Porque me voy despidiendo / y no quisiera olvidar / a ninguna, aunque bien sé / que en un corrido vulgar / ni están todas las que son / ni son todas la que están.*

*I am going to sing / the very famous corrido / of a matter that is called / the eternal feminine, / of which have written the wise / in books and scrolls.*

...

*Fly, fly, little dove, / and as you pass by say hello / to Eve and the Malinche, / Sor Juan, and Xtabay, / and the Guadalupanita / if you pass by Tepeyac.*

*Because I am saying goodbye / and I would not want to forget / any of them, although I well know / that in a common corrido / not all who exist are present / and not are all who are present exist.*

Rosario Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino* (1975)

The task of this dissertation has been to examine, document, and attempt to understand the participation of women as mariachi musicians. Although women were generally not encouraged to learn mariachi music through the aural tradition process, this dissertation presented examples of early mariachi musicians, like Rosa Quirino (Nayarit), an anonymous woman (Zacatecas), and Carmen Moreno (Los Angeles), who performed musical instruments in mariachi ensembles. In order to explore the history and meaning of women's participation, it was first vital to understand, and then challenge, the definition of the mariachi tradition, its history, and its cultural significance today. For this, I examined eight elements of the mariachi tradition, each with their own histories, which reveal a non-linear and discontinuous past. I referred to this reality in Chapter Two as the aporia of mariachi history: what is at once understood as a

historical succession and continuity of events is opposed with the multiple histories in the eight elements of the mariachi tradition that reveal a non-linear and discontinuous past.

As I engaged in a trans-disciplinary focus that drew upon gender, performance studies, historiography, as well as various themes in music research and ethnographic investigation, my intention was to contribute the knowledge of both mariachi music, in general, and women mariachi musicians, in particular, on three fronts: (1) to re-conceptualize the mariachi tradition by acknowledging that it is both a traditional and popular performing art, which enriches the understanding of the tradition as a whole; (2) to argue that the mariachi tradition deserves respect and dignity based on its artistic value, and that women can contribute to this; and (3) to unfold narratives that bring forth women's historical, social, and musical participation and contributions to this tradition. In the following, I will offer some concluding remarks on these points.

### **1. Re-conceptualization of the mariachi tradition**

In Chapters One and Two, I described the distinction between two kinds of musical expressions, both called "mariachi": the rural/original/traditional/folk and the urban/contemporary/modern/popular groups. The latter is an evolution of the former, and the former, as a relatively recent revival moment, is a response to the latter. Reflecting upon the history and current status of mariachi music, we have seen how tradition is an ongoing process that entails the negotiation of socio-musical factors that impact the music's sustainability.

#### *a. Globalization and the mass media*

Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes global cultural interactions as "flows" that he coins as: (a) ethnoscaples, (b) mediascaples, (c) technoscaples, (d) financescaples, and (e) ideoscaples (Appadurai 1996:33). Mediascaples and ideoscaples refer to the global creation and

dissemination of cultural information and visual representation. In Chapter Two, I examined how mariachi music evolved alongside the globalizing culture industry, as with other popular musics around the world. I discussed how the tradition was featured in all emerging media technologies: the first commercial phonograph recordings in 1908, live national radio programs since 1925, the first sound film in 1931, touring caravans since the 1950s, and pioneer broadcast television programs since the late 1960s. This was a vital part of the ideological force that would drive mariachi music to appear as a musical symbol of Mexico. In this sense, ideoscapes would center on the negotiation between regional and national ideologies, and how the international spectator would perceive mariachi music as a national symbol.

The film industry was the media driver that convinced the world that mariachi music represented Mexico. These internationally disseminated films featured mariachi groups that accompanied the most famous iconic singers, such as Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Lucha Villa, and Lola Beltrán, and were exported to many countries, many translated to local languages. Figure 9.1 is a scene from the Mexican film, *Un Día de Vida* (One Day of Life), directed by Emilio Fernández (1950), which features Mariachi Pulido performing "El Son de las Olas."



Figure 9.1: Mariachi Pulido in the film *Un Día de Vida* (1950).<sup>173</sup>

The film became very popular in former Yugoslavia and was translated into Serbo-Croatian, as can be seen in the image above. Endless examples like this one demonstrate how globalization and the mass media served as mechanisms that made mariachi music internationally accepted as a national musical symbol.

In Mexico City, as of the mid twentieth century, as mariachi music evolved alongside the emerging media technologies, mariachi instrumentation became standardized with specific instruments (such as including a trumpet), they began to use a *traje de charro*, and they began to incorporate popular musical genres in their repertory. These changes in the urban version of the tradition affected rural mariachi ensembles, and some of them noted how it also began to change their own musical tradition, despite the fact that they did not travel to Mexico City in search of opportunities to perform. Since the media had such a strong impact on the changes in the

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<sup>173</sup> The scene where Mariachi Pulido performed el Son de las Olas can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcX2EYAaQrY>

mariachi tradition, many traditional groups contested that modern groups were invented or modified by the mass media.

*b. All-female mariachi ensembles around the world*

Mexican pride outside Mexico is often reflected through the arts, and with community mariachi programs in particular, many people learn to gain a better understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures so that they may transition within these communities. Beginning the new millennium, all-female mariachi ensembles have also been founded in Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Peru. Many of these groups may have only lasted a few years, and former members possibly created new ones.

In 2010, the *Instituto para Mexicanos en el Exterior* (Institute for Mexicans Abroad) held the mariachi competition "Sones de Mariachi Por el Mundo," (Mariachi Sones For the World), which would prize the top four mariachi ensembles outside Mexico whose online video would receive the most votes. Forty eight videos were presented from 22 different countries. The judges voted Mariachi Siete Leguas from Mc Allen, Texas, as the best mariachi ensemble. Based on online votes, the first place winner was Mariachi Cobre from Peru. Interestingly, second and third prize winners were both all-female ensembles from Bogotá, Colombia: Mariachi Divas de América and Mariachi Las Alazanas. This competition emphasized how mariachi music has reached many people, Mexican and not, across the world. Yet more importantly, it showed how online voters were critical of a good musical performance, even if that meant voting for women.

While all-female mariachi groups that have earned a growing reputation as musicians have largely been viewed as a novelty or a change to the mariachi tradition, this panoramic view of all-female mariachi ensembles, throughout history and across the world, has offered a new



vision in understanding the mariachi phenomenon in general and has also opened a door into thinking about the ways in which women relate to this music as their own.

## **2. Revindication of mariachi music's artistic value**

Globalization and the mass media impacted the traditional mariachi expression since the 1930s by modifying a few aspects of the tradition and giving it national and worldwide visibility. This modern expression thus came to achieve its status as a national musical symbol, which ironically lost its credibility among some rural musicians, scholars, and the general public who did not identify with this symbol. This loss of credibility led to the establishment of negative stereotypes, presented throughout several chapters in this study. Obtaining UNESCO's recognition in 2011 was an institutional effort to dignify the tradition's artistic and cultural value.

### *a. Safeguarding the mariachi tradition*

To exemplify this situation, I would like to refer to a conversation I had Enrique de Santiago, guitarrón player for Mariachi Vargas, on Thursday November 29, 2013, after Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán's master class concluded at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi. We were discussing the future of mariachi music. For Enrique, people abroad think that Mexico is mariachi and tequila, *pero nadie es profeta en su tierra* (but no one is a prophet in his own land). This refrain, originally biblical, came to mean one's virtues and, in this case, artistic value, is more recognized and valued outside one's own land. Enrique mentioned that, in the U.S., there are fewer and fewer jobs for mariachi musicians, compared to the amount of work there was about two decades ago. He added that the mariachi restaurant businesses today are not doing so well. He also noticed that groups are getting smaller and smaller so that they can charge customers less money, and those individuals who once charged a specific amount to perform

with other groups had to reduce their price if they wanted to work. In sum, despite the decrease in the demand for full mariachi ensembles, many mariachi musicians from Mexico continue to migrate to places like Los Angeles in order to find work.

"And now that there is a mariachi school, now what?" he asked rhetorically. We joked and said, "Well, once the students complete their studies can move to Los Angeles where the mariachi scene is booming." Of course the joke was that the mariachi scene in Los Angeles is hardly booming. Many of mariachi musicians in Los Angeles used to work almost everyday during the week, yet some musicians find a decreased amount of work on the weekends. The renowned La Fonda de Los Camperos is out of business (although there is word that it may be resurrecting). Cielito Lindo is cutting back. People find themselves in an economic struggle and cannot pay what a full mariachi ensemble is worth today. In fact, some who migrate to the U.S. for more work as mariachi musicians find themselves having to take on another job in order to make ends meet. The Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi in some way provides some hope to students and to the mariachi community in Mexico City, hope that ideologies will change for the betterment of the musical tradition.

The current situation for mariachi music is not as it was up until about the 1980s. In Mario de Santiago's recent autobiographic book presentation in August of 2015, in Guadalajara, a man who allegedly worked for an important radio station made the claim that the kind of talent that boomed in the Golden Era of Mexican Film no longer exists. He added that, today, Mexico has no artists at the level of Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Lucha Reyes or "La Torcacita," and that is why they are not promoted in the mass media. Guitarrist and musical arranger Rigoberto Alfaro, who wrote the prologue for this book, pointed out, however, that it was not a problem of talent, for talent is everywhere; it was a problem of method. In the heyday of these Mexican

icons, their talent was sufficient enough for them to appear on radio, films, television shows, and record albums.

Rigoberto Alfaro stressed that, today, talent is not enough. Contemporary artists now pay millions of pesos to radio stations in order to appear on their programs. Perhaps this is one reason why mariachi music is no longer being promoted on radio programs: they cannot pay the millions. Mariachi music, however, need not be broadcast nationally for its continuity as a tradition, for it already exists in the collective imaginary, nationally and internationally. That mariachi music does not appear on popular radios stations, films, and television programs as it once did does not mean that there is no talent, and much less that there is no continuity.

What is rocking the music scene today is banda and norteco music. Enrique mentioned that these groups may charge up to \$100,000 pesos (approximately \$10,000 USD) for one performance. He added mockingly that there have even been attempts to fuse their music with symphonic music in order to legitimize it. These kinds of groups have the possibility to pay the millions in order to be broadcast on national radio. All this considered, where does mariachi music stand today? If there are fewer jobs, then what is the future for emerging musicians? What is to become of this phenomenon we call the mariachi "tradition"? Sitting at a table in front of the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli' performance forum, my back towards a large "Secretaría de Cultura" banner, which Enrique was facing, he kept repeating: "cultura, cultura, cultura." After reflecting on the above-mentioned questions, Enrique finally said: "Lo que necesita el mariachi es que prospere" (What mariachi music needs is to prosper).

Reflecting on those questions, and Enrique's answer, I realized that the task is not an easy one, for there are various levels of consciousness and possible intervention: the individual, community, and institutional. Overall, a major objective is to recuperate the tradition's dignity by

strengthening and safeguarding a tradition that has been transmitted orally for over two centuries.

One way to achieve this, drawing on the aforementioned three levels of intervention, is to

consider the following tasks:

- Ideologies must change;
- Infrastructures must be readapted;
- Performance spaces must be created;
- Audiences must be educated; and
- Government support and private sponsors must be considered.

Many of these have already begun to be addressed on all three levels, but the work for the future is plenty. The reality is that mariachi music is not in danger of extinction. There are problems with methodology in terms of *how* to best sustain the tradition, but mariachi music cannot die out in the near future, for it is sustained by Mexicans and non-Mexicans, in Mexico and abroad.

*b. The real effects of cultural policy*

Early in 2013, a police officer arrested a mariachi musician for standing too far off the plaza and trying to flag down customers because work was scarce. The mariachi union opposed this legal effort and closed one of the most important boulevards in Mexico City: *El Eje Central*. In minutes, images on Facebook circulated, as shown in figure 9.2, accompanied with comments such as: "Aren't we Heritage of Humanity, and you want to take away our HERITAGE?" and "We are mariachis, not criminals!" Additional comments, not shown in the following images, aimed at the local government circulated, such as "You can't disrespect us because we are Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and if you don't believe it, ask UNESCO!"



Figure 9.2: Propaganda seeking government respect on Plaza Garibaldi.

The decades of disdain have morally and economically affected mariachi musicians all over Mexico, but especially on Plaza Garibaldi. Many are hopeful that this international recognition will legitimize their tradition—with the assistance of the government, of course.

*c. Women's participation in the mariachi tradition*

It is important to note that, for the most part, I centered on what has been referred to as the modern mariachi expression, and wish I had the time to also engage in ethnographic work concerning the women who perform in the traditional mariachi ensembles. There is also a growing amount of women who are performing with traditional groups, and their experiences are also important to document. For instance, Emilio Perujo, the director of Mariachi Charanda, a traditional group from Mexico City, has taught his daughter Emilia to play the guitarrón. Emilia Perujo Lavín currently holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology, plays guitarrón in her father's traditional mariachi ensemble, and recently entered as a guitarrón student at the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi. In many other parts of Western Mexico, there are examples of women who

have desired to perform an instrument in the traditional mariachi expression, as opposed to the modern, and further research would bring about those narratives as well.

Through mass media, especially films from the Golden Era, the mariachi tradition has been promoted as male-centered, which has perpetuated the idea that men are the primary tradition bearers. Given the overall musical, cultural, and institutional situation that mariachi music currently finds itself in, women who integrate themselves in this tradition have been confronted with a series of challenges, presented in various chapters in this study. In general, the tradition and its bearers have been supportive of women musicians. For example, the doors for women to learn the music have not been closed on them, which is exemplified with institutionalized musical transmission, which has offered a growing number of women to learn mariachi music. Socially, however, the condition of the open/closed doors has been ambiguous.

At the Escuela de Mariachi Ollin Yoliztli en Garibaldi, of the 13 women who entered the first year of the three-year program in 2012, all but one dropped the program, and the one who continues will complete her studies in her fourth year, so there were no women graduating with the first generation of students in August of 2015. Some of the women who dropped the program did so for several reasons: to be blessed with giving birth to their children, to return to their hometown in other states, or to avoid a social situation affected by their mariachi music studies. The situation that hurts me the most concerns a very talented young woman who was physically abused by her boyfriend and suddenly stopped attending school. Sometimes the social factors are much stronger than words can give justice.

Hope exists on various levels, and as women are becoming empowered to become better musicians, it is my desire that more doors will continue to open for them. The social structures that govern the tradition's ideological self-representation have both supported and restricted

women's participation as musicians in the mariachi tradition. The support many women have received includes the opportunity to gain access to the musical knowledge necessary to perform the music. The restrictions, however, deal with what I have referred to in various parts of this study. Although there are challenges, many women have been given the opportunity to learn and to perform with a variety of mariachi ensembles, including the most renowned. Upon asking many women to name their favorite mariachi ensembles, the majority referred to Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, Mariachi de América de Jesús Rodríguez de Híjar, and Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano. When I asked them what their opinion was with respect to the fact that by the year 2015, *there were no women performing in the most renowned mariachi ensembles*, most said "that's just the way it is, but we have other kinds of opportunities."

Does freedom as musicians mean that women find satisfaction in gaining opportunities as women in all-female groups? Or does freedom mean that there should be gender equality so that they can also perform alongside men in historically recognized and world-renowned groups? If freedom is the overcoming of the ideological internalization of oppressive and essentialized gender rules that identify women as less capable of performing mariachi music, and if performing in all-female groups allows for that freedom, then many women have achieved it successfully—and many more are yet striving for that goal. However, for those women who believe that freedom is equality, and that they too may have the capacity and talent to perform with the world-renowned groups, the task has just begun.

In my view, women currently do not perform in renowned ensembles, in Mexico and in the United States, for two reasons: (1) the socio-cultural context is not prepared for that change in the mariachi tradition, and (2) there are far fewer musically prepared women who can perform at that level. In the first situation, time will tell if ideologies can change, but only if the second

situation permits it. As mentioned previously, it might be the case where an all-female performance space might be masked as a vehicle of male dominance in order to exclude women from spaces of power and prestige. Women have the ability to choose to continue to train themselves musically in order to perform at the highest level, and as this is accomplished, and when there is no doubt that women can perform just as well, then can ideologies concerning the musical performance by women change.

### **3. Concluding reflections**

Within the last year (2014-2015), some of mariachi music's most renowned figures have passed away: Nati Cano (1933 - Oct 2014), director Mariachi los Camperos; Miguel Martínez (1921 – Dec 2014), first trumpeter for Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán; Marcelino Ortega, director del Mariachi Perla de Occidente; and Laura Sobrino (1954 – May 2015), American woman pioneer and musical director del Mariachi Mujer 2000. In retrospect, these musicians have left a legacy for mariachi musicians of the future, and their legacy needs to be recorded in this and other histories of the mariachi tradition.

Current mariachi research is shedding light on the importance of documenting, and publishing, biographies of musicians of the mariachi tradition, which result in an important contribution to the knowledge of the mariachi tradition. These concern biographies of musicians from both the traditional and the modern mariachi expressions. For example, in the last few years, Miguel Martínez Domínguez and Mario Ángel de Santiago have left us their memories and experiences in their autobiographies. This study has attempted to make a modest contribution to the knowledge of the mariachi tradition—with women included. I am aware, however, that I may not have had capacity to document accurately every single detail in every interview. Furthermore, I am aware, that much more ethnographic and archival research is still



pending. If the work presented in this dissertation creates a consciousness for a better understanding of the mariachi tradition, and women's role in it, then part of the goal was achieved.

When John Blacking distinguishes between *music for having*, that which is occasional, and *music for being*, that which enhances the human consciousness, he stresses that the latter is art, and that this does not depend on its simplicity, complexity, or the circumstances in which it is created (Blacking 1973:50). In the quest for understanding mariachi music as performed by women, and thus, as music for their *being*, the conditions of the realities in which they make their music and find their expression begin to emerge. Their music for *being* is music that is suffused with gendered stereotypes, narratives, and aesthetic expressions. It is my hope that the content in this dissertation has contributed to the archive on gender studies, to a future history of mariachi music, and to the living memory of Doña Rosa Quirino, Isabel López Soto, Laura Sobrino, and those women who never appeared in historical documents, and have dedicated their life to performing mariachi music.

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## Appendix One

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The following typescript text is published in this dissertation with Dr. Jesús Jáuregui's consent. It is the chapter "Rosa Quirino (1891-1979), 'Una mujer a la que le gustó mucho el destino de los hombres'" of his forthcoming book *Mariacheros Tradicionales de Nayarit. Biografía, Mito e Historia Oral* (2010a), and consists of ethnographical descriptions of Doña Rosa Quirino, the earliest known woman mariachi musician.

### 5. Rosa Quirino (1891-1969)

#### **“Una mujer a la que le gustó mucho el destino de los hombres”**

“Me tocó tocar con Rosa [Quirino] en La Escondida, [ella] sabía minuets y música de baile. Era mariachera, tocaba violín primero. No ha habido más mujeres, nomás ella, que toquen en mariachi. No ha habido más mujeres que sean mariacheras. Era como diez años mayor que yo, tenía su mariachi y ella lo dirigía. Ella andaba pa’ dondequiera, era mariachera por derecho, ése era su destino”.

(Sabás Alonso Flores [1895-1984]; El Pichón, Tepic, Nayarit, 15 de enero de 1983).

\* \* \*

“Doña Rosa, la mariachera, tocó conmigo. Ella era de La Escondida. Andaba con los hombres y usaba pistola. Con ella no se podían pasar de listos, ella decía... “Muchachos, andamos trabajando y, si alguno quiere, nada más párese...” y sacaba la pistola. Doña Rosa vestía de guaraches, rebozo cruzado, enaguas largas, trenzas. Tocaba el violín, guitarra, vihuela. La respetaban mucho. Yo no me acuerdo si era casada o no. Ella me gustaba... pero no se le arrimaba nadie.

Yo la conocí [a doña Rosa] en una velada en Navarrete. Era una mujer respetuosa. Se animaba a matar o a que la mataran. Se emborrachaba. En aquella ocasión en Navarrete, se emborrachó y ya no pudo cumplir el compromiso de tocar los minuets. Entonces me pidieron a mí que tocara. Yo les dije que no:

– “¿Luego, si se enoja doña Rosa”?

– “¡Qué se se va enojar!, si está bien borracha”.

Y ya cuando ella se reformó, yo estaba tocando y nos amistamos. Después me convidaba a que tocáramos juntos. Íbamos a Puga, a una hacienda [ingenio cañero] que está aquí cerca [de San Luis de Lozada], y allí tocamos juntos. Ella ya murió”.

(Refugio Orozco Ibarra [1894-1985]; San Luis de Lozada, Tepic, Nayarit, 27 de abril de 1983).

\* \* \*

“Sí, ella es... es Rosa [se le mostró la fotografía de doña Rosa Quirino, ya anciana]. Ella era piecerita: tocaba piezas, casi sones no. Yo la conocí más nueva, como por 1920, cuando tocaba ella con unos músicos de allá mismo de La Escondida, tocaba con el mariachi de Miguel Zanabria. Ese violín que trae en la foto se me hace que lo hizo ella, porque hizo uno”.

(Daniel Pulido Escareño [1896-1996]; Tepic, Nayarit, 2 de enero de 1986).

\* \* \*

“Mi mamá era de Tlaltenango, que pertenece a Zacatecas. Nos vinimos aquí con los trabajos del papá de ella, mi abuelo [Santiago Quirino]; más antes aquí era ingenio azucarero, como el de Puga.

Mi mamá se enseñó a tocar. Sí, le gustaba mucho tocar. Tocaba el violín y el bajo sexto de doce cuerdas. Ella agarró el destino desde muy chica, tendría 12 o 13 años y, desde esa edad, fue de agarrar el destino. Fue música, ella tocó todo el tiempo, dondequiera encontraba compañía pa’ tocar. Iba a las fiestas del Señor de la Ascensión a Santiago [Ixcuintla]. En San Blas se juntaba con otros acompañantes. Salía a lo lejos, toda la costa. ¡Me mentaba tantas parte donde iba a tocar! Un día me platicó que, en El Botadero, mataron a una señora de San Andrés, que andaba de vinatera, por defender a su hijo. “Pensaron que había sido yo –me dijo– y hasta me rezaron el novenario. Y, ya que después salí [viva] yo, no, pos el gusto que les dió”.

Me platicaba mi mamá que dizque andaba tocando en un mariachi en Santiago, porque comenzaban los mariachis desde 15 días antes [de la fiesta] del Señor de la Ascensión. Se iba de aquí sola, pero allá ya la conocían. Se juntó con un mariachi y estaba tocando en un puesto. Allí llegaba gente de muchas partes y de muy lejos. Un señor la llamaba y ella les preguntó a sus compañeros:

– “Luego, ¿no sacaron licencia?”.

– “Sí”, le dijeron.

El señor era de traje.

– “A la señora le hablo. Háganos el favor, señora. Trajimos dos violines y un señor se nos puso mal. Ayúdenos a tocar en la iglesia. Vamos a tocar la antevíspera, la víspera y el día del castillo”.

– “Mire, señor, yo no sé de nota, pero las piezas que toco, las toco a medida”.

Los demás músicos del mariachi le dijeron:

– “Vaya, Rosita, nosotros aquí solos tocamos”.

– “Fui subiendo al coro, vi los candiles, y dije: ‘Dios mío, me vas a ayudar’”.

Ese señor había traído un castillo muy grande, lo había traído en tren [hasta la estación de Ruiz]. En Santiago nunca habían quemado un castillo tan grande como el que ese señor quemó. Ella era lírica, no sabía la nota, pero todo el tiempo tocó a medida. El que es lírico es distinto al que toca por nota.

Ella estaba sindicalizada en Tepic y pagaba... poquito. Porque cuando iba a tocar a Tepic, le cobraban. Ella pagaba allí al Sindicato [Único de Filarmónicos, Trovadores y Mariacheros]. En Tepic se juntó con un mariachi de un señor que se llamaba Pánfilo [\*], tocaban de fijo en una casa pública [burdel]. Mi mama tocaba adelante y el señor Pánfilo las tocaba [las piezas] a medida. Ya que me casé, ella tocaba con mi esposo [Salvador Bautista Martínez (1918-1971)]. A medida todo lo tocaba. Era una señora muy inteligente de eso. También cantaba, si le pedían alguna canción. A ella le gustaba mucho tocar. Ella tocó en dondequiera; se acompañaba con mucha gente, si sabían tocar.

No crea, como se acostumbró a andar con los hombres, pos le gustó el trago. Ella agarró también el vicio de la borrachera. Ya ve, a los músicos les dicen que ‘Ándele, pa’ la desvelada’. Había veces que ella sola se entregaba con los hombres. Se iba a tocar a la costa y traía buen dinero. A ella le gustaba mucho el acordeón y iban acordeoneros de Tepic. En el camino de allí pa’ cá se encontraban a esos acordeoneros –porque entonces no había carros–.

– “¿Me tocan?”

– “Pos que sí”.

– “Pos me tocaron toda la noche. Pos se me acabó el dinero. En la madrugada dijeron que ya había menudo por ‘ai... Pos compré toda la olla y las tortillas pa’ los compañeros”.

Nunca fue casada. Ella dio su resbalón, tenía 16 o 17 años cuando ‘me compró’. Después compró una niña, cuando ya estaba yo casada; se le murió chiquita, de meses.

Cuando ya se puso mayor, cuando la sentí yo fatal, ya le hacían [afectaban] las desveladas. Después, ya de más mayor, ya no tocaba acompañada, la ocupaban pa’ los velorios de los niños: más antes se usaban ‘los angelitos’. Ya muy mayor, viejita, tocaba en Puga: mi madrina, Claudia [Flavia] Pérez, la ocupaba pa’ que fuera a tocar en las danzas. Mi mama ensayaba danzas aquí y

‘onde le dijeran. No era interesada: una vez se tocó una danza aquí, el que la ensayó era de Tepic y era pa’ cuando viniera el Gobernador. Le decían a mi mamá que el Presidente [Municipal de Tepic] le iba a dar buenos centavos si tocaba ella...y mi mamá no quiso. Dice mi madrina: “Desde que murió mi comadrita, no he encontrado quién me ensaye la danza”. En Bellavista sí hay músico; en San Andrés no deja de haber danza.

Mi mamá también era carpintera, hacía camas, repisas, mesas, cuadros... Era una señora que le gustó mucho el destino de los hombres”.

(Refugio Gómez Quirino [1907-1986]; La Escondida, Tepic, Nayarit, 31 de diciembre de 1985).

\* \* \*

“Mire, yo fui ambulante y cayí a San Andrés [por 1930]. Iba de paso, pero siempre trayía yo mi violín. Llegué a una casa y pedí permiso pa’ quedarme. Mire, el violín es como quien trae un pase. En esa casa estaba un músico que tocaba “el tirón” [el violón]. Me dijo que allí estaba una señora que andaba tocando sola [la melodía]. La señora Rosita era de La Escondida.

Fui a casa de la señora Rosa para ver si quería otro violinero [en su mariachi]. Ya la voy viendo a aquella señora: con un violinón a toda madre, como una viola de grande. Entonces andaba de nuevecita la [pieza] *La mujer casada*.

– “¿Sabes *La mujer casada* y *La gaviota*?”

– “Sí”.

– “A ver, tócala adelante”.

No, pos eso era lo que yo quería. La señora, al ver que tocaba [bien] yo, me tuvo confianza.

– “Mira muchacho, el domingo tengo una tocada en Bellavista”.

No, pos toqué como un año con esa señora. Luego me desvalagué, estaba nuevo [joven] y me gustaban las andulencias [las andanzas]. De ahí me acomodé con un mariachi en Tuxpan, luego en Tepic me acomodé con un mariachi de Jalcocotán, que tenía un compromiso el 2 de febrero en La Cantera”.

(Fermín Bautista Martínez [1909-2003]; Tepic, Nayarit, 1996).

\* \* \*

Años después de mi conocimiento por entrevistas sobre doña Rosa, un campesino de Lo de Lamedo –de peregrinación rumbo a Huaynamota– tomando sombra en medio de la sierra, me ofrecería su vibrante recuerdo infantil:

"Doña Rosa cayó a mi rancho un 3 de mayo a tocar minuets: la Santa Cruz es la patrona de Lo de Lamedo.

No se me olvida, tenía yo la mollera [mente] fresca; tenía unos seis años de edad por 1944. Ella era delgadita, altota, con falda larga y blusa, usaba guaraches de baqueta con 'garbancillos' [estoperoles, cuyas cabezas metálicas permiten una mejor adherencia en el terreno]. En ese tiempo los mariachis eran dos guitarras, uno con violón, un violinista, uno con vigüela, así eran los mariachis que había en ese tiempo.

Por 'ai en la amanezca andaban unos de los hombres que les dicen galanes, llamados Ricardo Talamantes y Filiberto Aguayo, hombres bravos en aquellos tiempos, que ponían [clavaban] un machete en medio del camino a ver quién lo quitaba... era de la gente que se cree ser los amos y señores del pueblo: bravucones, a según ellos no se les rezongaba... eran gente abusiva.

Filiberto la quiso abrazar a fuerzas y la señora, doña Rosa, sacó una daga de las que había en aquellos tiempos, de cacha blanca con una bolita de bronce en la punta de la cacha. Al ver la daga, el hombre le tira con furia un cuerazo con el machete pa' tumbársela y la señora se quitó el golpe. Filiberto ya encabronado le tiró por lo menos 40 golpes a todo lo que da el brazo y nunca le pudo pegar. Doña Rosa empuñó la daga con la punta para abajo, recagarda en el antebrazo para tener apoyo y con la hoja de la daga se quitaba los golpes... la señora se la jugaba, porque los golpes van desde abajo hasta arriba. Al sentirse incapaz, Filiberto se le arrimó a quererla abrazar. Al arrimarse el hombre en cortito le dio con la bola de la cacha en la quijada y el hombre rodó por el suelo. Y le dijo: 'Mira, hijo de la chingada, no porque veas que soy mujer... yo con el que quiero hasta me le arrastro, ¡pero a güevo, no!' Los rodeantes de la velada le palmearon, viendo la gracia de que una mujer le haya pegado al más bravito de mi rancho... ella ya era viuda y estaba grande [de edad].

Ricardo Talamantes, su amigo que andaba con él, lo recogió y Filiberto ya jamás volvió ese día a la fiesta. Como dice el dicho, ese señor quedó muy humillado, porque siendo carbonero una vieja lo '[ha]bía tizado".

(Juan Solís Mariles [1938]; en las inmediaciones de La Cueva, El Nayar, 30 de marzo de 1994).

\* \* \*

“Rosa era mi comadre. Aquí venía a ensayar la danza. Se enseñó a tocar desde que vivía en su casa con sus padres y sus hermanos –tenía un hermano que se llamaba Pilar–, con sus abuelos. Cuca, su hija era mi ahijada. Cada año ensayaba la danza de arco y sonaja, para la Santa Cruz, el 3 de mayo. Yo nomás iba por ella. Desde que ella faltó, danza como es debido ya no se ensaya aquí, por falta de quien les administre de tocar. A otro señor lo grabamos en cassette, pero la gente no quiere ensayar así, no es igual”

(Flavia Pérez viuda de Miranda [\*], Puga, Nayarit, 2 de enero de 1986).

\* \* \*

“Yo, cuando estaba chiquillo, la llegué a ver que tocaba en las danzas. Pero, por pláticas de mis mayores, llegué a saber que ella era música de mariachi. Iba a tocar a Moras, La Cantera, El Trapiche. Se apartaba ella como de gira. A veces se iban como un mes. Iban a Santiago Ixcuintla en el tiempo en que se celebraba allá el Santo Patrón, en el mes de mayo” (Pedro Morán Bautista [\*], bisnieto de doña Rosa Quirino; La Escondida, 17 de noviembre de 1996).

\* \* \*

“Yo la conocí tocando en los mariaches que había. Yo estaba chico cuando la ví que andaba en el conjunto de mariacheros tocando, trabajando. Sabía tocar y cantar bonito.

Salía a tocar también a donde había ‘angelitos’... Se venía la velada de algún santo y venían a llevarla. Toda la noche tocaba” (Concepción Bautista Gómez, 2 de enero de 2001).

\* \* \*

“Esa señora se llamaba Rosa Quirino tocaba el violín, buena mujer pa’ tocar el violín. Viera qué bien lo hacía tocar, [casi lo hacía que hablara]. Era una señora grande [de edad]. Era una mujer muy buena, tenía su casa. Era una mujer muy servicial. A pesar de que andaba en la bola, era una mujer muy respetuosa. Nomás que también le gustó el trago y se la llevó el vicio.

Tocaba en compañía de los Guzmanes. Era don Pancho Guzmán, Vidal y Felipe. Uno tocaba el violín, otro la guitarra, otra la trompeta y otro el violón: se acomodaba bien con lo que tocaban. Con ellos se acompañaba un señor que se llamaba Cornelio [Quirino, era sobrino de doña Rosa, hijo de un hermano de ella]; allí con los Guzmanes se adherían doña Rosa y Cornelio y hacían un conjunto muy bien y era solicitado para los bailes y para los angelitos: que los minuetes, decían. Venían de Salazares, porque se murió un niño [para que fueran a tocar en la velada]. Ellos en las fiestas en la iglesia, en las bodas, en todo tocaban. Andaban en Salazares, en San Andrés, andaban dondequiera, por todos lados. Pasaban su vida errantes, pero venían muy contentos de los ranchos.

Aquí [en La Escondida] la gente era muy del gusto. Cuando la hacienda trabajaba, nos organizábamos y toda la noche tocaba la música. Aquí la gente fue de mucha alegría, de mucho contento y había dinero.

Yo en mi juventud aproveché para ir a los bailes. El día de San Juan se hacían fiestas muy grandes. Se cooperaban las muchachas de a diez centavos. A las dos, tres de la mañana, ya andaban las muchachas convidándose para irse a bañar. Bailaban sones, la jota, el jarabe, las polkas, los valeses. Antes eran las piezas re’ alegres.

Con un violín le tocaba doña Rosa al volantín de Apolinero Moscoso. Era el dueño del hospedaje en la calle Durango de Tepic.

Los tiempos de antes eran muy bonitos. Se acabaron ellos [los músicos] y se acabó la música. Después ya hubo muchos tocadiscos. Venía un señor de El Rincón, otro de El Pantanal [con aparatos de reproducción sonora]”.

(María Guadalupe Rodríguez Hinojosa [1925],  
La Escondida, Tepic, Nayarit, 14 de julio de 2008).

\* \* \*

“A esta semejanza [sorprendente, entre la “danza del cordón”, usada en España, y la danza indígena de “el volador”] podemos agregar la clase de música que de ordinario se usa aún en la actualidad, en el “volantín” [que deriva del antiquísimo “volador”], en los pueblos pequeños y ciudades alejadas de la capital, que tienen su feria de “Todos santos”, “Noche buena” y otras. Esa música está constituida por los “sones” y la ejecuta el “mariachi”. [...] La semejanza de concepción y sentimientos espontáneos no podía tener mejor representación que el “volantín”, hijo legítimo de “el volador” indígena y la “danza del cordón” española, con música híbrida, con la más genuina y típica música híbrida: los sones y el mariachi [tanto la música como la orquesta ejecutante son el resultado de la conjunción de sentimientos fundidos en el mestizaje].

En la capital de la República y en algunas otras de las ciudades principales, sucede que la música del volantín de maquinaria movida por motor de gasolina, tenga alguna música de la usual, ya ejecutada por la orquesta ordinaria, por “jazz-band” o por alguna máquina musical, victrola o cilindro; pero, fuera de esas excepciones, parece ser el mariachi la música que en propiedad le corresponde al volantín, y en las demás poblaciones en que se presenta este juego, siempre le acompaña la música de nuestros sonos populares, aun cuando haya, como siempre hay, orquestas que ejecuten otra clase de música. Para los que conocemos esto por haber vivido largo tiempo en contacto con el pueblo humilde y campesino, es tan natural y estrecha la unión del mariachi y el volantín, que éste, en los días de feria, se nos presenta inmediatamente que, a lo lejos, escuchamos lo bardonazos del arpa”

(Galindo, 1933: 87-88).

\* \* \*

“En Santiago Ixcuintla todo el tiempo ha habido mariachi. En aquel tiempo [la década de 1920] la feria duraba 30 días, eran 30 días de fiesta en la Ascensión. Luego le pusieron el nombre de “Fiestas de la primavera” y ‘ora dura pocos días. Mariachis establecidos no había allí en Santiago, iban especialmente para la fiesta y se quedaban unos días más arregando las cuentas.

Por los años 1924 y 1925, antes de la “inundación” [1926] se estableció allí un mariachi de uno que le decían El Puerco, Ángel se llamaba. Se agarró de los músicos de otros mariachis de los que llegaban y duraron allí como un año. Traía seis músicos: tirón, dos guitarras, dos violines y vihuela. Allí sentó sus reales El Puerco y fue conocido en la región: salía que a San Blas, que a Tuxpan...

El mariachi tocaba puros sones para bailar. En la fiesta de mayo se usaba uno como cajón, ‘onde se bailaba, se zapateaba... le decían tarima. Los arreglaban con cierto acabado pa’ que sonaran de cierta manera... Los bailadores iban zapateando al ritmo de la música”.



(V́ctor Loera, Tepic, 7 de noviembre de 1989).

V́ctor Loera naci3 en Santiago Ixcuintla en 1908. Violinista de nota y albañil. En 1974 se traslad3 a Tepic para integrarse a la Orquesta del FONAPAS, que pas3 al nuevo Instituto Cultural y Artístico de Nayarit.

\* \* \*

“En 1950 todav́a toqu3 en Santiago Ixcuintla en puestos donde hab́a tarimas en la plaza. La tarima era un caj3n grande. Ya no se usa alĺ”

(Marcial Jim3nez \* [1921]; Laguna del Mar, Ruiz, 1992).

\* \* \*

“Solamente nos véamos con los deḿs mariacheros de la costa cuando cábamos a la fiesta de Santiago Ixcuintla, que era la alegŕa de toda la costa. Alĺ era cuando nos véamos. Alĺ en Santiago era una recopilaci3n de mariahcis de todo el estado, hasta de la sierra iban”.

(Daniel Pulido Escareño, Tepic, Nayarit, 22 de agosto de 1989).

\* \* \*

En septiembre de 1975, entrevist3 en El Ciruelo (Laureles y G3ngora), municipio de San Blas, a Margarito Murillo Ibarra, quien hab́a nacido en 1890 en La Playa de los Caballos y falleci3 en 1986. Record3 que en su juventud lo ḿs importante era ir cada ańo a la feria de Santiago Ixcuintla; adeḿs de llevar sus productos agŕcolas para vender y adquirir alĺ mercancías que no hab́a en su zona, lo ḿs importante era bailar en las tarimas. ́l cant3, junto con su hijo Fidencio Murillo Castro (1918), acompańado de un mariachi tradicional, la siguiente versi3n del son Las olas de la laguna:

¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, las olas de la laguna;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, una vienen y otras van;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, unas van para Sayula;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, y otras para Zapotlan.  
Las olas de la laguna: unas vienen y otras van,  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!,

Chinita, vamos al mar,  
pa' que juntes caracoles:  
yo junto coloraditos  
y t́ de todos colores...  
¡chinita, vamos al mar!

Ya no pesco en los esteros,

pesco en el centro del mar;  
¡cómo es posible que el mero,  
teniendo tan duro el cuero,  
se haiga comido al caimán?

Chinita, vamos pal mar,  
allá nos embarcaremos:  
tu cuerpo será el navío,  
mis brazos seran los remos;  
¡chinita, vamos al mar!

¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, las olas de la laguna;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, una vienen y otras van;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, unas van para Sayula;  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!, y otras para Zapotlán.  
Las olas de la laguna: unas vienen y otras van,  
¡Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay!,

(Margarito Murillo Ibarra [1890-1986], El Ciruelo, San Blas, 3 de septiembre de 1975).

\* \* \*

“Cuando él [mi papá] estaba joven, no se usaba valsear, puro son en la tarima. Ése era el uso de la juventud de aquel entonces. Eso era el gusto. En el rancho no se usaba el valse, más que puro zapatear. Yo heredé lo de mi padre”

(Fidencio Murillo Castro, 1 de enero de 2001).

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## Appendix Two

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The following typescript text is published in this dissertation with Dr. Jesús Jáuregui's consent. It is an interview with mariachi violinist Evodio Pérez Bernal, in El Limón de los Ramos, Culiacán, Sinaloa, on January 11 and 13, 2011. The text forms part of the chapter "La Historia de Vida de Evodio Pérez Bernal, Un Música Serrano de Badirahuato" in his forthcoming book *La Tradición del Mariachi en Sinaloa*, (2014b).

### **Evodio Pérez Bernal (b. 1932), un músico serrano de Badirahuato.**

“Yo nací el 6 de mayo de 1932, en el rancho de El Muertito, San Javier, Badirahuato, Sinaloa. Era un ranchito donde solamente había cuatro casas, que eran de mi abuelo y de los hijos de mi abuelo.

Hacían muchas velaciones de danzas. Mi papá, Inocencio Pérez Aguirre, festejaba mucho el 15 de mayo, día de San Isidro Labrador, y celebraba el 12 de diciembre a la virgen de Guadalupe. Mi papá era nieto de una poblanita [indígena] que no hablaba nada de español. Entre él y sus hermanos se juntaban para hacer la velación del 3 en la noche pa’ amanecer el 4 de julio, que era la virgen del Refugio, porque mi abuela se llamaba Refugio. Y yo era muy metiche, me gustaba mucho oír aquellos trabajos. Los violines se me entraban, se me grababan y yo era un niño como de 9 a 10 años. Yo iba a todas las velaciones.

Un señor se llamaba Pablo Ramírez y su hermano Remedios Ramírez, tocaban violín los dos. Eran mixtos, hijos de una poblanita y un señor mexicano [mestizo]. Ellos vivían en El Arroyo de Almodóbar, eran hijos de Pomposo Ramírez. Venían ellos a tocar en las velaciones de mi rancho. Venía uno u otro. Las notas de esos violines fueron las que me impresionaron. A ellos los oí yo y de ahí saqué la idea de la música. A éstos fue a los que les robé la música, porque ellos no sabían que yo estaba escuchándolos.

Pablo Ramírez preparó un trueno para sacar pescados en el río de Basanopa y le explotó en la mano y le dañó bastante los dedos de la mano izquierda. Le cambió las cuerdas al otro lado del violín y tocaba el arco con la zurda y le picaba con la derecha. Se amarraba el arco con un pañito en la mano izquierda. Cuando ya pisaba con los [dedos] mochos –a los cuatro o cinco años–, le volvió a cambiar las cuerdas a la derecha.

Cuando yo ya salí al campo a ayudarles a pizar maíz –allí se siembra en las laderas; sembraban a picado, con barra [en coamil]– se me ocurrió hacer un violincito de cañajote. Tiene unas coyunturas como de 20 centímetros el cañajote seco. Le levantaba uno una cascarita [a lo largo] de una medida [a lo ancho] y a otro cañajote le arrancaba otra cascarita de otra medida, más angostita. Unía cuatro cañajotes empalmaditos, que venían dando dos pulgadas [de ancho]. En cada punta le amarraba un palito. Los dos cañajotes de enmedio los dejaba más larguitos, pa’ agarrarlos de ahí. Le untaba choquile, que lo produce un ocote de pino, en lugar de brea. Lo sonaba con otro cañajote. Y el choquile lo hacía sonar. No da muchas voces, allí nomás un chillidito. No era más de divertirme yo solo allá en las sementeras, ‘onde yo andaba cuidando el montón de maíz.

En una ocasión miré una mandolina, pero yo ya tenía unos once años. A las escondidas de mi padre –porque él no era de parte de la música, él era muy trabajador del campo–, corté un tronco de carpincerán y formé la caja de una mandolina, de un solo palo. La hice a puro machete. Le saqué el centro con una gurbia, un instrumento que se usaba para vaciar la madera. Me dio la idea que el diapasón de la guitarra con los trastos más juntitos me daba el diapasón de una mandolina; de allí me dio la idea del largo del buche. Entonces ya los guitarreros me proporcionaron pedazos de cuerda para completar las ocho que lleva la mandolina. Se los pagaba a diez centavos el pedazo de cuerda. Yo era muy luchón, vendía naranjas y cañas. Yo tocaba la mandolina y cantaba; le daba tonos, pero todavía no sacaba piezas. Mis primas y mis hermanas y hermanos se reunían en la noche y bailaban unos con otros y yo tocando con la mandolina.

Pero por la ilusión de una daga que quería usar yo, un señor me la ofreció por la mandolina, la que yo había hecho nomás con machete: yo no conocí lija, ni nada. A través de los días la echaba de menos yo a mi mandolina. Entonces corté un árbol de copale, que es muy livianito, y ya formé un violín. De la misma manera lo vacié con el fierrito útil aquél [la gurbia]. Y le adapté una tabla por el lado de la boca y su diapasón. Para ese primer violín que hice, en la noche –cuando mi papá ya estaba dormido– le cortaba la cola a los bueyes, para la cerda del arco. ¡Fíjese hasta dónde llegué [en mi atrevimiento]! Ese violín ya me daba voces casi como uno de medida, pero eran distintas las pisadas. Con ése empecé a precisar piecitas y después los sones [de danza] los empecé a precisar más. Las primeras canciones que aprendí a cantar eran *Río florido*, *Viento fuerte*, son valseaditas. Ésa fue la primera música que empecé a salir a tocar.

Y así fue como un señor –Refugio Martínez Arellano, un señor chaparrito, pero muy trabajador– me encontró tocando con ese violín y él era violinista. Me ofreció el violín prestado, él entonces ya no lo usaba. Le había costado dos vacas ese violín. Entonces fui con mi padre a que me diera permiso de que me prestaran ese violín. Pero no quería mi papá que yo aprendiera la música. Mi papá era en contra del destino de filarmónico porque, según él, era destino de flojos. Ése fue el mayor problema que tuve, porque a las escondidas de él elaboré mis instrumentos. Y algunos de los parientes que veían el entusiasmo que yo manifestaba en aquello, le rogaron a mi padre que me proporcionara el modo de que yo estudiara en aquel violín. “Entonces pregúntale que cuánto vale su violín, por si acaso lo quiebras”, dijo mi papá. Me contestó que 50 pesos. Pero batallé un poquito, porque ya era de una medida exacta ese violín. Pero yo ya tenía la idea.

Había un chamaco como de doce años –Nazario Elizalde Molina– que tocaba la guitarra y era muy bueno para cantar, tenía buena voz y no lo detenía su papá, eran muy pobrecitos. Nos

acompañamos y una vez que ya tocábamos y cantábamos, los familiares, por curiosidad, nos empezaron a solicitar por la noche. Eran bailecitos que hacían los parientes. Nos pagaban diez pesos a cada uno por toda la noche.

En una ocasión estábamos arrancando trigo y llegó ese muchacho pidiéndole permiso a mi papá para que me dejara ir con él a unos matachines a Santa Ana, municipio de Dolores, ya del lado de Chihuahua, vecino de El Frijolar. Dijo que sí fuera, pero que el domingo tenía que estar de vuelta por la tarde. Mi papá nos permitía ir a fiestecitas, pero no le debíamos de fallar, porque él era muy trabajador.

Yo lo que más estudiaba y más me conmovía eran los sones de matachines. Nos atendió muy bien el casero, Crescencio Cobarruvias Varela. Yo tenía entonces once años. Nos habló para que le tocáramos una pieza a San Isidro; ya estaba el altarcito arreglado en una pieza de su casa. Cuando tocamos la primera pieza –que eran *Las flores*– estábamos rodeados por todo el acompañamiento allí. Un maestro que iba en misión [cultural de la Secretaría de Educación Pública] comenzó a aplaudir y los demás también me aplaudieron y lloré. No estaba acostumbrado, estaba yo muy chiquito y tocaba en puras rancherías y no había oído un aplauso. Ya me abrazaron y me consolaron.

Entonces ya se comprometió el señor a que le tocáramos toda la noche al santo y que nos iba a dar cien litros de trigo a cada uno. Y le aceptamos. Entonces sacaron el altar para un patio y allí le tocamos y allí le bailaron. Se bailan dos sones de matachines y de ‘ai se toca el jarabe.

Pero en la mañana, que ya amaneció –hasta allí era el compromiso–, ya que guardaron los santos en el lugar acostumbrado, formaron un baile. Tocamos como hasta las dos de la tarde y entonces nos invitaron a otro rancho –allí en Chihuahua, que se llama La Sierrita– a seguir tocando el domingo. Pero nos oscureció tocando otra vez. No pudimos irnos, porque no nos habían pagado y ya era de noche. El lunes nos invitó Cleofas Archuleta Uriarte a llevarle la música, como gallo, a su novia a Las Tepozanas. Y le tocamos todo el día. *Noche serena y oscura*, *Las cuatro milpas*, *Vidita mía*, *Hace un año*, *El huérfano*, ésas eran las piezas que se usaban entonces. En ese entonces se cantaban corridos: *Heraclio Bernal*, *La tumba de Villa*; *Jesuita en Chihuahua* (polka), *La Cuchi* (polka), *Amor chiquito* (canción ranchera), *Cosquillitas* (chote), *El coyote* (fox trot). Cleofas nos pagó ya en la noche, dándonos 70 pesos a cada uno, entre billetes de a peso y de a cinco pesos. Era una emoción, porque eran muchos billetes.

El martes madrugamos pa’l rancho ónde estaban pizcando trigo mi padre, mis hermanos y gente que les ayudaba. Llegué como a las siete y media de la mañana al trabajo. Colgué mi violín en una parva (donde se garroteaban las matas de trigo). Y me incliné [hacia] donde estaba mi padre. Mis hermanos me hacían señas de que me iba a pegar. Me quité el sombrero, me arrodillé y lo saludé y sobre el saludo ya venía la regañada. Lo primero que hice fue sacar el dinero y se lo puse. Era lo que valían tres vacas. No lo tomó mientras no me investigó quién me había dado ese dinero y por qué. Le contesté que nos lo había dado Cleofas Archuleta, porque le habíamos tocado desde el domingo hasta el lunes por la noche. Lo tomó en sus manos. Le dije: “Tengo cien litros de trigo para que pague diez compañeros”. Y lo convencí. Estaba yo de once o doce años.

Detrás de mí venían las hermanas que nos llevaban el desayuno. Entonces me senté a desayunar junto con todos y me quedé dormido. Entonces mi padre me ordenó que me fuera a acostar a la sombra, donde no me pegara el sol. Era en mayo. Así pasé el día comprobando que “la música era destino de flojos”, que era lo que me reprochaba mi padre.

Me recogió mi padre 30 pesos del dinero que yo llevaba y me dejó 40 pesos para que los gastara en lo que yo quisiera. El siguiente domingo me mandó a un mandado a San Javier, donde estaba la Sindicatura, montado a caballo. Había allí un comerciante que se llamaba Juan Puga, muy amigo –íntimo, de mi padre. Le dije que me surtiera un pedido del valor de 40 pesos, que yo llevaba en efectivo. Entre dulces, galletas, cigarros, peinetas, hilaza... le nombraban “barilla”. Cargué el caballo con dos cartones de mercancía y de allí comencé a sacar dinero por el lado del comercio.

Audón Herrera, Julio Palafox, Leandro Martínez, a todo ellos los guiaron sus papás; ellos ya agarraron desde el principio instrumentos buenos. Yo aprendí solo, no comprendí la música por un detalle estudiado, sino de un estudio natural. Allí no hay clases impartidas por nadie. Yo ni un día tuve en la escuela. La música la copié de puras oídas y la estudié por mi idea de ser músico, de tocar lo que oía. Siento que para el público no somos iguales, porque a ellos no los procuran como a mí.

Cuando ya tenía como un año tocando con el violín prestado, ya mi papá me dio permiso y me mandó con los 50 pesos a que le pagara al señor Refugio Martínez. Entonces me dijo que eran 75. Pero de Rancho Viejo, municipio de Dolores, Chihuahua, me mandó decir don Carlos Olivas que me vendía un violín en 40 pesos. Era viejo y estaba quebradito, pero valía la pena, era muy fino. Se lo compré. Entonces Refugio se enojó y dijo que se le tenían que dar 100 pesos. Y se los mandé con el comisario del lugar, porque a mí no me los quería recibir.

*El gabilancillo* y esos sones [*El toro*, *El cuervo*, *El Jabalí*, *El carretero*] los aprendí de chamaco grande, ya cuando andaba de compañero de Nazario Elizalde, el guitarrero que andaba conmigo, era buen músico. *El gabilancillo* tuvo otra letra, la de *El chivo*:

El chivo se está cociendo  
con los herbores de la olla;  
saca la cabeza y dice:  
“Nomás no le echen cebolla”.

Mucha gente aquí en Sinaloa le dice “minuetes” a los sones de matachines. “¡Tóquenle unos minuetes a San Isidro!”.

Nos daban mucha chamba por la curiosidad de que éramos chamacos. Nos decían “los músicos”, nomás. Luego decían “Vamos a hablarles a los Evodios”, Después nos comenzaron a decir Los Gabilancillos, porque tocábamos mucho ese son, el de *El Gabilancillo*.

La guitarra la aprendí ya de grandecito –ya casado–, el acordeón también. Tenía 16 años cuando me llevé la primera muchacha y el suegro de mi hermano, Máximo Martínez, me prestaba el acordeón. Empecé a ver que me solicitaban más con el violín. El violín era el instrumento más

preferido por los clientes y el más raro. Como mi intento era aprender algo artístico para mantenerme, entonces dejé ya la guitarra y el acordeón y me decidí por el violín.

A los 18 años, yo hacía mesas. Ya después de grande hice muchos yugos para vender, también arados. Cuando se me apartaba la chamba [de músico], por los tiempos malos, entonces hacía teja. Todos los años sembraba maíz, frijol y trigo, todos los años fui agricultor.

A mí no me buscan por bueno –digo yo–, sino porque nunca dejaba de tocar por borrachera mía, ni hacía menos a nadie.

Y así ha sido mi vida: entre el comercio en pequeño, la música y me gusta sembrar también. Estoy satisfecho con mi destino. Mi mismo talento me hizo hallar cómo mantenerme honradamente. Nunca he sido rico, pero nunca me ha faltado como mantener a mi familia con la música. ¡'Orita no debo ni un peso!’”

(Evodio Pérez Bernal, El Limón de los Ramos, Culiacán, Sinaloa: 11 y 13 de enero de 2011).

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