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Performing Peruanidad: Music, Dance, and Cultural Caretaking in Peruvian Communities
in Los Angeles

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Claudine Avalos

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This poem— an ode to Peru— was taught to me by my mother, and taught to her by her mother. I dedicate this thesis to my family, past and present, whose teachings I carry with me with care as reminders to never forget where we came from.

*Sabe suelo afortunado,
en cuyo seno fecundo
Lo mejor que hay en el mundo,
el Señor ha derramado.*

*Te engalanó con montañas
que ocultan tanto tesoro,
y amasado de fino oro
te dio corazón y entrañas.*

*Juventud te dan los ríos,
majestad las cordilleras,
gentileza las praderas,
gala los bosques sombríos.*

*Y el mar al sur levanta
celebrándote rumores,
como a una reina te da honores,
y humilde besa tu planta.*

*¡O Perú! Con que alegría
Se me inunda el pecho mío,
Yo me gozo y me extasío
Siendo tú la ¡patria mía!*

— Unknown author

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Introduction

During an early October afternoon in Los Angeles, a Señor de los Milagros *hermandad*¹ came together to raise funds for their annual procession. Casa Peru L.A., a backyard turned venue, was filled with the aroma of Peruvian food and the constant traffic of people running in and out of the driveway setting up equipment for the *verbena* (festival). As I approached the driveway, a purple and white balloon arch—colors associated with Señor de los Milagros celebrations—signaled to me that I was in the right place. Walking into the yard, families were already scoping out tables and getting in line to purchase food. It was not long until older audience members began singing along with the musicians playing familiar *valses peruanos*, music deeply tied to *criollo* or coastal culture(s) in Peru.

As the musicians rounded out their first set, a sparkly set of outfits on a group of young girls on the wings of the stage caught everyone’s eye. Excitement grew—the dancers were here! Parents and family members sat down and pulled out their phones poised and ready to capture the performance. The girls came out during a percussion interlude and each got a chance to improvise a solo to the *festejo*, an Afro-Peruvian dance genre, played by the band. The audience clapped, danced along in their seats, and the singer yelled out encouraging phrases to the girls. As the last of the dancers received her

¹ A lay religious confraternity dedicated to the veneration of the “Lord of Miracles,” a Peruvian Catholic sacred image of Jesus widely celebrated in Lima and throughout Peru.

applause and the band picked up again, a woman representing the hermandad came forward to speak. The woman congratulated the dancers but shared with the audience that they were not Peruvian—they were, in fact, of Mexican descent. The audience collectively gasped but continued to congratulate the dancers. The woman then thanked them for taking an interest in Peruvian culture and for “interpreting our festejo.” “We would have never guessed that you were not Peruvian!” she exclaimed.

With a relatively small community of Peruvians in comparison to Mexican/Chincanx people in Los Angeles, the audience that afternoon was stunned. They would later be even more shocked to find out that the dance instructor working with the performers is also not Peruvian. This brought up as many questions for me as it did for others in the audience. “How did the dance instructor learn to dance festejo?” “Are there other non-Peruvians in LA performing folkloric music and dance traditions?” “Why the interest in traditional Peruvian dances?” And “How do these dancers fit into the community in LA performing Peruvian folkloric dance?”

On another side of town, vibrant *polleras* (traditional long skirts) were fanned out and *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs) were twirling. The striking sound of a snare drum roll greeted me as I entered a dance studio in Gardena. Women were staring at themselves in the mirror making sure to maintain their good posture. The *marinera* began and in pairs everyone moved in a figure-eight pattern. I quickly got out of their way as their skirts brushed up beside me. The *marinera* recordings seemed familiar to most, but the dance steps did not come as easy. These women were all learning *marinera norteña*, the

“national dance” of Peru. There was a sense of pride and determination evident in the women in the room. What was it about this particular dance that held such importance for these women? What did this space offer these women in terms of the tradition they were learning? The dancers both here and in Casa Perú L.A. were part of deeply-rooted Peruvian traditions, however their relationships to and identity within the tradition could not have been more different.

This thesis explores Peruvian identity formation through Peruvian cultural performance in Los Angeles, California. Through ethnographic work and interviews, I present three case studies to understand how performance of Peruvian traditions, particularly dance and religious traditions, reinforces and renews ties to home for those in diaspora and constructs understandings of *peruanidad* (literally, “Peruvian-ness”) for Peruvians and non-Peruvians. While initially this project would only look at classes of folkloric music and dance, the questions that animated this project were also being addressed in community events which lead to the inclusion of a religious procession as a site for fieldwork. “What are the ways that people engage with being Peruvian in Los Angeles?” “Why are *these* symbols of *peruanidad* important to Peruvians abroad?” “What is being passed on or communicated about *peruanidad* across generations (referring to both age as well as relation to immigration) and how?” These questions would lead me to meeting community members in Los Angeles that were at the fore of grappling with these issues. These community members who then became my interlocutors included Fredy Chiara and Alessandra Diaz, both of whom teach and

perform Peruvian cultural traditions, as well as Roxana Perez, a dance teacher of Mexican descent who teaches Afro-Peruvian dance. Through ethnographic research in the community, I came to understand how their work comprised far more than just teaching and learning of performance traditions. They also taught cultural values and norms, engaged with romanticized views of the homeland, and participated in a nation-building project that redefines the nation and the idea of citizenship—in this case, in relationship to Peru. Collectively, these acts are examples of what I term cultural caretaking.

Cultural Caretaking

Cultural caretaking describes the sense of duty or responsibility of a person to pass on what they have been given and know to be true of the culture they are a part of. This can often include anecdotal experiences with the culture, but also includes romanticized understandings of an imagined shared history. Cultural traditions that are thought or understood to represent the masses are taught as and passed on as symbols of the nation. Dances and music in particular are presented as national folklore and hold meaning to those in the homeland, but they take on heightened significance for those living abroad. With the migration of Peruvians that grew in the 1980s and 1990s, these symbols of home took on new importance as many of those migrants never returned to Peru and permanently made their homes in other countries, including the U.S. These acts of cultural caretaking—of ensuring that others know of their music and dance traditions and of imparting a sense of responsibility to care for them and pass them on—perpetuate

these symbols and are a mechanism through which culture has been and will continue to be sustained throughout the diaspora.

Peruvian identity in the U.S. is informed by more than just viewing folkloric music and dance in a presentational manner. Peruvians are active participants in the presentation, the teaching, and dissemination of peruanidad in the U.S. They engage in sustaining and reconstructing what it means to be Peruvian in the U.S. It is through the ways in which peruanidad is created, sustained, and recreated that cultural caretaking occurs.

Being Peruvian in the U.S.

As the child of Peruvian parents who migrated to this country in 1985, I was surrounded by many of the connections to home that I witness being kept alive today in Peruvian communities in the U.S. My parents did not know each other at the time, but in 1985 they each made the decision to migrate to the U.S. during the same year for very common reasons among Peruvian migrants; my mother worked at a national radio station that was bombed by Shining Path (a terrorist group active through the 1980s in Peru) and did not feel safe, and my father was looking for better economic opportunities. Each of my parents had an older sibling living in New York, so they had help finding jobs and settling into new lives. Having parents that endured crossing the U.S./Mexico border and experienced settling down in New York allowed me to understand the complex web of networks used by Peruvians and other Latino migrants to get by. I would hear my parents' stories of crossing the desert for three days and praying to not be caught by

Border Patrol. I would later witness several family members arrive to New York in a less dangerous, yet equally precarious manner and be assisted in finding work and housing.

So much of my experience growing up in this country has been working towards a more comprehensive understanding of my parents' experiences as immigrants. The kind of knowledge Tara Yosso calls "community cultural wealth" (Yosso 2005, 78) that my family passed down was of utmost importance. For my parents and for many migrant parents, that consisted of a strong sense of where we came from and an even stronger ability to aspire to more. Being able to bridge the past and the future and understand both sides was crucial. Acquiring linguistic capital by learning Spanish to better communicate with my parents and extended family, while also mastering English so that I could translate when my parents' English was not clear enough, is just one of the many common experiences the children of Latinx immigrants have (Yosso 2005, 78). While the plight of the immigrant is not a firsthand experience for me, being the child of one is.

Growing up in New York City, I experienced a different display of peruanidad than the types of performance that I have encountered on the West Coast for this project, more specifically in the greater Los Angeles area. I grew up attending Señor de los Milagros processions and hermandad events in NYC. I ate in Peruvian restaurants and listened to the vals criollos in the background. I was also fortunate enough to travel to Peru throughout my childhood and apply the cultural knowledge that I had acquired through the Peruvian American networks I was a part of. By engaging in peruanidad both within and outside of Peru, I came to understand the stagnant interpretations of Peruvian

culture in the U.S. I learned that Lima was not all *marineras* and *jaranas* (parties). But I did learn that this was a legacy that Peruvians held onto very tightly and passed on to their children, as thoughtfully and carefully as family heirlooms. I was never able to learn to perform Peruvian music and dance as a child, but I experienced it at concerts, Peruvian Independence Day events, and in family gatherings. Through these spaces, I learned about Peruvian history and folklore, but also about the values and ways of being that were held in high regard in Peruvian spaces.

In my research with the Peruvian community of Los Angeles, I see different generations of Peruvians interacting with their heritage in a multitude of ways. Some are revisiting their past in Peru through musical and dance forms that remind them of home. Others are learning about what it means to be Peruvian through these spaces since they emigrated as children and were not raised in Peru while the younger generations born in the U.S. are learning what *peruanidad* is altogether, many of them without ever having been to Peru. My experience as part of this younger, American-born generation allows me to see the ways that cultural performance is used as one of many tools to pass on Peruvian values and traditions. My lived experience as the child of immigrants allows me to recognize when Peruvians who emigrated feel their connections to Peruvian identity strengthened. Through this lens I am then able to make the case for the cultural caretaking that is taking place in these spaces.

Having parents that left Peru during the wave of migration in the 1980s, I came to understand Peru and *peruanidad* in a particular way. Music and dance traditions of that

time were passed on with pride and the value of these symbols of Peruvian identity became an important way to express a connection to our family still in Peru and to a community that we didn't always have access to living in New York. *Procesiones* (processions), *polladas* (fundraising cookouts featuring chicken and other grilled foods for sale), and *jaranas* were all spaces that allowed for Peruvians to gather and enjoy each other's company and Peruvianness.

In these spaces, I learned how the sound of a snare drum roll could command the attention of a whole room in anticipation of the couple about to dance a *marinera norteña*. I learned how the sound of Eva Ayllon's voice, a prominent Afro-Peruvian singer, could transport people back to a time when they were surrounded by friends or family in Peru. How hearing Arturo 'Zambo' Caverro's 'Y Se Llama Peru' was as powerful and unifying for Peruvians as their national anthem. But when that national anthem does play, *asu*²! get ready. I also came to understand the more complicated symbols that represent *peruanidad* for so many here. The Andean music that seems to evoke pride even to those who are not from the highlands. The Señor de Los Milagros or San Martín de Porres processions that draw Peruvians who do not identify as afrodescendants or who never venerated these images in Peru. These and other symbols represent something more than just reminders of home. They complicate the notion that Peruvians (and other migrants)

² From "*a su madre*" shortened to "*asu mare*" and then "*asu*". An exclamatory phrase usually meaning "Wow!" or "Oh my goodness."

only identify with symbols that resonate with their personal experiences of home and speak to a larger need to engage with their community.

Before residing in Southern California, I was surrounded by expressions of Peruvianness as well as displays of Colombianness, Dominicaness, and all other kinds of Latin American identities. Each one coexisted with the other in New York City and none was so predominant that it overshadowed the other. My understanding of Peruvian cultural forms and their place within a larger Latin American U.S. context comes from this type of environment; an environment where differences are seen and have the space to be celebrated. In the communities I have encountered in Southern California, finding places that feature all of the Latinx communities around are harder to find and are often overshadowed by the Mexican/Chicanx contexts that they find themselves in. This is not to say that Central American and other Latin American identities are shunned or threatened. Because of the history of this region, Mexican/Chicanx culture is and has been ubiquitous but has not hindered communities like the Peruvian community from holding and creating space, whether it be in a church, a restaurant, or in someone's backyard.

In my experience, this requires more than just finding a Peruvian restaurant, concert, or community event. There is a vocabulary and customs that one needs to be fluent in to be able to access these spaces. Without understanding the values and ways of being in Peruvian spaces, it becomes difficult to fully feel a part of the community or to be considered a part of the community—an issue many children of immigrants face. Acts

of cultural caretaking, then, become important in educating and ultimately empowering this population to claim their space as members of their respective communities

Cultural caretaking is not limited to financial support or sporadic involvement in large community events. It can take these forms, but it can also include a pedagogical side. While cultural caretaking can and does exist in the public sphere in the ways migrants maintain connections with the homeland and its cultural norms and values, in the U.S., it can often be found within migrant families. Pedagogical decisions are made in the ways that peruanidad is taught and the aspects of peruanidad that are shared. Some of these are not directly passed down within the family, but are passed down by the larger community in the way that social interactions across generations are upheld, for example. Having children not only hear about Peru from their parents, but getting to experience the culture with other Peruvians becomes important and leads to more thorough understanding of peruanidad. In the U.S., dances like the ones discussed in this thesis can contribute to acts of cultural caretaking on a superficial level by presenting a staged, stylized, and folklorized performance. But in the process of engaging with these traditions, Peruvians abroad learn shared cultural values that are to be emulated through the style and mannerisms seen in cultural performance. By exploring the role of Peruvian music and dance in the formation and sustaining of identity for Peruvians in LA, we come to a better understanding of how a sense of peruanidad fits into the larger Latinx narrative.

The Peruvian Diaspora in Los Angeles

The history of Peruvian migration extends beyond the exodus that began in the 1970s. As José Carlos Mariátegui describes in his classic *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (Seven Essays on Interpreting Peruvian Reality), migration within Peru from the highlands to the coast existed long before the 1900s and has long been a part of Peruvian life (Mariátegui 1928). The migration of people from the interior of the country to urban centers led to the growth of these cities (mainly Lima) and resulted in social and economic mobility for those that made the move. In other words, moving to the capital city—which was the primary hub for migrants within Peru—led to a shift in social status (often from indigenous/peasant to mestizo) and better economic opportunities that allowed for education and travel outside of Peru (Mariátegui 1928). During the 1940s to the 1960s, internal migration swelled as Peruvians moved to Lima in search of better employment and education. As Takenaka et al state,

rural-urban migration in the context of twentieth-century capitalist expansion, industrialization, and rapid urbanization led to important changes in the country's class and power structure (Takenaka et al 2010, 4).

These important changes were evident in the shift from 65% of the Peruvian population being rural in the 1940s to 65% of the population being urban by the 1980s (Turino 1993, 29). This migration to Lima allowed migrants to develop social and economic networks in the process of internal migration (Takenaka and Pren 2010, 33). Urban living also

allowed migrants to acquire information about better opportunities abroad (Paerregaard 1997).

In the 1970s, external migration began in earnest and grew throughout the 1980s. With the rise of terrorism by the Shining Path, political instability, and economic turmoil, many Peruvians relocated both within Peru and to other countries around the world. Many moved to countries within South America, such as Argentina and Chile. Others used previously established networks to ease the transition of moving farther away to countries including Spain, Japan, Italy, and the U.S. (Takenaka et al 2010, 7).

Several factors play a role in choosing a country to migrate to. As Paerregaard states,

the USA represents a unique opportunity to study or do business because of its open immigration policy and liberal labour market. Similarly, Japan is regarded a haven by many because salaries are higher than in other countries, while Spain and Italy are preferred destinations because Peruvians find it easy to adapt to the local language and culture. By reverse, Argentina and, in particular, Chile, are thought of as the last option because salaries are lower and migrants' prospects of improving living conditions for themselves and their children are less prosperous in these countries (Paerregaard 2014, 7).

These considerations have resulted in the U.S. having the largest number of Peruvians living outside of Peru (Takenaka et al 2010, 5). In the U.S., several cities with established Peruvian enclaves have drawn Peruvians to settle throughout the country. The first of these cities include New York City, Paterson (New Jersey), Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami (Takenaka et al 2010, 5).

The Peruvians that came to settle in the U.S. were of differing social classes, but they collectively developed an idealized memory of Peru and the cultural practices that strengthened their connections to home. Upon arrival, Peruvians in Los Angeles settled in different parts of LA and largely remain dispersed without a “distinct central Peruvian district” (Lauder et al. 2012). According to a five-year estimate from a 2011 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey published by the Los Angeles Times, Van Nuys, Santa Clarita and Reseda had the largest numbers of Peruvian-born county residents in the region. During 2012, community members were working to have a part of Vine St. in Hollywood— between Sunset Blvd and Melrose Ave— designated as “Peru Village” (Poston 2012). Although this has still not occurred, it is a testament to the desire for a space within the L.A. landscape. This lack of designated Peruvian space within L.A. has not stopped Peruvians from gathering and sharing in their connections to their homeland. One of the more prominent ties to the homeland came in the form of music and dance (Feldman 2010, 141). Certain styles of music such as *criollo* (coastal) and Andean music were associated with nationalistic pride and connections to an imagined, shared past. Even today, you will often hear *música criolla* playing in the background of Peruvian restaurants around the world. Since migrants of this time period had a sense of home that was more or less frozen in the time of their departure, the cultural performances were also focused on drawing from these dated symbols of home. In Los Angeles today, dancers perform *marineras*, *huaynos*, *festejos*, and *vales*. These genres have important connections to the history of Peru and are featured prominently within Peru and in communities where Peruvians have settled around the world.

Ethnomusicologist Joshua Tucker has studied Peruvian diasporic cultural practices in Spain, specifically in Madrid, and discusses the ways

. . . performance, consumption, and conversations about music allow people to rehearse their relations to old and new ethnic identities, and to define their place in a changing multicultural order (Tucker 2014, 903).

Peruvians in Madrid face a context similar to that of other Peruvians in the diaspora: they are now a part of an “other,” a minority group that consists of other migrants and other groups on the margins of society in any given city or country around the world. The Spanish case is interesting in that it does not feature Peruvians carving out space for themselves in Madrileño society through the deployment of Peruvian-specific cultural practices. In fact, Peruvian folkloric music or uniquely Peruvian performance are set aside in favor of maintaining ties to the greater Latino identity that links this particular “other” in Madrid. The music that was providing a sense of connection to other Latinos in this case was *música tropical* in an effort to cater to a wider net of migrants that comprised the Latino community in Spain. Tucker states:

For Peruvians in Madrid find themselves tacking between a sense of Peruvian nationality acquired over a lifetime, their new self-awareness as members of an emerging, marginalized ‘Latino’ community within Spain, and state-driven pressures to minimize disruptive signs of alterity despite its persistent influence in their lives (2014: 904).

For Peruvians in Spain, while they do still retain a sense of identity with the Andean and coastal musics of Peru, they are limited to their engagement with this identity in the Spanish context. In the U.S., Peruvian communities are more substantial, and span across a wider range of ages, socioeconomic status, and often vary in the length of time spent living in the U.S., allowing for more events hosted by and for Peruvians to take hold.

While Tucker's work sheds light on this particular case in Spain, little work has been done in the U.S. to look at the ways Peruvians have engaged with their cultural practices while also becoming a part of the U.S. Latinx narrative. In the U.S. much of the scholarship looks at the financial connections kept by those who have migrated most recently and those who still have family that remains in Peru. This was especially important in the 1980s and 1990s, when Peru's economy was suffering due to political turmoil. Through remittances sent from the U.S. to Peru, Ayumi Takenaka argues that the search for financial stability and increased wealth play a role in the emigration of Peruvians. While migrants often move to the U.S. in an effort to "get ahead" and seek financial stability, the real determining factor lies in the resources and education available to the individual and can often determine whether emigrating actually makes a difference for the person financially (Takenaka and Pren 2010, 45). This work provides insight into an important factor for migrants in their pursuit of a better life abroad. However, finances are not the only factor keeping migrants in the U.S. Often even those who do not intend to stay long term never return to Peru, for a multitude of reasons. One of the most

common is the decision to start a family, and the realization that there are more opportunities in the U.S. for their children than in Peru.

Even as Peruvians settle abroad, however, connections to home through religious practices, financial commitments (i.e. remittances), travel (for those that have the legal status to do so), and online platforms provide a sound tether to Peru. As a predominantly Catholic nation, Peru has several traditions that migrants bring with them and continue to practice today. One of the largest traditions was that of the procession and veneration for El Señor de los Milagros (the “Lord of Miracles”). A seventeenth-century mural painting of Jesus’ crucifixion that withstood two major earthquakes, despite severe damage to the surrounding area, was considered a miracle and has since been venerated by Peruvians. These processions have become important to the greater Peruvian diaspora especially since *El Señor de los Milagros* came to be known as the patron of Peruvian migrants.

Peruvian cultural performance today consists of events curated for Peruvian migrants in the U.S. Often, this can include processions in which music is used to honor the saint or image being processed. These cultural performances can also take the form of festivals to celebrate important holidays or important figures to the Peruvian community. Some of these include Peruvian Independence Day on July 28th, the *Día de la Canción Criolla* (Creole Song Day), and *Día de la Cultura Afroperuana* (Afroperuvian Culture Day).

In Los Angeles, celebrations for these events take many different forms, but almost always include music and dance. Because of the surrounding Latinx population,

Peruvian celebrations in Los Angeles differ from those elsewhere in the U.S. in that they may feature a blend of local Mexican/Chicanx traditions with more typical Peruvian customs. One such event is the display of an altar for *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) by the community organization Peru Village L.A. In honor of this significant holiday for local communities of Mexican descent, Peru Village L.A. hosts an annual event in early November, creating an altar dedicated to an important Peruvian cultural figure and celebrating with music, dance, and recognition of the cultural contributions of the honored Peruvian figure. It is through events such as these that the Peruvian community uniquely portrays their place in the larger Latinx community in Los Angeles.

Cultural performances in the Los Angeles Peruvian community are also distinct from elsewhere in the country through their highlighting of Afro-Peruvian traditions. Classes and workshops on *cajón*, a wooden box drum that originated in Afro-Peruvian communities, are offered by local Peruvian teachers, and Afro-Peruvian dances like the *festejo* and *landó* are prominent when performances are organized for the Peruvian community. In the New York, New Jersey, Connecticut tri-state area, there is a stronger emphasis on Andean traditions in performances of Peruvian culture. The highland *huayno* dance genre, indigenous panpipes, and an emphasis on the Quechua language are more prominent in this part of the U.S. and have been since the 1990s. This could be attributed to the fact that there are large numbers of South Americans, particularly South Americans from Andean countries that reside in this part of the country alongside the Peruvian population. This could generate a larger audience for these types of cultural performances

which would explain why the choice is typically made to highlight Andean Peruvian culture. Definitive reasons for this regional differentiation in Peruvian diasporic practices in the U.S. remain open for further research but lie beyond the scope of this project.

Cultural Performance and Cultural Caretaking

Before turning to the ethnography of Peruvian cultural performance in Los Angeles, I first want to establish how I am using “cultural performance” and “cultural caretaking” as guiding concepts for this thesis. Performance as a general topic has been studied across multiple disciplines for decades but became of greater interest in research within the fields of anthropology and sociology during the 1970s. Ethnographers in theatre studies as well as folklore also take an interest in studying performance, with scholars like Richard Schechner and William H. Jansen defining the term as the study of behavior and classification of behavior, respectively (Carlson 2004, 13). Sociolinguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes also theorized performance in relation to audience by distinguishing performance from behavior and conduct. Performance, Hymes argues, would be considered a further subset within conduct involving the assumption of responsibility to both an “audience and tradition as they understand it” (Carlson 2004: 12). This understanding of performance, however, has raised many debates as to what is meant by the “responsibility” assumed by the performer and the responsibility to tradition.

Anthropologist Richard Bauman has also defined the term performance as an act requiring a “consciousness of doubleness” in which the act of performance is “placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action” (Carlson 2004: 5). Bauman goes on to explain that it is an observer of the action that is the one making this comparison. However, the consciousness of doubleness described by Bauman allows for the performers themselves to be the ones drawing these comparisons. As Marvin Carlson states “Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self” (Carlson 2004: 5).

Moving on to look at *cultural performance*, then, involves closer attention to a certain type of performance highlighting aspects of a particular culture. Used to describe “observable units of the cultural structure,” cultural performance refers to specific events that encapsulate a people’s culture meant for both those who are members of the culture as well as non-members (Bauman 1992: 47). Bauman posits that perhaps this is why cultural performance has caught the attention of ethnographers in various fields over the years; the reflexive nature of cultural performance is a “cultural means for objectifying and laying open to scrutiny culture itself” (Bauman 1992: 46-47). Through this self-reflexive act of the cultural group, the resulting performance is then “an object to itself and refers[s] to itself” allowing for these events to be seen as a window into a culture and presenting researchers with the opportunity to gain an in depth look at the perception a cultural group has of itself and how it chooses to present itself (Bauman 1992: 48). Singer

describes features of performance which emphasize the prepared nature of these events as well as the importance of the context in which discrete performances occur. These performances are planned in advance and adhere to a set schedule with a clear beginning and end. They are also bound spatially, typically confined to a particular location, whether it be permanent or not. Another key aspect of cultural performance is that it be a public event. By allowing not only members of the cultural group to be present, but also visitors from other communities, the performance serves as a symbolic and concise representation of the particular culture and the practices being performed (Bauman 1992: 46). Weddings, religious festivals, concerts, theatre, and dance are all among the performances Singer identifies as cultural performance, all temporally and spatially bound with an “organized program of activity” and an audience (Carlson 2004: 13). By looking at Peruvian cultural performance, we will see how these features contribute to the understanding of the particular identity being reified for both Peruvians (migrants and those of Peruvian descent), and non-Peruvians.

One of the most prominent displays of Peruvian identity can be seen in cultural performances of Peruvian folkloric music and dances. Heidi Feldman discusses the development of this in the case of Afro-Peruvian music (Feldman 2006, 2010). Through the revival and staging of Afro-Peruvian music in Peru through the 1950s-1970s, the Black population of Peru took ownership of their past and were able to create a community through their music and dance. Feldman also details how these musics and dance have been stylized and staged to promote nationalist agendas. Because this all

occurred before the increase in migration during the 1980s, this particular form of Peruvian cultural performance became an important symbol of home for Peruvians as they migrated to other countries in the 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, the legacy of the Afro-Peruvian revival as a representation of distinctly Peruvian performance of the 1970s, and as a nationalist symbol through the performances and tours of dance troupes like Peru Negro, become the music for staging Peruvian identity for Peruvians in diaspora during this time. Feldman looks at examples of these performances that had generally not been altered, but in the U.S. context would be adapted or “translated” (Feldman 2010, 152). One of these examples happens in a part of Peru Negro’s choreography in which bananas are passed around to the dancers. Feldman explained that in an effort to attract a wider audience, Juan Morillo, the group’s U.S. manager, asked the dancers to take this out of their choreography, stating that this “reflected a Latin American notion of race that does not translate well in the United States” (Feldman 2010, 152). In this “translational act,” the integrity of the tradition is kept intact while aspects that may avert audiences are done away with or replaced, making performances more palatable for audiences outside of Peru. However, the performance itself is still recognizable to the Peruvian individual as inherently Peruvian which allows for this performance to fulfill its role as a symbol of home.

While we do not have a U.S.-Peruvian equivalent today of Peru Negro, there are performance groups that work to continue this tradition of cultural performance and look to engage Peruvian communities and create spaces for community and shared ideas of

nostalgia and home. Danzas Raíces Peruanas, which I discuss in more detail below, is one such group that has been present for the last 30 years in Los Angeles. The performers of this group work with teachers and choreographers that have studied folkloric dances and look to bring these dances to Peruvian audiences in the U.S., particularly throughout California. Their members, however, were mostly raised in the U.S. and are first- or second-generation Peruvians. Their dedication to performing Peruvian folkloric dances for Peruvian and non-Peruvian audiences has allowed for Peruvian community members to engage with their heritage, while also bring Peruvian cultural performance to people who may have otherwise not ever engaged with it. As such, cultural performance is an important aspect of Peruvian community building and self-expression, and part of the broader phenomenon of cultural caretaking.

Culture bearers have played an important role in bridging the knowledge gap between members of a given culture and those outside of it that seek to better understand the culture. The term culture bearer has been used to describe members of a culture that possess a level of expertise in a traditional practice— such as music, dance, or ritual—who then share this knowledge with those outside of their community (Bolden and O’Farrell 2019, 68). Typically, the contribution of a culture bearer is sought out to provide the cultural knowledge, context, and understanding necessary to engage respectfully with the culture at hand. The concept of cultural caretaking pushes the idea of the culture bearer to also acknowledge the sense of responsibility that a member of a particular cultural practice feels towards the culture itself. This sense of stewardship

toward the cultural practice in the ways that the culture bearer engages with it is the driving force for acts of cultural caretaking to take place. These acts can take many forms and be public or private and can be of an artistic nature or educational nature. Acts of cultural caretaking can often begin in the home among family members of different generations. These acts can include storytelling, teaching of ritual and tradition, cooking, religious observance, and much more. While much research has focused on the idea of culture bearer as holding a certain level of proficiency or expertise, those engaging in acts of cultural caretaking do not have to be experts. In teaching others, in learning, and in exploring the nuance in cultural practices, those engaged in cultural caretaking fulfill a sense of duty and responsibility that is at the root of cultural caretaking. This sense of responsibility is not in doing exactly what was taught to us, but rather in communicating the importance of a given tradition, religious practice, food, song, etc., and ensuring that the essence of what is important about that practice is passed on with care. With these efforts in communicating that importance, the sense of care and responsibility is then passed on to peers or those of varying generations. The objective in engaging with acts of cultural caretaking is not one of preservation or conservation, but rather of communication. Often the culture bearer is the one looked at to display the cultural practice in question and serves as a repository of the experience of engaging with the cultural practice. But cultural caretaking offers an entry point for someone who has not necessarily mastered a cultural practice but can communicate a visceral understanding of why it is important to their community and why they have a responsibility as a member or descendant of the community to uphold that importance and to pass that on to future

generations. When the essence of cultural practice and its importance is understood, the focus is not on preserving it as a fixed tradition but rather being open to the ways that a practice can remain dynamic and change with the people that practice it while maintaining its essence and meaning.

Acts of cultural caretaking can take many forms. While these acts can range from public to private, communal to individual, in Los Angeles, they have been shaped in unique ways by their sociocultural context. While cultural caretaking is not a unique development of the Peruvian community, the acts of cultural caretaking specific to this population require a closer examination of the broader context within which the Peruvian community exists in and across Los Angeles, to better understand how and why cultural caretaking takes place as well as some of the obstacles that it has faced as a result of local demographics and circumstances.

There have been several challenges that cultural caretaking has faced over the years. Some of these challenges are related to geographic issues that are present in the greater Los Angeles area. Others reflect common issues for community organizations more broadly such as financial and logistical issues related to space, public, and participation. In this section I will be looking at these issues in greater detail and looking at the ways that community members have been able to overcome some of these hurdles or work through them presently.

Challenges to Cultural Caretaking

As stated earlier, in Los Angeles, the Peruvian community has not settled in one particular location. This is also the case for Peruvians throughout the U.S. as a whole, however, there is a large concentration of Peruvians and Peruvian Americans located in places like New Jersey and Florida (Noe-Bustamante, Flores, and Shah, 2019). This issue of Peruvians being located across the greater Los Angeles area has resulted in several acts of cultural caretaking affected by the distancing between and among the Peruvian community. These acts have included the creation of newspapers, email chains or listservs, and more currently social media groups and online community spaces. The newspapers created by the Peruvian community are not unique to the Los Angeles area, but served an even more crucial role in disseminating information regarding social events, religious events, as well as legal information and news pertinent to the Peruvian community. These newspapers provided a way for Peruvians to remain informed of the goings on in Peru as well as locally. These newspapers were often found at local restaurants and sometimes at community events. Through the work of disseminating this information in the form of newspapers, the Peruvian community worked to close the physical gap between many of its members spread across Los Angeles. While this began in the late 70s to early 80s, these newspapers still circulate today and still provide a place for Peruvians to share current events with their community.

The use of listservs as well as online communities through social media platforms have also contributed to overcoming the issue of physical distance across the Peruvian

community. Email listservs have allowed for information to travel much quicker among the Peruvian community in Southern California. Fund raising events, showcases, and community events are all disseminated in the Yahoo listserv Peruanos en el Sur de California. By utilizing this mode of communication, participants can receive updates as well as comment an email threads that contained important information. With the advent of social media platforms, an even more immediate response could be obtained through posts and the creation of event pages. Social media has also allowed for individuals within the community as well as organizations to post audio visual clips of performances to generate audience interest. This has also allowed for connections and commentary with family and friends currently located in Peru and abroad, opening the door to viewership outside of the Southern California community. These online spaces allow for greater interaction between performers and audience as well as easing the financial burden of advertising to the community. These online communities allow for Peruvians in Southern California to access their own while living apart and among a Latinx culture that is quite different. While online spaces are often taken for granted now, during the time that this thesis was written these virtual spaces can and have become some of the only ways that communities can remain in touch with one another. Hopefully, we will see the influence this has in the next few years and the ways that these cyberspaces fill an important role for supporting the Peruvian cultural caretaking that takes place in Southern California.

Another difficulty the Peruvian community has worked through has been the financial burden on the community. Since many of the organizations sharing and teaching

performing arts are grassroots efforts, funds for this come most often from members of the community and donations from the events that they host. Without this community support many of these organizations would not run. The boards and leadership of some of these organizations such as Casa Peru L.A. are not full-time paid positions which means that these members have full time jobs of their own on top of the countless hours of work in preparation for events and fundraisers that the organization puts on. Because of this, funding has always been a precarious issue for many of these organizations. For example, Danzas Raíces Peruanas has been organizing dance showcases and musical performances for 30 years In Los Angeles. They have been recognized by the Peruvian Consulate of Los Angeles as well as local officials in LA for the last three decades for their contributions of music and dance to the Los Angeles community. Even a group such as Danzas Raíces Peruanas faces financial hardships in running their organization. Like many other organizations, they apply for grant money and other funds to maintain their organization running. But the costs of renting a dance studio space, dance props, teacher salaries, and dancers' traditional garments for the multitude of dances that they perform, comes at a high cost every year. And still, groups such as Danzas Raíces Peruanas find the way to continue performing and disseminating a tradition that is so important to them. Dance groups like these are not common, and so the community of dancers that participate in these groups often belong to several groups. It is through their support and community efforts to maintain these groups that Peruvian music and dance has managed to stay alive in Los Angeles. Despite the financial hardships that many face, teachers of these dance groups and musicians give of their own time to work with students of

generations born in the U.S. to not only pass down their knowledge on an instrument or a particular dance, but of the importance of disseminating this tradition. These acts of cultural caretaking allow for Peruvian music and dance to continue to thrive in Los Angeles and beyond.

As mentioned, there are often many generations represented in groups performing Peruvian music and dance in Los Angeles. These groups show that they are a direct response of the environment that they are born out of. We see this in the age groups of the dancers that participate as well as their backgrounds. To a Peruvian person living in Peru, it might seem odd that a non-Peruvian would be dancing a *marinera norteña*, for example. But in the U.S., and in Los Angeles specifically, it is not all that strange to see a non-Peruvian dance student partaking in very serious marinera competitions throughout the state of California. In fact, one of the champions of marinera in the junior division in 2019 is of Mexican descent. This dancer does not have family that is Peruvian but came to love Peruvian dance traditions by sharing in them with a neighbor growing up in Los Angeles. Through this she was able to learn marinera both in California and in Peru and managed to win her division in 2019. While this might seem like a common occurrence in the world of amateur competitive dance, any marinera dancer will tell you that their dance culture is quite rigorous, often involving intense classes and workshops locally and internationally, posing a major financial commitment from parents and families, and leaving a small group of people who can continue their training through adulthood. For those engaging in this tradition in the U.S., the difficulty of consistent training is

exacerbated by the fact children and adult students usually cannot train during the summer months in Peru, as the summer takes place during our winter in the states. Although these challenges are ever present for those engaging in the cultural caretaking of marinera, this has not stopped the growth that has been seen in this and similar practices over the last 20 years.

While cultural caretaking in the Peruvian community has been met with challenges, none have managed to stop acts of cultural caretaking from occurring and engaging community members. As seen above, the flexible, dynamic nature of cultural caretaking has allowed community members to work through and around any difficulties to continue sharing in cultural practices. In the following sections I turn to three case studies in the Los Angeles area. Each of these case studies display acts of cultural caretaking across generations, beginning with the religious practice of street processions in honor of El Señor de los Milagros.

El Señor de Los Milagros in Southern California

During the month of October, many Peruvians spend their weekends partaking in a tradition of processing with an image of Jesus in an act of veneration known as the procession of El Señor de los Milagros (the Lord of Miracles). This ritual that features a mass and procession began in the 17th century in Peru. In the town of Pachacamilla, an African man painted a mural of the crucifixion of Jesus inside of a church. After several

intense earthquakes, the wall this mural was on remained intact while the rest of the church was severely damaged which was considered a miracle. As African men formed *hermandades* (brotherhoods) mirroring the Spanish practice to venerate saints, an *hermandad* was formed to venerate this image that would be known as the Lord of Miracles. During the 18th century, processions were organized by the *hermandad* to carry a replica of *la imagen* (the image) through the streets of Lima where male devotees would carry the image in groups called *cuadrillas* wearing purple *hábitos* (habits or robes). Women also participated by carrying incense and singing songs of devotion in honor of the image as *sahumadoras* (incense burners) and *cantoras* (singers) respectively. This ritual has continued to grow in scope, becoming the largest religious procession in Latin America drawing millions of purple-clad devotees every year to Lima, dubbing the month of October in Peru as *el mes morado* (“the purple month”). It has also become one of the principal, and certainly most visible, cultural practices of Peruvian diasporic populations throughout Europe and the Americas (Napolitano 2017).

While I have never experienced a procession in Lima, the sights and sounds of these processions in the U.S. are very familiar to me, as I grew up attending these processions where my father and uncle served (and still serve) as members of their local *hermandad*. Preparations for these processions are similar across *hermandades*: several events lead up to the actual procession including fundraisers and *verbenas*, which are celebrations featuring music and dance on the eve of a procession. Typically, the day of the procession begins with a mass after which dozens of men in purple robes line up to

carry this image of Jesus through the neighborhood. In Southern California, more than two dozen Milagros processions take place every October across parishes in several counties, the largest and most visible being the mass and procession from the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles. Hundreds of people gather every year to continue in this centuries-long tradition, processing along with the *sahumadoras*, *cantoras*, and a brass band.

One Sunday in October of 2018, I drove down to Los Angeles to the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels and watched in awe as Peruvians from all over Los Angeles gathered for the mass for the Lord of Miracles. A smaller group outside of the cathedral would never make it into the mass as they were setting up tables with the ease of people who had done this for many years. Families would help each other open folding tables and begin preparing the food that would be sold to people before the mass and during the procession. This practice has become an important part of these October processions in the U.S. Devotees come to venerate the image being processed, but also enjoy eating typical Peruvian foods throughout the long evening of processing. Quickly the sidewalk filled with familiar smells of *anticuchos*, *papa a la huancaína*, *ceviche*, and *arroz con pollo*, classic dishes of Peruvian coastal cuisine. As food was prepared, others would lay out items of clothing for sale with the very image that would be processed later that afternoon, as well as familiar Peruvian images like the flag, the coat of arms, and popular Peruvian landmarks and destinations. As soon as food was ready, I ordered a plate of *causa*, an appetizer made of mashed potatoes with layers of avocado and, in my case, chicken salad. I knew I would

need sustenance for the long day ahead, so I ate along with several families outside in the courtyard. I walked into the church to see that like myself, others were also clad in purple and waiting for mass to begin. I had never seen so many Peruvians in Southern California before. I felt at home with a community that had a tradition of celebrating something that was such a staple of my Peruvian upbringing. As the image entered the church and was walked down towards the altar, parents would pick up their children and show them the image and point at the men wearing these purple robes. Children of all ages would face forward and look up as the smoke of the familiar smelling incense filled the sanctuary. Mass carried on in its typical manner with one important addition—sounds of *quenas*, *charangos*, and *cajones*³ filled the cathedral.

As the processional hymn began, the men in the purple robes prepared to carry the *anda*, the raised platform on which the image sits. Preceding them was a group of teenage children also dressed in purple robes with white rope tied on their waists. They carried a smaller version of the image and walked towards the back of the cathedral where they would exit into the large courtyard. Watching as their parents, filled with pride, snapped pictures of their children participating in this time-honored tradition was evidence of the

³ All instruments indexing Peruvian identity. The *quena* is an end-notch flute played throughout the Andes; the *charango* is a small, 10-string Andean lute; and the *cajón*, as previously mentioned, is a wooden box drum associated with Afro-Peruvian music traditions.

importance of this tradition to this community and one of the acts of cultural caretaking seeking to foster a sense of duty and responsibility to El Señor de los Milagros.



Figure 1: Señor de los Milagros procession outside of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in 2018 with the main anda (Left) following the smaller anda being carried by teenagers (Right)

The adult men followed behind the children and brought the larger image out into the courtyard and with the sound of the bell, altogether set it down on the ground before the public. Families brought flowers to be placed next to the image and a man quickly grabbed these offerings and arranged them so that they were securely in place. Parents brought their babies to the image and the same man carried these children one by one and held them up to the image to be blessed by it. A small brass band was preparing their music and their instruments to join in the procession. Once everyone was ready, the first group of men to carry the image took their places and with one sound of the bell, the men lined up under the *anda*, and with another sound, they lifted it up on their shoulders.

As the band started up, the men stepped in unison working together to carry and move the image in to the street. The group of devotees followed alongside the image,

held back from getting too close by a thick rope. *Sahumadoras*, women carrying incense, surrounded the image. The women, also dressed in purple dresses with white veils, joined the procession with prayer and song. In front, the crowd was led by the children who had the replica of the image and young girls as *sahumadoras*. Every block or so, the group would be stopped by the bell and would lower the *anda* to switch off those carrying the image. During the first stop outside of the church, a *cajón* could be heard playing music to pay homage to the Lord of Miracles. This would also take place along with dancing when the *anda* reached the end of the procession at the church at La Placita.

The processions of el Señor de los Milagros are often discussed by scholars as the most important display of Peruvian identity (Berg and Tamagno 2006, 273; Napolitano 2017). While this point is debatable among Peruvians, there is currently a lack of scholarship around other forms of Peruvian identity expression, like musical expression, to provide examples of other displays of Peruvian identity. The *hermandades* of El Señor de Los Milagros are significant spaces that foster cultural caretaking as they have existed for several decades as some of the first established communities of Peruvians in the U.S. By providing a common interest for Peruvians to gather around the planning, fundraising, and community events in support of El Señor de Los Milagros, these processions instill and strengthen a dedication to the uniquely Peruvian ways faith and Catholicism are practiced. These acts of cultural caretaking empower adult community members to continue their engagement in these religious practices while also teaching children of the

ways their faith, service, and peruanidad can intersect in an act of veneration such as this one.

Around the world, these processions draw together people from all parts of Peru and their families (more and more frequently consisting of people of Peruvian descent born outside of Peru). As a religious gathering of Peruvians, these processions during the month of October strengthen connections to home by providing a space to engage in this tradition thousands of miles away from their families as communities back home do the same. For those engaged in the planning and processing, it can provide access to social circles in Peru that they may not have had access to otherwise (Berg and Tamagno 2006, 274). For those not formally involved in the procession, the connection to home can exist in the form of sights, sounds, food, and religious expression that is found at these events around the world.

As seen with the children included in this tradition, the procession allows for Peruvians of all ages and identities to come together and take part in an experience that celebrates important aspects of their peruanidad. Music, religion, food, and dance are all experienced in these processions wherever they occur. But for Peruvians abroad, particularly those in Southern California, this practice can be an important performance of Peruvianness that draws a direct connection to Peruvian tradition, while also distinguishing this Catholic, Peruvian population from their surrounding Mexican/Chicanx Catholic communities. El Señor de Los Milagros symbolizes peruanidad even to those that did not venerate this image in Peru. As one of the traditions

that has been held and spread by Peruvian migrants around the world, the Lord of Miracles was designated as the patron of Peruvian residents and immigrants. This reflects that importance of El Señor de los Milagros, not just as a religious symbol of Peruvian Catholicism, but as a symbol of Peruvian community abroad.

Another cultural symbol held in high regard by the Peruvian community is that of the *marinera* dance. In the following section I focus on a community featuring dancers of varying skill levels as another space that fosters cultural caretaking through performance.

Marinera as Peruvian Performance

As I walk in and turn the corner of a dance studio in Gardena, I come upon a large dance floor, almost the size of the entire first floor of the building. Dancers are skipping forward and backward practicing their choreography. I make eye contact with Fredy Chiara, the dance instructor and choreographer of this group and with whom I arranged my visit. He greets me and takes me up a narrow stairway to a different group. On the second floor I am met with a much smaller rehearsal space filled with *pollera* skirts fanned out and the women wearing them poised. I try to move past them while dodging the crimped edges of their polleras. Taking it all in, I watch the class in awe of the movements of their bare feet bending and sweeping across the floor.



Figure 2: Marinera students with their skirts fanned out during rehearsal in Gardena

Marinera is known in Peru as a dance style requiring years of training and dedication to perfect. This dance, often described as depicting a flirtatious courtship between a man and woman, is thought to have its roots in *zamacueca*, a dance that was often associated with the coastal Black enslaved population of Peru (Romero 1994, 317). Each region of Peru has its own version of the *marinera*, featuring differences in instrumentation, steps, and dress (Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2015). Because of this, the tagline of “national dance of Peru” is commonly tacked onto descriptions of the *marinera* by many Peruvians. While this may not be a unanimous feeling among Peruvians today, the *marinera* is held in high regard both in Peru and abroad where

Peruvian migrants have brought the marinera to their new homes by forming dance programs to train dancers of all ages and hosting marinera competitions.

One of these competitors and dance teachers in the U.S. is Alessandra Diaz, whose classes I observed in Gardena in 2018-2019. Alessandra was born in Peru and in 1985 at the age of 2 migrated to the U.S. with her parents. They settled in Los Angeles and her family has remained in Southern California ever since. In an interview over Zoom with Alessandra in 2020, she shared her experience as a Peruvian child raised in the U.S. during a time when the Peruvian community's presence in the form of cultural performance was still growing.

When Alessandra was about 12-13 years old, she saw marinera performed for the first time during a presentation at her school. Seeing this dance and learning about its connection to Peru, Alessandra became interested in learning the dance and asked her mother to begin taking classes. This would spark a love for the dance that would lead to a decade of intense training resulting in national and international marinera titles.

For Alessandra, marinera played an important role in the formation of her sense of identity and belonging to her family's culture, as is the case for many first-generation children who engage in art forms from their respective cultures. Alessandra shares:

I think the children of immigrants feel a lack of identity, because you're not fully from here—because your parents raised you and you have Peruvian customs and values— so you're never fully American, and you're never fully Peruvian. [Marinera] came at the right time because it helped me learn about my culture. (interview with author, July 9, 2020)

During the time that Alessandra's interest in marinera was developing, there were not many teachers of marinera in the LA area. During 1996-2006, Alessandra describes a "marinera fever" that surged in San Francisco and Los Angeles among the Peruvian community that led to an increase of teachers traveling from Peru to teach students in the U.S.

Alessandra noted how being familiar with and able to dance marinera instantly legitimized her identity as Peruvian to her family in Peru. Being familiar with the dance style and the canon of marineras used in competition and known widely by the audiences attending marinera competitions, was a signifier to her Peruvian family that she knew of a cultural art form valued by Peruvians which connected her to her family's home country. It gave her a point of access to her family and strengthened her sense of self as a Peruvian and as a member of the Peruvian community abroad.

During the weeks that I watched Alessandra work with varying age groups, her expertise and training was evident in her feedback to her students, but also in the comments and imagery she used to communicate the importance of the dance and how to tie that into their movements. Alessandra shared that when working with students born and raised in the U.S., one of the biggest challenges is creating a sense of connection to the culture behind this dance. After one rehearsal, Alessandra mentioned how difficult it was for some students to really grasp this aspect of performance, even with those students whose technique is advanced. "I don't want to create robots," Alessandra said explaining that she felt her students could pick up moves, but couldn't grasp the importance,

culturally, of what they were doing. How could they? They are not surrounded by it every day. “This is not the music they hear while they sit and have lunch every day. They don’t hear this on the radio and they aren’t around people who also know what that’s like. Their experience of [marinera] is at home with family or what they find online” (interview with author, July 9, 2020). Alessandra raises this concern not because of the effects it will have in competition settings, but more so because of what she knows, from experience, to be true: engaging in marinera practice can transcend the barriers present in establishing a Peruvian identity for those Peruvians that were not raised in Peru. This act of cultural caretaking comes from a person who has been able to transcend the gap between knowledge and experience. Alessandra is someone who, like her students, at one point had only heard of marinera, but had never seen people enjoy listening to it in their daily lives. Eventually she would travel to Peru and experience firsthand what that culture was like and the importance it held for her family and broader Peruvian community. But trying to teach that which is learned through experience is the difficult task—the very terrain that cultural caretaking seeks to navigate.

Alessandra’s rehearsals consist of children of different ages in different classes. Boys and girls around the same age get ready by taking out their hats, *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs), and *polleras* (skirts). As a group, they begin to rehearse steps they learned previously and are eventually partnered off. The class seems to respond well to moves yelled out over the music. In English and Spanish, moves like *caballito* (the “little horse”), figure eight, and *olas* (“waves”) are called out. The children respond at varying

levels falling back in with the class as they remember the steps. Alessandra demonstrates and adjusts the children's posture as she sees fit. The sequence they are working on becomes familiar and more students are picking it up. Since these students are each about 6 years old, the songs change, but the steps remain the same. Every hour as the age group increases, so does the difficulty. The older classes are asked to improvise according to the music played and for those that have experience with marinera, the class becomes less about technique and more about practicing their improvisation skills. Different marinera songs are worked through, sometimes with requests taken from parents sitting around the back corner of the room. The older students enjoy the challenge and welcome the opportunity to show off what they have been working on.

Often times when older students are waiting to begin their own class, they will help the younger students. The boys will approach the six and seven-year-olds and help with their posture or with their footwork. The girls will do the same with skirt movement, posture and footwork. This assistance and mentorship is encouraged and Alessandra will often ask one of the older students to provide an example and demonstrate the choreography. As Alessandra asks them to dance, she tells the younger students to watch and pay close attention to different physical details. "Coqueta," she'll say, describing the body language and facial expression that the older girl should be employing, in reference to the flirtatious nature of the marinera. The emotion and story behind the marinera dance as a flirtatious courtship is crucial to its performance. Alessandra focuses on steps while teaching, but also works to impart the sense of commitment each dancer must have to

serve that story. This act of cultural caretaking seeks to impart students with a love, respect, and appreciation for Peruvian culture by learning to love the marinera. In this way, Alessandra hopes to impart that sense of connection to Peruvian culture that will keep this tradition alive.

In the following section I turn to acts of cultural caretaking in another dance community in the third and final case study of festejo dance instruction in Los Angeles.

Festejo in Los Angeles

In a studio in Lynwood, parents and dancers enter the room and work quickly to get ready for the evening class. The skirts they put on the dancers were far different from the ones I had seen used in marinera; these skirts were much shorter and had intricate embellishments. The sound of cajones coming from a speaker filled the room as their instructor, Roxana Perez, played a recording from her phone. The girls warm up on their own, and work on their respective choreography. As the dancing began, the parents comment on the improvement of their girls and watch their 6-14 year-olds dance festejo.

The music and dance known as festejo is an important part of coastal Peruvian culture, particularly in Lima. During the 1950s through the 1960s, a surge of interest in Afro-Peruvian culture and growing black power movements around the world led to a revival period for Afro-Peruvian music and dance practices sought out by afrodescendants in Peru as well as the dominant white *criollo* (creole) population (León 2006, 218). This revival period resulted in reconstructed cultural practices, Afro-Peruvian

dance troupes, the first recordings of Afro-Peruvian music, all of which led to the commercialization of the genre (León 2006; Feldman 2006). For festejo, this meant that the staging of the dance led to standardization of the dance seen in its choreography that would later be understood to be Afro-Peruvian folklore (León 2006, 218). Through the 1970s, performances by dance troupes like Peru Negro were popular, making this a prominent style of performance that those emigrating during the 1980s would cherish abroad as representations of Peruvian criollo culture. Festejo is staged in the U.S. in showcases of Peruvian music and dance and is becoming a more popular dance to teach. While searching for festejo performances for this project, what I did not expect to find was someone like dance teacher Roxana Perez, who teaches festejo—but is not Peruvian.

I met Roxana at the Señor de los Milagros verbena in October of 2018. Roxana teaches at Latin Mirage dance studio in Lynwood and had worked with the girls that danced at the verbena at Casa Peru L.A. described earlier. In speaking to Roxana, I learned that her family is from Mexico and she has been a dancer since she was a little girl. Her mother was a seamstress who had a client that was a festejo dancer. Roxana's mother would often make skirts like the short, shiny ones I described above for performances. This dancer client knew that Roxana was a dancer as well and left some recordings of festejo for her to listen to. Roxana says that she became interested since she had not heard anything like this festejo music before and wanted to learn how to dance it. Since at that time there weren't teachers of festejo widely available (similar to the marinera case), Roxana resorted to watching tapes of festejo dancers and learning from

teachers when she could. This self-training led to her being able to teach her young students and has allowed her make connections with the Peruvian community and bring in Peruvian teachers (culture bearers) to strengthen her teaching.



Figure 3: One of Roxana's students dancing festejo at the verbena at Casa Peru L.A. in October of 2018

During the rehearsals Roxana allowed me to observe, the older dancers seemed to have experience with the rhythm of the music and how to dance along with the different accents played on the cajón. The younger students had not all danced festejo before and were just learning for the first time. As I spoke to the parents watching in the back of the

studio I learned that, similar to their instructor, most of the students taking this class were not of Peruvian descent.

In Lynwood, the dancers practice basic moves together, but eventually move to an open circle where each girl takes a turn at dancing solo. At times, the dancers are each at a loss for what to do, as their choreographies had not been finished. But each girl is encouraged to improvise with moves they had been taught. As they dance, Roxana pushes them to focus on the other parts of their performance as well: their energy, their facial expressions, and their “*coqueta*” (coquette) attitude. Hearing what aspects of performance were emphasized by Roxana reminded me of Alessandra’s remarks while teaching *marinera*. In Roxana’s feedback I noted an importance placed on the joy that was to be communicated through dance by the young girls. This was similar to what Alessandra would try to bring out in her students. When talking to the girls, Roxana would often work to explain the culture that the dance was coming from, relaying that *festejo* needed to be happy, energetic, and connected to the percussion rhythms being played. The importance placed in communicating a joy or happiness while performing was part of Roxana’s cultural caretaking practice. At times, Roxana would remind the girls of feedback given by Nadia Calmet, one of the Peruvian dance teachers brought in to do a workshop with the girls.

Nadia is a well-known Afro-Peruvian dancer and choreographer known in the Peruvian community in Los Angeles. Having worked with all of my interlocutors for this project at some point and in varying capacities, I knew that Nadia’s contribution to

Roxana's dance class was crucial to the dancers' training in festejo. During Roxana's rehearsals, I would often hear Roxana reminding her students of Nadia's teachings. "Remember what Nadia said, to listen to the cajón!" she would say. This was an important note to give these dancers who are still learning to connect their choreography to the drumming that occurs while they dance. Nadia, as a culture bearer, was able to teach the girls that in this genre, the music and dance are in many ways inseparable as the dancer looks to emphasize the cajón playing and vice versa. Nadia's act of cultural caretaking here is important to note, as the festejo dancing without its connection to the cajón is just not the same. Nadia's efforts to impart the dancers with this knowledge and responsibility for them to listen to the cajon and anticipate rhythmic figures as they dance is the act of cultural caretaking that was necessary for these dance students to better understand the festejo.

While Roxana also worked on the individual dance moves, often the hardest part for these trained dancers was the emotion behind the movement. That aspect of performance often comes from experiencing music and dance in its intended and original context— a luxury dancers often do not have, especially for these dancers who are performing a dance of a culture they have little to no experience of. However, Roxana does what she can to explain festejo and finds ways to bring out the emotion in her dancers.

Acts of cultural caretaking like Roxana's represent the work done by those who are not members of the communities that engage in a given practice, like festejo. But

through their own education and experience as performers, these teachers and dancers come to understand the significance at the root of the cultural practice at hand. Roxana's experience of festejo and the care she takes in imparting a sense of responsibility for the cultural practice is what makes this an act of cultural caretaking.

Conclusion

In Los Angeles, cultural caretaking has taken many forms in the Peruvian community. Cultural performances and religious rituals have proven to be important spaces for Peruvians across Los Angeles to gather and thrive while still being a part of their local community in California. Roxana Perez, Alessandra Diaz, and the community organizers for the processions of El Señor de los Milagros all take part in these processes, sharing traditions with deep connections to home for Peruvians in the Los Angeles area. Cultural caretaking here has allowed for members of this Peruvian community to engage in the transformative process of ascribing new meaning to these cultural forms and redefining peruanidad. For these communities, their acts of cultural caretaking serve as tools to share the significance of these forms across generations. This allows for cultural symbols such as music, dance, and ritual to continue in practice as dynamic, ever-adaptable traditions whose importance and significance remain relevant to those engaging with them.

Looking immediately outside of the Peruvian community, as in the festejo case, we see the dynamism of cultural caretaking in action. Through Roxana's prior work of

engaging with festejo and learning from Peruvian and Afro-Peruvian teachers over the years, she has been able to integrate festejo in her repertoire of dances taught at her school and even have students compete in a growing network of festejo dance competitions. Roxana represents this subsequent group that results from acts of cultural caretaking including members outside of a given community. People like Roxana, who are introduced to cultural practices not their own, learn and experience the tradition—in this case through festejo music and dance—and can then share it with others in a way that is not appropriative, but rather comes from a deeper understanding of cultural significance derived from personal participation. This cross-cultural experience allows for groups like the Peruvian community to involve surrounding community members like the Mexican/Chicanx community to create meaningful experiences for everyone involved.

The trajectory of how the Peruvian community engages with cultural caretaking has been positive. Over the years, in Los Angeles and throughout the U.S., Peruvian communities have continued to find new platforms for cultural expressions that feel true to their traditions while also engaging different generations of Peruvians in ways relevant to their experiences living abroad. In recent years, social media has become a tool for younger Peruvians to share their traditions while also grapple with the harsh realities of the racialized, gendered histories that they come from. These acts of cultural caretaking feature current generations finding ways to honor and uplift music, dance, activists, and histories through social media videos and posts in ways that resonate with them, thus

reinscribing these cultural symbols in yet another generation of Peruvians, featuring a new-found relevance. By doing this work, the sense of responsibility to cultural caretaking is strengthened through critical, active engagement. As people play a role in determining how cultural forms are discussed and represented both within and outside of their own community, they reshape and redefine Peruvianness and through this process feel more invested in its future and direction. While this use of social media platforms is not unique to the Peruvian community in the U.S., Peruvians around the world have joined others in wielding this tool to question cultural symbols and generate new ones.

Looking at the process of cultural caretaking will hopefully lead to research addressing a side of the narrative of cultural performance that focuses less on the performance or performers themselves, and more on the ways that emotional investment is generated and transmitted. By looking at acts of cultural caretaking as mechanisms through which people wrestle with and redefine culture, we unearth the larger question of what it ultimately means to be a part of the culture as a community member. The Peruvian community is just one example of how these acts of cultural caretaking cultivate invested actors in the spread of cultural forms. Through cultural caretaking, traditions can continue to remain a part of people's lives in more meaningful and mindful ways.

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